

THE COMPLETE
Bastard Operator
From Hell

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EDITED BY SOC



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Introduction and Editors Note

I accidentally ran across BOFH at the Register web site in June and sent a link to a buddy of mine. We both thought it was hilarious. Since he had a slow (dialup) connection, I asked if he wanted me to put together a compilation. Of course he said yes. Little did I know how much BOFH was out there. Two days later and a lot of blood sweat and tears, you have what you see before you. Damn!!!

26 June 2004 I completed the first version.

4 July 2004 I completed version 1.4. The changes included adding Episode 21 for 2004 and making some format changes that I had missed. Also I removed some blank pages. At this point I am slowly working my way through the ENTIRE collection and correcting things as I go. When that is done then there will be a version 2.

16 July 2004, Found out today that TechWorld had a bunch of BOFH that I hadn't seen. I added it between 2004 and 2003 since that was when they were written (well duh). STILL reading through everything to find any errors I missed.

Ok. I was brought to my attention that I had the order backwards; going from newest to oldest so today (19 August 2004) I fixed it. Also I have decided that this document has gotten way to big. As in huge so along with a complete document I'm also going to break it up by years and have separate pieces available. This will get done when I want to spend time and energy.

Completed breaking this monster up. 29 August 2004

Well here it is four years later and I think this needs some more cleaning and work so off we go.
17Feb08

Major Update 28 Feb 2008 continued the cleanup and "Americanization" of the syntax.

SOC

BOFH Source Guide

As of 15 May 2011

2011: <http://www.theregister.co.uk/odds/bofh/>

2010: <http://www.theregister.co.uk/odds/bofh/>

2009: <http://www.theregister.co.uk/odds/bofh/>

2008: <http://www.theregister.co.uk/odds/bofh/>

2007: http://www.theregister.co.uk/2008/01/14/bofh_2007_archive/

2006: http://www.theregister.co.uk/2007/01/02/bofh_2006_archive/

2005: <http://www.theregister.co.uk/odds/bofh/>

2004: http://www.theregister.co.uk/odds/bofh/bofh_2004_archive/

2003 – 2004 TechWorld: <http://www.techworld.com/bofh/>

2003: http://www.theregister.co.uk/2004/02/11/bofh_2003_year_book/

2002: http://www.theregister.co.uk/2003/01/27/bofh_2002_a_readers_digest/

2001: http://www.theregister.co.uk/2002/05/11/2001_a_bofh_odyssey/

2000: http://www.theregister.co.uk/2001/01/04/bofh_2k_the_kit/

1990 – 2001: <http://bofh.ntk.net/Bastard.html>

The Revised, King James Prehistory of B.O.F.H

Where it came from, How and Why...

Here's the revised version in the light of various revelations.

Where it came from:

I was an Operator at the University of Waikato, back in the heady days when "Helpdesk" meant nothing, disk quota meant everything, and lives could be bought and sold for a couple of pages of laser printout - And frequently were. We Operators had powers verging on the Technical-Superhero. On one hand, we had the SYSTEM and root passwords; on the other hand we had the excuse *"Really? I didn't know DEL *,*,* would do that - I'm just an operator..."* All the power and **none** of the responsibility. Good Times. You could do ANYTHING to a user and no-one would know. Well, they'd know, but they couldn't prove anything.

Still, I was bored, and frequently annoyed. In the late 80s, I even started to get bitter and twisted in the self righteous way that people tend to get when they've got a cushy job.

However, I had in my hot little grasp a TRS80 Model 100 with a whopping **23K** of memory (and no disk) with an onboard firmware text editor - scored it out of the bin during a building move. BONUS! I started writing articles on it at home and posting them to Usenet news from work - the most difficult and important part being remembering to bring the Trash-80 in to do the upload, as it'd only hold about 3 or so articles before the memory ran out. Sigh.

So I was writing the [Striped Irregular Bucket](#) around 1988-89 or so - it's hard to remember - and I was in much the same situation as the poor operator I was writing about. I was bored shitless. So I chunked out Striped Irregular Bucket, which was far less offensive than some of my previous posts. Somewhere along the line, I mentioned computing and the Bastard Operator from Hell Manual.

I think I started getting email from people very shortly after it was published, mentioning they liked the idea of a manual about how to be mean to users. (Remember, and this point in time Usenet News was really only used by the computer semi-literate and above, and not the cloven-hooved loser types who use it now. So there were a higher percentage of support types to loser types back then, and they liked this sort of thing).

Receiving email was unusual enough in itself, but receiving non-local and non-whiney email was almost unheard of. I was surprised. I thought it was just a quick fad, however, and ignored what was blatantly obvious (that people liked it) and went on with other writing, resurrecting BOFH (who was as yet pretty much unnamed) in Striped Irregular Bucket #5.

The Revised, King James Prehistory of B.O.F.H

More email came in, and I'm no slow learner, so I thought I'd bash out a couple of BOFH articles. And still more email came in. I wrote a bit, and then killed the BOFH off (as I had a tendency to do with characters that were written into a corner) only to find that people didn't want him dead. I resurrected him for a bit, then ran out of imagination and ideas and let it rest. I'd whack out a quick article for Christmas some years, usually just before, or during, the office party.

I toyed with the Bastard System Manager From Hell for a bit, then put that to sleep as well. In late '92 I went to London for a year to seek my fortune and see if the streets were paved with gold. They were not, but it was a good enough time, and I worked for a small Oil Company over there - Enterprise Oil, a nice enough place. I bricked out a couple of articles while I was there and posted them in a huuuugely roundabout manner because the company didn't have an internet connection at the time. Basically, I had to sneak into a basement at the University College London between the last lab time and the building closure time, write the article, send it to a NZ username, then post it to Usenet via a Telnet link to a VMS machine running NEWS. Talk about shocking response time... I still recall the heady delight when the Oil company finally got a dialup link to the real world. Good Times...

During that time I'd get maybe one mail message a week from someone who'd just read it for the first time. I still do, strangely enough. Anyway, so I got back home, took up a job as Analyst Programmer, kissed the Computer Room goodbye, and thought that would make a fitting end to the BOFH.

That was the plan anyway.

Welcome to the latest, Smoooooth BOFH FAQ as of Y2K1.

STOP! LOOK! LISTEN!

What can you do for me?

Find [Maxwell Cooter](#) and buy him a beer. A real beer - A lager, not that sheep's piss in a keg he calls real ale. This is all I ask of you. You owe him, he got me writing bastards after I quit! You could also buy any of the old Network Week Team (before VNU bought them out and shut them down) a beer too, which would be nice as well. And don't buy Jane Oliver any spirits - That's just a mistake. Everyone knows. Don't let her convince you otherwise.

Here's what I've been up to in reverse chrono order, which I usually hate.

31 Jul 2002 Still Updating, but not much. Heavy demands of work mean that I actually work for a living now, damn it all. Latest book came out at [Plan9.org](#) just the other day.

19 Apr 2001 Updating. LOOK for some changes in this site. FEEL the difference of the extra content. HEAR the kind words spoken by the readers. SMELL your PC on fire...

14 Mar 2001 Update. Was writing for a place called bugblatter.org for my mate Maxwell, who you should have all bought a beer for by now. That closed down, and so the eight articles I wrote for them (called "Ruthless Tech Professionals") will probably be posted here some day, demand requiring. Plan9.org has just released the collected works to the year 2000. See them at www.plan9.org. Still writing for [The Register](#), and was briefly reposted in PCPlus Mag, but that's ended now due to budgetary constraints. No harm, no foul.

6 Mar 2000 Tee-shirts are available from [The Register](#).

12 Jan 2000 Submitted my first article to the register today. And not a Y2K bug in evidence. Talk about storm in a teacup. JUST as I predicted, there were NO (that's ZERO) problems at my site. Not endkdf k##xff flkf*k! Axxxxxxx`x`f! dxxf`x`` ``xxd' d*vxxfv`'_d_xxf1`.

21 Dec 1999 Look for me **writing** at www.theregister.co.uk, from Jan2K and for my **archives** at bofh.ntk.net. Thanks to James Cronin, et al at ntk.net for the hosting offer. Bonza.

Righto! So, to recap: look both ways before crossing the street, and remember that Red, Yellow and Blue are often used to denote a PHASE wire.

- Simon

Glossary of Terms

DUMMY MODE - The mode that users change into when confronted with technical detail which they can't process. DUMMY MODE ON = BRAIN OFF, FOLLOW INSTRUCTIONS WITHOUT QUESTION

IUF - Incompetent User Failure, the cause of the majority of problems

PFY - Pimplly Faced Youth. The keen newbie type who often forgets to wash, change his clothes regularly, etc.

STACK MODE BRAIN (See [Stack Mode Explained](#) [also next page]for more info) A brain that can only handle a small amount of technical info before redirecting input to /dev/null. Similar to *Dummy Mode*

SOFTLY SOFTLY means you've got to be cruel to be kind.

EXPERT - 'ex' being a has-been, 'spurt' being a little drip under pressure

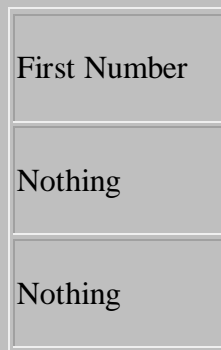
STACK MODE BRAINS EXPLAINED

Stack Mode is important. This point cannot be overstressed. Managers live by it, your job is affected by it, and it's a lot more prevalent than people think.

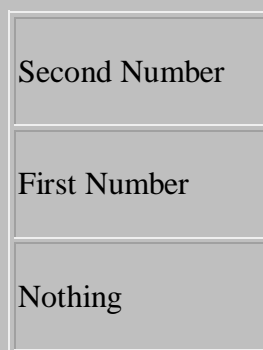
So what is "Stack Mode"?

If you've done classical computing, you'll have learnt about Stacks. Or, if you're one of those poor bastard reverse left-handed Polish Rotation-Notation Calculator users, OR you're a postscript programmer, you'll have played with it. The calculator example is the easiest to work with though. Say you want to add a couple of numbers. Using one of these calculators, you type in the first number, and hit enter. This puts the number on the stack, and is called PUSH-ing in geeky terms. (The opposite of this is POP-ing something off the Stack).

So your Stack looks like this:



Next, you type in the second number, and press enter. Your Stack now looks like this:



STACK MODE BRAINS EXPLAINED

Now you press the ADD key. Your Stack now looks like:

TOTAL of First and Second Numbers
Nothing
Nothing

The two dangers of Stacks are Underflow and Overflow.

Underflow is like if you were to type in ONE number, then press ADD. ADD the first number to what? There's no other number on the stack. Error!

Overflow is the worst. Overflow is when too much data is PUSHed onto the stack. I.e. In the above example, our stack is three items in size. When you try and put a Fourth number into the stack, an Error occurs. Depending on the Stack Implementation, this can be a really bad thing. SOME stacks will remain in place, but POOR IMPLEMENTATIONS lose everything - the stack is obliterated, or filled with garbage.

What's this go to do with Managers?

Glad you asked. Managers, like a lot of people, are Stack Brained - only more so. People, when confronted by a term they do not understand in conversation, PUSH the term onto their stack to ask about later. Too many terms and their Stack has a minor error and randomly throws away the new term and/or one or more of the Stack contents.

Managers on the other hand have a poor stack implementation and a low number of items, which means technical conversations usually lose them quite early on.

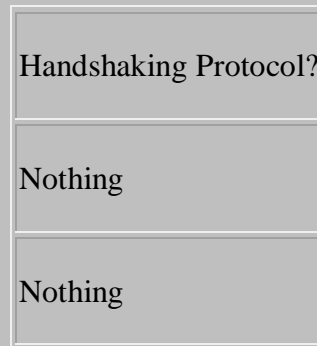
IMPORTANT NOTE: Stack Overflow results in data Corruption E.g.:

STACK MODE BRAINS EXPLAINED

Tecchy: "There seems to be a problem with the handshaking protocol of the modem bank"

Manager: *Uh-huh*

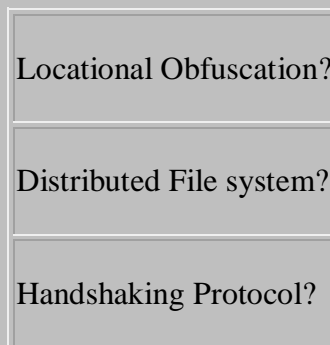
Manager's Stack:



Tecchy: "Meantime we'll also need to look at Distributed File systems to provide Locational Obfuscation"

Manager: Uh-huh Uh-huh

Manager's Stack:



Notice:

- (a) The words "Uh-huh" are used to signal a successful stack operation, and
- (b) The Manager's stack is now full. We're in the danger zone. All it takes now is one unknown to enter the conversation, and it's all over...

STACK MODE BRAINS EXPLAINED

Tecchy: "Your wife bears a striking resemblance to a member of the Babboonus Uglius Genus"

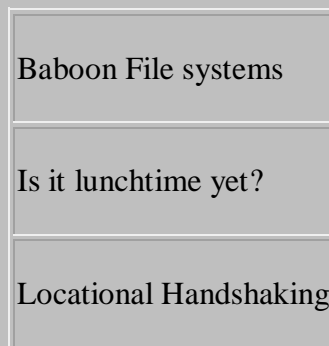
Manager:

Manager's Stack:



Notice how the successful stack operation signal was not generated. Notice the Stack Contents. This is a temporary stack, which is replaced almost instantaneously (in Manager Brain time scales - 1 or 2 seconds to you or me) with:

Manager's Stack:



Here concludes the lesson on Stack Based Managers. You now know the risks.

Special Note: Sometimes, in a particularly nasty overflow, the corruption will extend to the Run-Queue and the Manager's Brain will execute the Instruction **BTE** - that is, ***Branch To Elsewhere***

Extra Special Note: There is a known bug in the BTE Instruction in the Manager Chipset, in that it doesn't take an address parameter. No one knows where it goes, but wherever it is, it stays there. The Manager will most likely have to be rebooted by kicking the "SEAT UP/DOWN" lever of his/her wheelie chair.

Good Luck.

BOFH 1990 – 1995 Source Links

The Bastard Operator from Hell Archive

[The Original Bastard Menu From Hell](#)

[The first real Bastard articles \(Chaps 1-4\)*](#)

[A bit more of the Bastard \(Chaps 5-8\)*](#)

[Still more of the Bastard \(Chaps 9-13\)*](#)

[The Bastard System Manager from Hell \(Chaps 1 & 2\)*](#)

[The Bastard is Back \(Chaps 14 & 15\)*](#)

[The Bastard in Britain \(Chaps 1 & 2\)*](#)

[The Bastard REALLY is Back \(Misc\)*](#)

Genesis - Striped Irregular Bucket #1

I'm really bored. You know how bored you get when work's going on and on and on, and nothing interesting is happening, and you're listening to a radio that picks up ONE station on FM, and it's always the station with the least records in the city, about 5, and one of them is "You're so Vain" which wasn't too bad a song until you hear it about 3 times a day for a year, and *EVERY* time it plays, the announcer tells you it's about Warren Beatty and who he's currently poking, someone you'll never sniff the toe-jam of, let alone meet, let alone get amorous with. And EVERY time someone mentions Warren Beatty, someone says that he used to go out with Madonna too, and have you seen "In Bed With..."

AND THEN, someone ELSE will say "It wasn't really about Warren Beatty, it was James Taylor" and the first person will say "What, 'In bed with Madonna?'" and they laugh and everyone else laughs, and I slip out the Magnum from under the desk where I keep it in case someone laughs at a joke that's so dry it's got a built in water-fountain, and blow the lot of them away as a community Service. I figure that I'll get time off my sentence if I ever kill someone by accident who's got a life.

So visitors are getting pretty thin at the moment, and the Quick-Lime Pits are filling up rapidly, and all I've got to do is the full backups and maybe I can go home.

So, to relieve the boredom, I get some iron filings and pour them into the back of my Terminal until it fizzles out (Which doesn't take all that long, surprisingly enough), then call our maintenance contractors and log a fault on the device. Sometimes they'll send someone who knows what they're doing, but it's a lot more fun when they don't - which is about 98% of the time.

So the maintenance guy comes in, and I can tell he's NEW because the photo on his ID actually LOOKS like him, not like the head engineer, whose photo's a black and white tin-type (he's that old).

Maintenance Contractors always dress up nice, with a tie and everything because they believe that a customer will trust a nicely dressed guy with their million dollar equipment *just* because he's got a nice tie...

Because he's NEW and ALONE, he's what you call an appeasement engineer, the new guy they send so they respond within the 4 hour guaranteed response period. (Things are getting better and better) Your average appeasement engineer is about as clued-up on computers as the average computer "hacker" is about B.O, and their main job is to make sure the power plug is in and switched on, then call back to the office for "PARTS". The really keen ones will sometimes even take a cover off the equipment and pretend that they see this stuff all the time. I wonder what sort today's is...

"You got a dud terminal?" he asks pleasantly

I tell him yeah, and bring him into the control room.

"Which one is it?" he asks, confused by the fact that only one of them is smoking.

"It's the Model Three" I say, giving NOTHING away.

"Ah, the old model three!" he says knowingly, without a clue what a model three is, or which one of the three terminals it is, which isn't surprising, as I just made it up.

"We get a lot of Model Three problems" he says nodding "So what actually happened?"

Sneaky, but not good enough. I'm not going to point it out to him.

"It just went dead" I say, in loser mode.

"I see. Could you just recreate what you were doing so I can check the unit out when it's ready for operation?"

Very Sneaky. I decide to let him off the hook.

"Look, I've got to go to the toilet, there it is over there" I say, pointing at our Waffle-Iron.

"But that's a Wa..." He says, then stops. He's a beginner, and it's just possible that the company has a line of terminals that look like waffle irons. He bites.

"Sorry" he says, smiling again "for a minute there I thought it was a Model 2!"

A reasonably good save, but it won't save him. "Huh, it's nothing like a model 2! *THAT'S* the model 2" I say, pointing to the espresso machine.

He nods and I leave, which means he's got to take the iron to bits, otherwise he knows I won't believe he's worked on it. I give him a couple of minutes to get the element exposed then wander back in.

"So how does it look?" I ask, concerned-like.

"Well, I think we could have a processor problem..." he says concentrating on prying the element up.

...concentrating so much that he doesn't notice me plugging the iron in.

"Shouldn't you be wearing an earthing strap?" I ask innocently.

When he thinks I can't see, he creeps his hand over to the wiring frame and says "Well, It's just as easy to hold onto earth like this"

"But what about the risk of a cross-the-body shock with no resistor in series with you?" I ask ever-so-more-innocently

"Oh, it's ok" he says "the unit's unplug..."

>click< >BZZZZZZZZEEERRT!< >clunk!<

I ring the maintenance help-desk again...

It's Rhonda

"Hey Ronda!, Ah, I'm going to need another engineer and a new Waffle Iron over here; for some reason your engineer opened up my Waffle Iron without switching it off." I say

Rhonda knows me. It's the third call and the third appeasement engineer this year. You'd think they'd learn.

"You're a real prick" she says, annoyed

"Tell ya what Rhonda, why don't you come and fix it; it's a Model Three..."

The Birth of BOFH - Striped Irregular Bucket #5

I'm still bored.

But at least now the radio's off, it was on its 12th repeat of "Wildfire" THIS WEEK, and it's only Tuesday; shit I hate that.

So anyway, I quicklime the engineer to remove any fingerprints and then FedEx him back to headquarters and set about waiting for the new engineer.

Now the second engineer only has to come out after another 4 hours, there's no death of engineer penalty clause, (but I'm thinking about asking for one) so I've got to fill in some time. This guy's going to be a technical engineer, the sort that comes in with a raggedy tie where he got it caught in the drum printer at 3000 rpm a couple of years ago, and he'll have the grazes on the face that indicate that he didn't get the gate open in time...

I know those sorts...

So I fill in a couple of hours by killing users off and deleting their files, then waiting for them to call...

"Um, I can't find my files" the whimpering simp on the phone says

"Files? What files?"

"The files in my account. My thesis, my research - all gone!"

"Gone ay? What's your username?"

"TURGEN"

"TROJAN?! LIKE THE CONDOM?"

"No TURGEN. T-U-R"

"OH Turgen, like TURD, but with a GEN instead of a D... Ok let's see" I make vague clicking noises my dragging the quicklimed man's fingers back and forth across the keypad. "Uh-huh" >drag drag< "Yeah.." >dragedy poke< "AH! - You haven't got any files"

"I KNOW!"

"Well, what are you calling ME for? We don't make the files you know, we just look after them. And chopitty-chop too, your thesis looks like it's due in a couple of days.."

I hang up - he'll call back. Meantime I open up a copy of "VMS BASTARD OPERATORS MANUAL FROM HELL" I'm reading the article I sent in about getting rid of those trouble users...

"... Modify the user's password minimum from 6 to 32 letters, give the password a 1 day lifetime, set it so that they HAVE to use the password generate utility when they change their password (so their password will always be something that looks like vaguely pronounceable line-noise), add a secondary password with the same as the above, then redefine their CLI tables so that the only command that works is DELETE, and all other commands point to it."

Beautiful... Shit I'm good!

He calls back.

"MY FILES ARE GONE!" he screams, panicking.

"Did you have a backup?" I ask, as sweet as pie

"But that's what you people are supposed to do!" he sobs

"Yeah, well we did - but then we switched to those 8mm tapes, and they're the same size as the ones in my video camera, so I've been using them to tape the neighbor's sex romps..."

I hear the revolver go off, but what the hell, its 5pm, and not my problem...

Still Birthing the Bastard Operator.. (Bored #3)

So the second engineer rolls up, but the FedEx man has been and gone, so he misses out altogether.

This guy's a techno, (you can tell by the tie) but he's smart (no grazes), so I'm going to have to be wary.

"What's the problem?" he asks, in a business-like manner.

"It's the Model Three" I say (what the hell, it worked before)

"What the f*ck's a model three?" he asks confused.

He could be just testing me, but I decide to come clean. He doesn't notice so I just walk funny for a couple of minutes and then show him the terminal that I'd poured the iron filings into.

"It just went dead!" I say (having previously vacuumed the iron filings up, of course)

So anyway, he gets to work opening the cover and making board replacement noises. I decide to help and point out a fuse that's blown on the power supply board.

"Oh, I haven't got the parts for that - I've only got a replacement board." he says in a confused manner. "Which one was the fuse again?"

I point it out to him.

"Wow! And what does it do again? You know, I've been working at the same place for 6 years, and I've never seen one of those fuse thingies. It's amazing what you learn isn't it?!"

"What are you again?" I ask, already suspecting the answer

"Chief Engineer"

Thought so.

"Say, do you know anything about waffle irons?"

"A little..."

>Click!< >Fzzzzzeet!< >Clunk<

The Bastard Operator from Hell #1

It's backup day today so I'm pissed off. Being the BOFH, however, does have its advantages. I reassign null to be the tape device - it's so much more economical on my time as I don't have to keep getting up to change tapes every 5 minutes. And it speeds up backups too, so it can't be all bad can it? Of course not.

A user rings

"Do you know why the system is slow?" they ask

"It's probably something to do with..." I look up today's excuse ".. clock speed"

"Oh" (Not knowing what I'm talking about, they're satisfied) "Do you know when it will be fixed?"

"Fixed? There's 275 users on your machine, and one of them is you. Don't be so selfish - logout now and give someone else a chance!"

"But my research results are due in tomorrow and all I need is one page of Laser Print.."

"SURE YOU DO. Well; you just keep telling yourself that buddy!" I hang up.

You'd really think people would learn not to call..

The phone rings. It'll be him again, I know. That annoys me. I put on a gruff voice

"HELLO, SALARIES!"

"Oh, I'm sorry, I've got the wrong number"

"YEAH? Well what's your name buddy? Do you know WASTED phone calls cost money? DO YOU? I've got a good mind to subtract your wasted time, my wasted time, and the cost of this call from your weekly wages! IN FACT I WILL! By the time I've finished with you, YOU'LL OWE US money! WHAT'S YOUR NAME - AND DON'T LIE, WE'VE GOT CALLER ID!!"

I hear the phone drop and the sound of running feet - he's obviously going to try and get an alibi by being at the Dean's office. I look up his username and find his department. I ring the Dean's secretary.

"Hello?" she answers

"Hi, SIMON, B.O.F.H HERE, LISTEN, WHEN THAT GUY COMES RUNNING INTO YOUR OFFICE IN ABOUT 10 SECONDS, CAN YOU GIVE HIM A MESSAGE?"

"I think so..." she says

"TELL HIM `HE CAN RUN, BUT HE CAN'T HIDE'"

"Um. Ok"

"AND DON'T FORGET NOW, I WOULDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO TELL ANYONE ABOUT THAT FILE IN YOUR ACCOUNT WITH YOUR ANSWERS TO THE PURITY TEST IN IT..."

I hear her scrabbling at the terminal...

"DON'T BOTHER - I HAVE A COPY. BE A GOOD PERVY AND PASS THE MESSAGE ON.."

She sobs her assent and I hang up. And the worst thing is, I was just guessing about the purity test thing. I grab a quick copy anyway, it might make for some good late-night reading.

Meantime backups have finished in record time, 2.03 seconds. Modern technology is wonderful, isn't it?

Another user rings.

"I need more space" he says

"Well, why not move to Texas?" I ask

"No, on my account, stupid."

Stupid? Uh-Oh..

"I'm terribly sorry" I say, in a polite manner equal to that of Jimmy Stewart in a Weekend Family Matinee Feature "I didn't quite catch that. What was it that you said?"

I smell the fear coming down the line at me, but it's too late, he's a goner and he knows it.

"Um, I said what I wanted was more space on my account, *please*"

"Sure, hang on"

I hear him gasp his relief even though he'd covered the mouthpiece.

"There, you've got *plenty* of space now!"

"How much have I got?" he simps

Now this *REALLY* *PISES* *ME* *OFF*! Not only do they want me to give them extra space, they want to check it, then correct me if I don't give them enough! They should be happy with what I give them *and that's it*!

Back into Jimmy Stewart mode.

"Well, let's see, you have 4 Meg available"

"Wow! Eight Meg in total, thanks!" he says, pleased with his bargaining power

"No" I interrupt, savoring this like a fine red at room temperature, with steak, extra rare, to follow; "4 Meg in total.."

"Huh? I'd used 4 Meg already, how could I have 4 Meg Available?"

I say nothing. It'll come to him.

"aaagggggghhhhH!"

I kill me; I really do!

The Bastard Operator from Hell #2

I'm sitting at the desk, playing x-tank, when some thoughtless bastard rings me on the phone. I pick it up.

"Hello?" I say.

"Who is this?" they say

"It's me I think" I say, having successfully attended a telephone skills course

"Me Who?"

"Is this like a knock-knock joke?" I say, trying anything to save myself having to end this game.

Too LATE! I get killed.

Now I'm pissed!

"What can I do for you?" I ask pleasantly - (one of the key warning signs)

"Um, I want to know if we have a particular software package.."

"Which package is that?"

"Uh, B-A-S-I-C it's called."

>clickety clickety d-e-l b-a-s-i-c.e-x-e<

"Um no, we don't have that. We used to though.."

"Oh. Oh well, the other thing I wanted to know was, could the contents of my account be copied to tape to have a permanent copy of them to save at home in case the worst happens.."

"The worst?"

"Well, like they get deleted or something..."

"DELETED! Oh, don't worry about that, we have backups!" (I'm such a *shit*) "What was your username?"

He gives me his losername. (What an idiot)

>clickety click<

"But you haven't got any files in your account!" I say, mock surprise leaping from my vocal chords.

"Yes I have, you must be looking in the wrong place!"

So first he spoils my x-tank game, and *now* he's calling me a liar...

>clickety click<

"Oh no, I made a mistake" I say

Did he mutter "typical" under his breath?!?! Oh dear, oh dear..

"I MEANT TO SAY: That USERNAME doesn't exist"

"Huh? >whimper< It must though, I was only using it this morning!"

"Ah well, that'll be the problem, there was a virus in our system this morning, the... uh... DE VINCI Virus, wipes out users who are logged in when it goes off."

"That can't be right, my girlfriend was logged in, and I'm in her account now!"

"Which one was that?"

He tells me the username. Some people NEVER learn..

"Oh, yeah, her account was just after we discovered the virus."... >clickety click< "...she only lost all her files"

"But..."

"But don't worry, we've got them all on tape"

"Oh, thank goodness!!!"

"Paper tape. Have you got a magnifying glass and a pencil? SEE YOU IN THE MACHINE ROOM!!!! NYAHAHAHAHAHA!"

I'm such a prick!

The Bastard Operator from Hell #3

So I'm working so hard I barely have time to drive into town and watch a movie before I told people their printing will be ready. The queue's WAAAAAY too long to have everything printed (and sorted) by the time I told them, so I kill all the small jobs so there's only 2 left and I can sort them in no time.

Then, after the movie, (which was one of those slack Bertolucci ones that takes about 3 hours till the main character is killed off in a visionary experience) I get back and clear the printouts.

There's about 50 people waiting outside and I've got two printouts. That's about average for me. I thought I'd killed more though. Anyway, I put out the printouts and walk slooowly inside, fingering the clipboard with "ACCOUNTS TO REMOVE" in big letters on the back. No-one says anything. As usual.

...

I'm sitting back in the Operations Armchair, watching the computer room closed circuit TV, which just happens to be connected to the frame-grabber's Video player (sent off for repair, due back sometime in '97) when the phone rings. That must be the 2nd time today, and it's really starting to get to me!

"Yes?" I say, pausing the picture.

"I seem to have accidentally deleted my C.V!" the voice at the other end of the line says.

"You have? What was your username?"

He tells me. What the hell, I AM bored.

"Ah no, you didn't delete it - I did."

"What?"

"I deleted it. It was full of shit! You didn't ever get more than a B- in any of your subjects!"

"Huh?"

"And that crap about being a foreign exchange student, that was your girlfriend and we both know it!"

"Huh?!!"

"Your academic records. I checked them, you were lying.. Besides which, you forgot to include your criminal record.."

"How did y.." He clicks. "It's you isn't it? THE BASTARD OPERATOR FROM HELL!"

"In the flesh, on the phone and in your account.... You shouldn't have called you know. You especially shouldn't have given me your username.." >clickety< >click< "Neither should you have sent that mail to the System Manager telling him what you think of him in such graphic terms..."

"I didn't send any.."

>clickety< >click<.....

"No, you didn't did you? But who can tell these days? Not to worry though, it'll all be over VERY soon.." >clickedy click< "...change my username back, and..."

"b-b-b.." he blubs, like a stood-up date

"Goodbye now" I say pleasantly, "you've got bags to pack and a life to start over..."

I hang up.

Two seconds later the red phone goes. I pick it up, it's the boss. He mumbles the username of the person I was just talking to, mentions something about a nasty mail message, and utters the words "You know what to do...", with the dots and everything.

Later, inside the Municipal Energy Authority Computer, as I'm modifying the poor plebe's Energy Bill by several zeros, I can't help but think about what lapse of judgment - what act of heinous stupidity - causes them to call. Then, even later, when I'm adding the poor plebe's photo image over the top of the FBI's online "MOST Wanted Armed and Dangerous, SHOOT ON SIGHT" offenders list, I realize I'll probably never know; but then life goes on.

A couple of hours later, as I see the SWAT vehicle roll up outside the poor plebe's apartment I realize that for some, it just doesn't.

But tomorrow is another day.

The Bastard Operator from Hell #4

It's a Thursday, and I'm in a good mood. It's payday. I think I'll take some calls. I put the phone back on the hook. It rings.

"I've been trying to get you for hours!" the voice at the other end screams

"Not, it can't be hours" I say, putting "Blade Runner" back into its cover and looking at the back, "it was more like 114 minutes. I was on a long phone call with the big boss, trying to get you users some better facilities"

Hook; Line; and Sinker...

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"That's ok, I'm a tolerant person" I make a mental note to change his password to something nasty in the next couple of days.

"Um, I need to know how to rename a file" he says.

Oh dear... Hang on, its payday isn't it?! I'm in a good mood.

"Sure. You just go 'rm' and the filename"

"Thanks"

"No worries" (Now I'm in a *REALLY* good mood. I think I just might write that script to make saving impossible on rogue at random times like I've been thinking about)

The phone rings again.

"Hello?"

"Hi there" I say

"Is this the Operators?"

"Yes it is" I say, nice as pie

"Could you get my printouts out please. I need them urgently, and I printed them over 5 minutes ago"

"Your username?" I ask

He gives it to me, and I write it down for later. "No worries at all!" I say, and head to the printers.

There's a HUUUUUUUGE pile of printouts there, and sure enough, his is at the top of the pile. I pick it up, split it out of the rest and pour our ink- stained cleaning alcohol all over it, run it over a couple of times with the loaded tape trolley then slam it in the tape safe door some times as well.

Beautiful.

"Here's your printout" I say "Sorry about the delay, we've got a few printer problems."

He takes a look and shits himself.

"Well, can I print it again?" he asks, worried

"Sure you can" I say "But no promises, the printer's a bit stuffed today"

"Well can I print it on laser - is that working?"

"Yeah of course, but that'll cost you" I say, oozing compassion for the geek

"It doesn't matter about the cost, THIS IS URGENT!"

I slide-on back into the printer room and put in the toner cartridge we save for special occasions - the one that prints thick black lines down the middle of the page and is all faint on one side. It took me quite a while to make it like that too. The printout shoots through and I bring it out immediately - I don't want to miss this!

"W-w-what's happened to my printout?" the geek squeals at me. Lucky I wrote that username down - I'm really starting to develop a taste for torture.

"Well nothing. I mean sure, it's a little soiled, but that cartridge has already done 47 thousand pages and been refilled 17 times. It's quite good compared to some we get"

Geek pays up and starts blubbing.

"Hey now. There's no reason to cry! Have you got a disk with your work on it?"

He gives me a box of diskettes and I step inside and buzz them thru the bulk eraser. I come back out again.

"Sorry, I just remembered, our machine is on the fritz, you'll have to take these to the other side of campus to the machine there, it'll print them ok, and it had a brand-new toner yesterday."

"GREAT!"

"No worries. Oh, and hold the disks above your head the whole way there, the earth's magnetic field is particularly strong today."

"Huh?"

"No arguments, just do it."

He wanders off, hand held high. Shit, I hate myself sometimes!

+-----+

| +-----+ Digitally Enhanced | This space intentionally blank for note taking.

| |-O-O-| Portrait of: |

| | % | Simon Travaglia, |

| | --- | Analyst/Programmer |

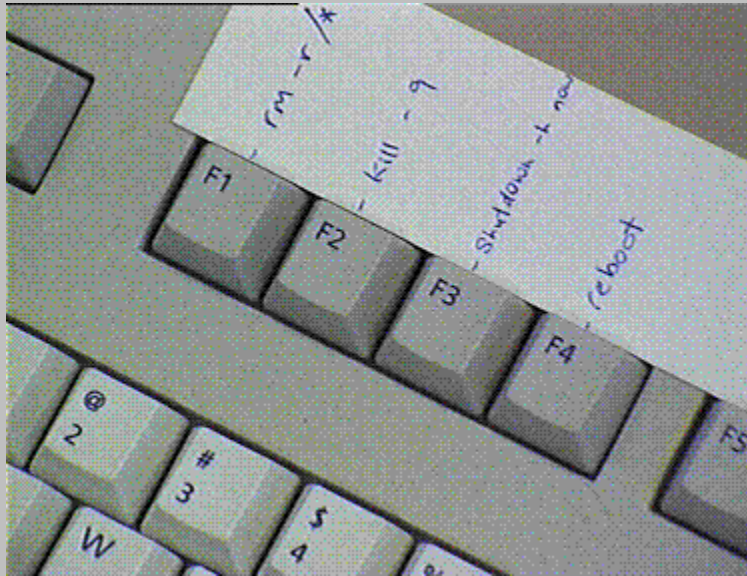
| +-----+ Waikato University |

+-----+

UNPRECEDENTED PERFORMANCE: nothing we had before ever worked this way

The Bastard Operator from Hell #5

I'm bored senseless, so I pass the time by reading users email. I must admit that today's lot is



PARTICULARLY boring, not one good message in all of them. I was expecting at LEAST some veiled reference to a grope in a storeroom, but nothing. So I'm bored senseless by the usual drivel about some relative's surgery and how the weather is over the other side of the world - that sort of crap.

To relieve the boredom, I remove an e-mail party invite from a user's mail and post it under the sender's username to alt.singles.with.severe.social.dysfunctions on news, and make a note in my diary to be there with my

camcorder. Should be a blast!

Next in line is the online medical records database, in which the company doctors store the current medical histories of the staff. I grep it quickly for "herpes" and "syphilis" and send the results to the local scum newspaper. I cover my tracks by adding an entry to one of the doctor's online electronic diaries for yesterday saying "\$500, Med Recs to Paper" I think that's all it should take.. That'll be the last time he doesn't shift appointments to make room for me..

I move some tapes from the racks to the trolley to make it look like we really use them, then start looking thru Archie listings for a hidden x-gif site. I find one then start a batch job running under some user's account to get them all back, charged to him. I make sure he's got enough disk for the job by removing any files not related to the task at hand. Like all those "Doctorate Final Report" papers that have got quite large in the last couple of weeks.

I go back to the mail now, as something's bound to have happened. I do a grep on all mail files for the words "pregnant" and "family way", and post them anonymously to the local general interest newsgroup.

Then, before anything can happen, the power goes out! The next second, the phone rings.

"Hello?" I say, annoyed - the coyote was just about to kill roadrunner again!

"Has the comput..."

I hang up. This is a matter of life or death. Quick as I can I rip the computer power cable out of the UPS and plug the TV in. Damn! Wylie missed again!

Meantime, all the alarms are going off like crazy as the disks spin down, but that's ok, because my Mac and Terminal are hardwired to the UPS in any case; and I'm at the Beer Factory level in Dark Castle too!

The phone rings, so I pull the PABX breaker on the UPS switchboard and it stops. Now to look like I'm working. I break out the puck and the hockey stick and play a little one-on-wall. From the observation window it'll look like I'm being blindingly efficient, as per usual.

10 Minutes later, the power is back and we're two HDA's down, but what the hell, I haven't lost a man, I'm onto the final screen, and there's more cartoons!

The phone rings, it's a loser. (What a surprise)

"Computer Room" I say, being efficient

"Hello, when will the compu..."

I hang up.

I'm doing well in the screen, all I need do is get past the wizard who throws spells at you and I'm in!

The phone rings again. I put it on hands free

"Computer Room" I shout, still deep in the game.

"I've lost my files" a user whines over the loudspeaker

"You bet you have" I say, as my concentration lapses just long enough for me to get zapped by the wizard.

"What was your username?" I say, all sweetness and smiles

He tells me, I look, and he's right. Shit, and I didn't even do it!

Not to be outdone, I change his login directory to the null device, set his path to "." and redefine the command "news" to execute a script in his old login directory to send a nasty message to the equal opportunities officer, then delete itself.

Now that's trying!

The Bastard Operator from Hell #6

It's Friday, so I get into work early, before lunch even. The phone rings. Shit!

I turn the page on the excuse sheet. "SOLAR FLARES" stares out at me. I'd better read up on that. Two minutes later I'm ready to answer the phone.

"Hello?" I say.

"WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN, I'VE BEEN TRYING TO GET YOU ALL MORNING?!"

I hate it when they shout at me early in the morning. It always puts me in a bad mood. You know what I mean.

"Ah, yes. Well, there's been some solar activity this morning, it always disrupts electronics..." I say, sweet as a sugar pie.

"Huh? But I could get through to my friends?!"

"Yes, that's entirely possible, solar activity is very unpredictable in its effects. Why last week, we had some files just disappear from a guys account while he was working on it!"

"Really?"

"Straight Up! Hey, do you want me to check your account?"

"Yes please, I've got some important stuff in there!"

"Ok, what's your username..."

He tells me. Honestly, it's like shooting a fish in a barrel. Twice. With an Elephant Gun. At point blank range. In the head.

(Do I really need to tell you the clicky clicky bit?.. I think not)

"How many files are in your account?" I ask

"Um, well there should be about 20 in my thesis write-up, 10 or so with the data for it, and another 20 or so in a book that I'm writing"

"Hmmm. Well, I think we caught it just in time. You've still got 2 files left... .cshrc and .login"

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaaaagggggggghhhh!"

He sobs into the receiver a bit - it really turns my stomach.

"What can I do?" he sniffs

"Ok, do you have any of your stuff backed up on floppy?"

"Some, but its weeks old!"

I fire up the bulk eraser.

"Ok" I say "How about I come out and load all that data onto your account pronto so you can get some work done?"

"That'd be great, but it's all at home" he whimpers. "I spose I'll just load it all in myself tonight"

"Sure. But remember what I said, solar flares are bad for disks and machines. Protect your disks from solar activity to prevent them losing their data"

"How do I do that? Wrap them in tin-foil?"

"NO! TIN FOIL'S THE WORST THING! YOU KNOW WHAT TIN FOIL DOES IN A MICROWAVE DON'T YOU?!"

"Yes.."

"Then don't use it. There's only one thing that protects disks from solar activity.."

"What's that?"

"MAGNETS! Wrap your disks up in a pillow case with lots of magnets - Solar Flares hate that"

"Wow! Thanks"

"No worries at all..."

The Bastard Operator from Hell #7

So I manage AT LONG LAST, to get a couple of hours off for lunch, AND, because I can't leave my desk unattended, I get the janitor in and have him sit in my chair. I tell him that all he has to do is make sure the receiver doesn't accidentally get put back on the hook. He agrees and I'm off.

First stop, the bank. I change a \$50 note into coins and then ask to see a balance of my account. Then I yank the power lead out of the teller's vdu. It dies. I say I'm in a hurry and is the manager around?

He rolls over like a man-sized Twinkie and asks what the problem is. I say that all I want is a balance of my accounts. I cross my fingers. YES! He finds the vdu lead out, plugs it in, and logs in, TO THE MANAGER'S ACCOUNT. Now's my chance - I slip up against the counter, slopping 200 coins across the counter. The manager ignores it, but all the tellers dive for the money. I watch, unobserved, as the manager types in his password at the breakneck speed of one character a minute. At that rate I should've got \$100 worth.... He finishes typing. "MONEY". What a toughie! Well, that's my mortgage taken care of tonight...

A user that I recognize from "D(eletion)-Day '89" approaches. I think he's going to talk to me!! Even the bank manager is shaking his head furiously. But it's too late, he stops.

"Um, excuse me, Could you tell me what is the best computer to buy to do my thesis on?"

?!

Right.

"You've heard of Commodore 64's?" I ask

"Yes?.."

"Avoid them like the plague! Not many people know this, but computers aren't made to handle that much memory - it's over 64,000 things, more in some cases. It's a recipe for disaster!"

"Oh!"

"Try something safe and proven. A ZX81 with dual cassette drive if you can get it. The 1K ram model. Write that down. Don't buy a disk drive - You know how they're always failing, but music cassettes last forever!"

"Hey thanks!"

"No worries. What was your username again?"

He tells me. Just in time for D-Day 92. You'd think they'd learn.

I get back to work and the janitor's asleep at the terminal. I ask him if he wants to work here too, but he likes the ability to bust in on people when they're in the toilet...

I put the phone back on the hook, and straight away it rings. I hate it when it does that, it takes me AGES to get my walkman phones in.

It's the hottest hose monster I've ever met, and she's got a computer problem! I love it when that happens!

"What's your username?" I ask

She tells me (as if I didn't know)

Quick as I can I read all her e-mail (mostly boring stuff), then grep everyone else's mail files for her username. Nothing. Excellent!

"What's the problem?" I ask, all smiles and charm.

"I can't save my documents, it says something about space."

"Not a problem for long" I say, and delete everyone else on the same disk as her. "You should be fine now.."

"Thank you so much" she gushes. I make a mental note to do something to her account again tomorrow. "No worries."

The phone rings almost before I've got it on the hook.

"My files are all gone!" a voice whines out at me.

"When did this happen?" I ask.

"Just now..." he says, through the tears

"I see. Well, I wouldn't worry, there's three days till the end of the semester, if you work day and night until then, you should get at least a C-"

He sobs a couple more times then hangs up. What a wimp.

THE PHONE RINGS AGAIN!

"The screen on my PC is really dim" The woman at the other end says "Should I wind the brightness knob up?"

"NO!" I scream "Don't touch that knob! Have you any idea of the radiation that comes out of that thing when the knob gets wound up?!!!!"

"Well I..." she says, all uncertain

"TAKE MY ADVICE!" I say "There's only ONE way to fix a dim display, and that's by power surging the drivers"

The words "power surging" and "drivers" have got her. People hear words like that and go into Dummy Mode and do ANYTHING you say. I could tell her to run naked across campus with a power cord rammed up her backside and she'd probably do it... Hmm...

"Have you got a spare power cord?"

"No.."

"Oh well, never mind, we'll have to do the power surge idea... Ok, quick as you can, I want you to flick the power switch of your PC on and off 30 times"

"Should I take my disks out?"

"NO! Do you want to lose all your data!?!"

"Oh! NO! Ok.."

I listen carefully.. ..

...clicky..clikcy...kliky..clicky. ...clickey.. . BOOM!

Amazing, it probably made it to 27 - the power supply usually shifts itself at 15 or so...

"MY COMPUTER BLEW UP!!!" she screams at me down the line

"Really? Must've been a dodgy power supply! Lucky we found out now! Is your machine still under warranty?"

"NO!"

"Dear oh dear. Well, Best get it repaired then. Did you backup your files?"

"Yes, to the system, Yesterday, but all this morning's work is gone!"

"Oh dear. What was your username, I'll just check that your backups worked ok?"

She tells me....

The Bastard Operator from Hell #8

I'm at my desk as usual, and a user calls.

"Hello Computer Room, Simon here, how can I help?" I answer

"I can't get into my account!" A user mumbles at me.

"What was your username please?" I say

They give me their username. No worries. I look in their account.

"No worries, it was just a badly made login file. I've fixed it, you should be able to login."

"Thanks!"

"No worries. Have a nice day!"

WHAT IS THIS you're asking yourself. Has the Bastard Operator from Hell turned over a new leaf? Sold out?! GONE INSANE?! No. The Bastard Operator from Hell is being LOGFILED. And if that's happening, I'm being bugged as well. So I'm being nice till I can find the bugs. It shouldn't be long bear with me.

Ah. One in the phone handpiece. Basic. But then the boss is a sneaky sort, so there's probably a couple more. Ah! And another in the base of the phone and one inside my keyboard. Time for a mad coffee-spilling frenzy. This is a big job, so I bring the whole jug over and wait for a witness. The System Manager comes in.

"Where's that report of mine?" he asks in a surly manner - he's obviously pissed that I haven't implicated myself yet. Antagonist Identified. As the Principal of "BASTARD OPERATOR SCHOOL" (me) will tell you, "There's no problem so large it can't be solved by killing the user off, deleting their files, closing their account and reporting their REAL earnings to the IRS"

I pull his printout from under the coffee jug where I put it, and the coffee splashes all over the phone and keyboard, which for some reason were stacked on top of each other.

"Whoopsy!" I say, mock horror on my face. The System Manager's face tells me I was right in my guess.

"Don't think you'll get away with this!" he snarls and stomps off.

I click on the Ethernet monitor and watch the traffic coming out of his PC.

Ah! A memo, authorizing the termination of my contract, going to the laser in the Director's office. I make a few alterations to the file in the spool directory and let it go to its destination. I run my dinky little program that deposits -512 to the PC and our mainframe shits itself.

Later, while booting in single user, I'll remove that nasty log file business.

Next, I wander into the comms room and plug my earphone into the spare RS232 port in the Directors office. It's amazing how simple it is to bug an office once it's got data lines going to it!

Director: "Are you sure about this?"

SysMgr: "OF COURSE!"

Director: "You don't want to reconsider?"

SysMgr: "NEVER!"

Director: "Very well, I'll fax it to staffing now.."

SysMgr: "EXCELLENT!"

Two seconds later the System Manager strolls in smiling. "Well, I'll really miss you Simon.." he says, full of himself.

"Oh?" I say, all sweetness and charm "Where are you going?"

"No Simon" he says, with glee "YOU'RE going!"

"A PROMOTION!" I say "You've finally written that letter to the head of staffing telling him he's a bum-sucking arse bandit and that you quit?"

"No..."

"Are you sure? It's much better than the one about me being fired.."

"Y.." His eyes widen slightly

It's like clubbing a seal to death with a foam cushion. He runs to stop the fax. Only, having just resigned, >clicky cklikcy< his card key no longer works...

Amateurs...

The Phone rings. It's the same guy as before

"I can get into my account now, but I've run out of disk"

"Hang on, I'll see what I can do"

>clicccky<...

rm -r *

Bastard Operator from Hell #9

I'm driving to work and I'm stuck behind this old guy, the classic slow driver from hell, whose car red-lines at 20 mph and can't take corners at more than 5. I honk my horn but his hearing aid's probably turned way down to "whisper", so I'm stuck.

I make a mental note of his license plate. In fact, I did that 60 times a minute for 15 and a half minutes. Oh dear.. oh dear.... Looks like another call to the DMV Database to register a vehicle as stolen by out of town arms dealers...

I get to work, flick the excuse page over. "ELECTROMAGNETIC RADIATION FROM SATTELLITE DEBRIS". Fair enough, it looks like it's going to be a good day.

I log into "FUCKYOU", (the help-desk enquiries username) and go into mail. There are 3 new messages, the first of which is 117 lines long, so it's obviously a storyteller. Shit, I hate that. Instead of saying "My account needs more disk space" they tell you about how they're doing this bit of research for a lecturer and how it's got to be in yesterday, and they almost had it but their second cousin twice removed had a perforated herpes scab and lost a lot of blood and had to be rushed into hospital... etc etc. I delete the message.

Second message I read, but it's one of those people who can't handle the mail interface and send a null message, so all you get is headers. I reply to the message saying "No worries, we can do that by next Tuesday". Hope it was important.

The last message I leave for tomorrow, because Saturday would be a dull day if I ever had to work then.

The phone rings. I thought I'd fixed that!

I put it on hands free so I can slop some pizza into the microwave.

"Yes" I call

"Something's wrong with my Boot disk, I can't login to the server"

"Have you got your disk with you?"

"Sure!"

I go get the disk and put it and the pizza in for 5 minutes on "ULTRA-NUKE".

Six minutes later, he rings back.

"It still doesn't work, and now my disk makes a funny noise and smells."

"OH SHIT! It's that electromagnetic radiation from satellite debris again!"

"Really? I think I heard about that!" (What a tool!)

"Yep, I'm sorry, you'll have to buy another disk"

"Oh, that's ok, I don't mind, the old one was getting worn. Thanks"

"Sure, no worries. And be sure to run it through our virus checker FDISK when you get a lot of important data on it..."

"I will! Thanks!"

"That's Ok - it's my job!"

Xcbzone is running really slow so I kill off a whole lot of database backends that seem to be hogging all the CPU and get back into my game. Much better.

(It isn't easy on the frontline, work work work...)

I go to the cafeteria for a quick 2 hour snack - they're so nice to me there. They always have been, ever since that computer glitch that registered their kitchen as an organ recipient - very messy. I grab a couple of cans of coke and some cheese things and cruise on back to the office via the first year computer fundamentals lab. I look in the window on the scene that unfolds itself to me - a lab full of first years with no demonstrator.

WELL I'LL JUST HAVE TO HELP!

I walk on in.

"Right, I'm your temporary replacement demonstrator and today we're going to put our assignments aside for half an hour to learn about the REMARK function, or, as it's known to the computer literate world, rm.."

I should've been a teacher you know - I've got this way with people...

...

The Bastard Operator from Hell #10

I get invited to a lecture as a guest speaker in "Computing Operations Fundamentals", so I leave the control room in the capable hands of Sam, the janitor and cruise on down.

The lecture starts and goes ok, then there's a 10 minute period where students get to ask a "real operator" questions that they have about operations.

I get out my pad and pen. "Before we get started" I say, "could you just call out your username before you ask me a question, I find it easier to apply your problem to terms you would understand better" The lecturer eats all this up - the personal touch really gets to them. "First Question, You over there.."

"What do you think of the privacy of individuals on a shared system?"

"What was your username please?"

"CMS1103"

>Scratchy scritch< "Computer Privacy... Hmmmm. This is a toughie really. You mean stuff like reading the email between you and your counselor about you not wanting to come out of the closet?"

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGH!"

"AH! Well, he seems to have left must have picked a bad COMPLETELY RANDOM example. Next question. You, over there..."

"CMS1136. I was.."

"Ah yes, 1136 the only person on campus who subscribes to alt.sex.buggery.by.sailors.dressed.in.mums.clothing"

"It's purely for research purposes!"

"I'm sure it is. You do a lot of story posting for a researcher don't you?"

"NNGggggAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGHGH!"

"Next please..."

...

Two minutes later, the lecture theatre's empty. That's the problem with students today, they just don't want to learn.

I go back to control and Sam's asleep at the console again. I think he's after my job. I make a mental note to tap into the salary database and cancel his health and accident insurance payments. You can't be too careful..

I put the phone on the hook for the first time this afternoon and it starts ringing almost immediately. THAT'S IT! I redirect it to 911 catch a bit of shuteye. That'll teach them. OOPS! Almost forgot to turn over the excuse calendar. "STATIC FROM NYLON UNDERWEAR" Nope, too plausible - although in some cases I could do an on-site check. Nah, can't be stuffed. I'll pick another one. "STATIC FROM PLASTIC SLIDE RULES" Now THAT'S one with a challenge!

I un-redirect the phone and drag the rubbish bin so it rests on the printer's stacker - another job well done. The phone rings - this could be the big one!

"Hello?"

"Hi, Um, how do I spell-check my file?"

"Simple, just type `spell' and the filename"

"Thanks"

I'm so bloody nice this morning. Especially as I know that my version of spell INTRODUCES errors instead of detecting them. Things like changing friend to friend and vice-versa. What the hell.

The phone rings - it's them again.

"There's something wrong with spell"

"What makes you think that?"

"Because my file is all corrupt now!"

"That doesn't sound like spell to me. Are you logged into thru PC?"

"Yes, but I can.."

"Please, leave the technical diagnosis to me... Now, is there a plastic ruler somewhere on or in the desk?"

"Um >clunka<, yes..."

"Right. You've got a static buildup on your hard-drive caused by the changing electrostatic field generated by the ruler - the same thing that makes bits of paper stick to it when you rub it up and down your arm..."

DUMMY MODE ON

"Oh. What do I do?"

"You know how you get paper off a ruler by hitting it on a table lots of times? Well do that with your PC. Say 20 times - lift it about a foot off the desk & drop it."

"Oh. OK"

>crash<

>crash<

>crash<

"Um, the screen went dark"

"That's ok, it's supposed to do that - keep going. And when you're finished, do the screen as well, that static may have gone up the wires to it."

>crash<

>crash<

>crash<...

I hang up. I get up and go out to the public area to put honey in the floppy drives when a guy who looked like Lee Harvey Oswald runs up to me and shoots me, only the sound comes from the machine room, and I can hear the ex System Managers chuckle....

Later, in the ambulance, I realize. I forgot to get the guys username...

Then everything goes dark

The Bastard Operator from Hell #11

The Bastard LIVES!

The darkness cleared as we got out of the tunnel and it occurred to me that I couldn't be all that injured. Then again, maybe I was. Someone was going to p..

I died.

Of course, a true BOFH considers this not really as dying, but more of going home for the holidays.

Five seconds later, I'm getting the upside of 15Kv across the nipples. (These ambulance guys sure know how to party).

Bastard Operator from Hell LIVES!

Three weeks later I'm back on my backside and feeling rested and relaxed behind the console again. The rest has done me good, I feel *great!*. I catch up on everyone's email then let the students know I'm back by performing an impromptu preventative maintenance in the middle of lab time by kicking the restart switch (They love it really)

I flip today's excuse card, "GLOBAL WARMING" YES YES YES! What a welcome home!

It's the end of the month so all those automatic email reminder programs will be sending messages all over the place. I set the system clock back 7 days to buy some peace and quiet and swap the printer ribbon for the three year old one with holes in it.

I sort through my snail mail and crack open the BOFH Monthly Newsletter, "kill -9" and check out the articles therein. There's a nice piece on making OS2 slow, boring and painful, but it looks exactly like the OS2 installation instructions to me... Ah, who knows. I head straight to the BOFH Wizard section to see if any of my articles were published. All of them!!! Even the one about the c compiler that randomly removes one line from the source code it's compiling!

The phone rings.

"The Screen on my PC is blank!!!"

"It's the power cord" I say

"No, I checked that. When I switch it on, it does nothing!"

"It's the power cord" I say

"No, I checked and it's all plugged in properly. There's no lights on the keyboard or anything"

"It's the power cord" I say

"Oh Hey! I just noticed, the cord's not plugged in properly!"

"The power cord?" I ask

"Yes... Whoopsy"

"No worries at all" I say "Is it all working well now?"

"Yes, I think so. I'm sorry, you WERE right all along"

"Yes, we're getting a lot of this, it's due to the current Global Warming problem. It causes random thermal expansion and contraction resulting in temperature induced movement of friction based holding mechanisms.."

I listen carefully. Nothing. In other words...

"You can fix it permanently though" I say

"Really? How?"

"Well it's all to do with lowering salt deposits on the metal contacts"

"Oh!" (Dummy mode irrevocably engaged)

"All you need to do is just take the power plug out deposit some dilute mineral salts on it. Do you have some dilute mineral salts on you?"

"Uh... no?"

"Ok, no worries, just stick it in your mouth drool into it. But make sure you wipe the plug first to get rid of any germs, and TURN THE SWITCH OFF ON THE MONITOR before you do - we don't want a nasty accident!"

"Oh. Ok!"

>Fzzzt< >clunk!<

I hang up as the receiver hits the floor. Disk space is too good for them.

The Bastard Operator from Hell #12

I get to work and I'm a bit tired so I plug a thick hunk of copper across the three phase supply and throw the switch. The room is plunged into darkness as the circuit breakers trip and for once the machine room is silent.

I like it!

I pop the phone off the hook and close the curtains on the observation window. Now it's **really** dark in there. I wouldn't be surprised if someone had a nasty accident in here..

I lift a couple of floor tiles up in the darkness and call our maintenance contractors saying the mini popped the breaker again, then replace the fuses in it with a couple of nails and short the power supply to ground. You can't just hope for this sort of thing, you've got to **MAKE** it happen.

15 minutes later the engineer arrives and falls down the hole. I pop the floor tiles back on just as the System Manager (a new and very thorough individual) comes in, telling me to watch out, someone could really hurt themselves in the dark...

I nod & tell him that we can't really afford all the downtime, and should I just throw the breaker and hope that there was no major fault. After thinking about the negative publicity we're getting already, he makes the last decision of his short career and tells me to go ahead.

Later, when the smoke clears I examine the smoking remains of the mini. Not a pretty sight...

"Strange that the breaker jammed shut, isn't it?" I say to our manager as he packs up the personal things in his office. "One in a million chance. A pity that someone saw what you did and posted the whole story to comp.misc. You'll be lucky to get a job managing a car computer after all that publicity..."

I go back to the machine room and throw the rest of the breakers to liven everything up, then login and start deleting users' email. I spot an interesting off-the-record sexual proposition from our male consultant to a member of the men's swim team which will make a good mold, so I copy it there, modify root's owner name to be "Winker" and password to be "ljkadlkajflkj" (then call the big boss to report a suspected intrusion). Should be at least a couple of hours of login time before we can sort that out. In the meantime, people are just going to have to read that message... I realize the message has been read when I hear the gunshot from behind the consultant's closed door.

I edit the online helpdesk information and change the phone number to the System Manager's - he'll probably appreciate the extra calls at such a sad time...

I hear another shot and realize he won't be answering any calls today. I put the phone back on the hook and flip today's excuse card. "Poor power conditioning". Too plausible. "STATIC BUILDUP". Still a bit too plausible for my liking, but I don't want to run out of cards before the end of the year, so I decide to run with it.

The phone rings almost as soon as I've got "Top Gun" in the video machine so I pause the video and put the phone on hands-free.

"I think I've bought a bad floppy disk"

"Yes?" I wonder if I've suddenly become the consumer watchdog.

"Well, I've got this disk and it won't format. All the others in the box did so I thought I must have a bad disk"

"Why are you calling me about this?" I ask

"Well, the disk says guaranteed; where do I go to get a replacement?"

Ah! Of course.

"Well, let's see. Are you sure it's the disk, and not just some problem with static buildup?"

"Huh?"

"Static Buildup, you know, static electricity that's passed from you to the computer"

"But I'm wearing a wrist strap!"

Around about now I realize I'm deep in dweeb country. Wrist straps aren't fashion accessories in *my* part of town...

"Of course you are, but your average wrist strap has a 1 Meg resistor in series with it, a *really* poor earth. What you need is a direct earth connection. Hang onto the frame of something that's earthed properly."

"What, you mean like our stainless steel work bench?"

"Excellent. Now, have you got a paper clip to discharge the static with?"

"Hang on. Yeah"

"Ok, with your other hand, poke the clip thru the ventilation holes at the back of the unit, and just touch the contact at the end of the thick red wire."

"The one going to the power supply?"

"Yep, that's it"

"....Hey, isn't that the li... >kzzzt!< >clunk<"

Another call solved by the helpdesk from hell...

The Bastard Operator from Hell #13

I'm busy with my new shell replacement login script, and it's almost foolproof. Let's just say it pops up with:

"Yes means No and No means Yes. Delete all files [Y]? "

Upon login. I'm really starting to worry about the number of account break-ins we've been having recently.... The manager isn't though. His main concern appears to be the number of computer-related fatalities on campus. Funny world, isn't it?

I flip the excuse card. "DOPPLER EFFECT" Sounds implausible enough that it's plausible - with a little work of course.

The phone, the bane of my existence, rings.

"Hello, Computer Room" I say, being helpful

"Is this the Technicians?" The caller asks.

Amazing the number of deaf people that use these things. What the hell, I'm bored..

"Yes it is" I lie (Nixon would've been proud)

"I've got a problem with my floppy drive, it doesn't seem to be reading all the time"

"Hmmm. How old is the drive?"

"About a year.."

"And it sometimes fails and sometimes works, but it's starting to fail more and more?"

"YES!"

"Yeah, it's the Doppler effect of magnetism.."

"I thought that only happened with light and sound?"

>Bullshit mode ON<

"Yes, well it's been found that on a spinning surface, like a disk, the particle's magnetic alignment changes, especially when the head is stationary and slightly magnetized in respect to it."

"Duh. Oh" >DUMMY MODE ON<

"So, what you need to do is to demagnetize the head. Have you got a disk head demagnetizing loop?"

"Uh.... No?"

"OK, we'll have to do it the hard way. Have you got your original diskettes for your software?"

"Yeah."

"Right, chuck them in the drive, one by one, and format them."

"WHAT?!"

"Don't worry, it won't work - remember the drive is failing. All that happens is that the virgin magnetic field of the disks realigns the magnetic field of the head, because they weren't written by a Doppler affected drive."

"Oh, yeah!"

"So, when it gives you a write error and asks if you want to continue, you say yes. Do it with all your original diskettes, then, to complete the demagnetizing process, run a head cleaning diskette through the drive as well, which will pick up the stray magnetic particles clinging to the head."

"Oh. Ok. Thanks"

"Don't thank me - IT'S MY JOB!" I say, hearty in manner.

I put the phone down, it rings again. It's the big boss.

"Simon, could you come to my office please?"

>ALERT!<

Quick as I can, I press the panic button on our LAN-Analyzer, or to be more precise, the "Generate 90% random traffic" button

"Sure, would you like me to come now, or..

The other phone rings. I chuck it on hands free

"Hello, Computer Room, Simon Here, How can I help?"

"THE NETWORK IS DOWN, ALL OUR PCS HAVE SHIT THEMSELVES!" the voice on hands -free screams into the mouthpiece of the other phone

"I see" I say calmly "Yes, our Monitor shows it up, it looks to be a bad segment of thinwire - please hold the line while I unplug it"

I press the "I just got a raise" button (AKA "Stop Traffic Generation") on the Lan Analyzer, and almost immediately the user shouts back "Excellent, its working now, thanks"

"That's ok, don't mention it. Have a nice day"

The big-boss has been listening to all this, so I reckon that the trip to his office won't be so bad after all. I tell him I'll be right down as soon as I secure the net and hang up. On the way down, I invent a new buzzword which always keeps management happy. Complete Transient Lockout. Sounds much better than pulling the plug. Like Master-Reset sounds better than off-switch.

I get to his office and the staffing officer is there too. Uh-oh.

"Simon - How would you like to be our System Manager?"

?!!!

"Well... I don't know, I like that hands on.."

"Extra 10 grand a year, Varsity Car.."

"Monaco?"

"Ok"

"Sold!"

....And so ends the saga, as it should have at #10.

The Bastard System Manager from Hell #1

I get into my office and it's my first day - I want to make a good impression, so I empty my IN tray into the bin. Now that's what I call efficient!

I get a call from the big boss - he's been getting complaints about the Trainee Bastard Operator from Hell. I ask him to forward all the complaints to me and that it would be best to let me deal with them. I ring the operator and get him to make an appointment with me.

Two weeks later, he does, and I show him the complaints that have accumulated so far.

"Seventy Three complaints in your first three weeks!" I shout "It's good - but it's NOT Good Enough! You should be getting at least 10 complaints a day - AT LEAST! Now, let's see what you're doing wrong: You get a call from a user - what do you do?"

"Kill them off?" The TBOFH replies

"NO! How can you kill them off if you don't know their USERNAME? Your FIRST priority is to get their username. Then what would you do?"

"Kill them off?"

"NO! Get them to tell you what their problem is!"

"Why?"

"Because later I can say they didn't explain their problem to you properly! It's a great defense, works every time. A user rings me up to complain; I listen to their problem, then say "OH, WHEN YOU SAID `MY PC DOESN'T WORK' HE MUST HAVE THOUGHT YOU MEANT `HOW CAN I MAKE MY PC NEVER WORK AGAIN AND DESTROY MY LIFE'S WORK AT THE SAME TIME?' - IT HAPPENS ALL THE TIME!" then they tell me how implausible that is, I say how terribly sorry we are, then fake some connect and CPU time records so their monthly bill is about the same as the Uruguayan national debt... Understand? So, after you've heard their problem, what do you do?"

"Kill them off?"

"NO! Then you make up some excuse. Have you got an excuse card calendar?"

"Uh. No.."

"And you said you were qualified to operate a computer! You'd better have mine." I pass my computer card calendar over, flipping it to page one - "ENTROPY"..... ...I like it. "Now, you give the cretin an excuse then what do you do?"

"Kill them off?"

"YES!" (He certainly has a fixation) "Then what?"

"Hang up?"

"NO! Then they'll call you back when the problem recurs. Your job is to make them FEAR calling you. How can you work when people are calling? So, you make them pay for calling in the first place. What would you do?"

"Delete their files?"

"Yeah, it's a start, but then they may call back when they get new files. You want them NEVER to call back. What could you do?"

"Swear at them?"

"No. I can see we'll have to demonstrate. Have you got a metal ballpoint?"

"Yes"

"See that wall socket over there. Take the refill out of the pen and poke in into the wall socket."

"But it's live!"

"Would I really make you do it if it were live?"

"Oh" >fiddle< >fiddle< >BZZZZZZZZEEEEERT!< >THUD!<

Of course I would.

He was no good anyway. No killing instinct.

The BASTARD SYSTEM MANAGER FROM HELL #2

So I'm interviewing for new Operators, and, as the Bastard System Manager from Hell, I have high standards. And as the Immediate Past Bastard Operator from Hell, I have even higher standards.

I get the first applicant in.

"Ok" I say "I'm just going to ask you some simple questions to gauge your knowledge of Computing and Networking in relation to the Operations Field"

"Sure"

"Right. Question One. What's the best way to stop an individual posting nasty articles to news?"

"Close their account"

"Good - But can you elaborate?"

"Delete all their files, Change their password to `Knobhead' and Erase any backups of their account"

"Excellent. What is a killfile?"

"Uh. It's a list of usernames/topics/news items etc that you wish the news- reader to automatically skip so you don't have to wade through rubbish"

"Uh No. Remember I said pertaining to Operations. A killfile is in fact a file with a list of names of people you are going to kill."

"Oh. Of course."

"Never mind. What is DCE?"

"Delete, Close and Erase"

"Good. DTR?"

"DON'T TRY to RING. The Operator's watchword"

"Well done. DBMS?"

"Don't Bug My Supervisor. Probably the most important acronym around"

"You betcha. Ok. A user comes to you with a complaint about another user sending sexually explicit email messages to them. What do you do?"

"Take a copy of the messages, close the complainant's account (by accident) and extort money from the mailer by threatening to show their parents"

"Good. I think you'll do nicely. Hang onto this wire..."

"I don't think so."

"Excellent. You passed the final test. You start tomorrow. Please leave by that door so as not to disturb the other applicants."

BZZZZZEEEEERETTT!

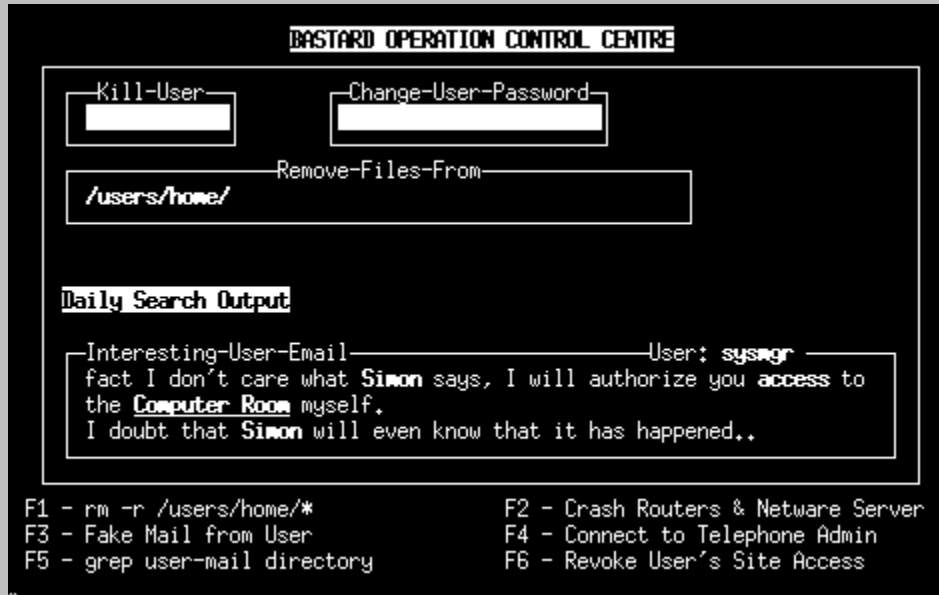
Electrified Door Handle. Gets them every time. I think it's the "Complaints Dept" sign that draws them to it like moths to a globe...

I push the body out onto the fire escape.

"NEXT!"

BOFH Rides Again

The Bastard Operator from Hell #14



Don't ask how I got back, I just did. Suffice to say that work frowns upon management material that uses electrodes to gain client information. Especially when you do it to the boss's in-laws. That's HIS entertainment.

So I'm back in the saddle. Unfortunately, that means there's a

surplus of operators in the computer room. One slam of the tape safe door later, the problem is solved. The knocking dies down in a couple of hours, so I guess the safes really **are** airtight.

To welcome myself back, I send a message out saying there's a shutdown in 10 minutes. 5 minutes later I shut the system down. I love doing that. I see the hard-disk activity lights flicker as the "disk recovery" phase of startup run through, globally deleting journal files. Funny how we always start up with lots of free disk..

I just get Wolfenstein started and the phone rings. What the hell, I almost missed it while I was away, so I answer it.

"Computer Room" I say

"THAT WASN'T TEN MINUTES!!!!" the voice at the other end screams

"What wasn't 10 minutes?" I ask in a pleasant manner. I can see that things have deteriorated in my absence. Spare the rod and spoil the rm -r, that's what I always say.

"THAT! You said it was going to be te... >pause<... Um, who is this?"

"This is the Operator; who did you expect it to be?"

"Darren? Is that Darren?"

"Uh, No. Darren.. Darren is... unavailable... at the moment."

"Oh. Do you know when he'll be back in the control room?"

"Probably around the time of our next backup - the year 2007 or sometime thereabouts I should imagine"

He's toying with asking me if he can recover their files or not. I let him dangle for a few moments.

"Was that all?", I say, nice as pie

"Well.... NO, it doesn't matter"

"Of course it doesn't. Would you like me to check if your files are ok?" I prompt

"Would you? I'm a bit new to this system and I'm not too sure what to do"

"Sure. What was your username?"

Everything inside him is screaming at him not to say it - People beside him are screaming at him not to say it.

He says it.

You just can't tell some people.

"Ok. Well, it looks ok to me, all your files are in perfect condition!" I say

"THEY ARE!! GREAT!!"

The relief in his voice is overwhelming

>clickety< >clickety<

"Yep. Both your x-defaults and your newsrc file are ok"

"But.. But what about my site monitoring data?"

"Sorry?"

"There were about 10 files in my research subdirectory, data I'd collected over the past year."

"Oh. Well, I can't see anything. Perhaps you backed them up somewhere?"

"I put a copy in my girlfriend's account.."

"What was her username?"

"Uh.... >pause< ... "

Is he going to do it? Is he?

He does.

Like running down a snail with a steamroller...

>clickety clickety<

"Nope, nothing there either. OH! Hang on, there looks like some form of journal file in your account, it's quite large... I think maybe you should login there and try to recover with it..."

I cat about 100 man files together and slop them in his girlfriends account under the name "rsrch.j"

"How do I do that?"

"Ok; can you login yet?"

"Yeah, I think so..... Ok, I'm logged in"

"Ok, You need to run the file thru the mailer to clear the eighth bit, other- wise the journal recovery will probably choke with an instruction error"

>DUMMY MODE ON<

"Oh... How do I do that?"

"Well, you have to type in `mail root < rsrch.j"

"Ok!"

"HANG ON! You have to type it with your nose."

"WH..? WHY?"

I flip the excuse card till something appropriate pops up. "HARDWARE STRESS FRACTURES"

"Well, it's got to do with hardware stress fractures. You probably type too hard with your fingers which upsets the internals of the keyboard. It's got to do with dry joints and electromagnetic inductance"

>DUMMY MODE IRREVOCABLY ON<

"Oh. Ok"

"Now, you've got to type it in 20 times"

"Sure, ok"

He hangs up.

I ring campus security

"Hey, we've got another crazy in the lab. Apparently he's typing with his nose. He might be armed..."

3 minutes later I hear the shots. I close his account, he won't be needing it any more..

The phone rings. It's my Mum.

"Hi Ma, what can I do for you?"

"Simon, I've got a problem at work, the floppy disk with all my personal stuff on it is failing I think"

"Oh. Ok. Well, have you got any nail polish remover and some cotton wool buds?"

"Yes"

"Ok, take your disk out, and clean that brown stuff off the inside of the disk. That's what gets the heads dirty. You should just have a nice clean plastic disk when you've cleaned it completely"

"Oh, Ok Simon, Thanks"

"You're welcome. Oh; remember that time you wouldn't let me go over to Graeme's place to watch videos when I was 11?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Oh, No reason.."

THE Bastard Operator from Hell #15

It's a warm afternoon in the computer room. I dunno, maybe I should turn the chillers back on, but what the hell, I've got a cold and I need to keep warm.

I flip today's excuse card. Magnetic Interference from Money/Credit Cards. Hmmm, vague enough to be plausible. The phone rings

"Hello, Computer Room" I say "Hi!" the caller says "I want to fit some RAM to my machine to upgrade the memory. I just bought some 8 Meg chips off a guy in town and wanted to know if you guys would fit it."

"Well," I say "normally we would, but today the technicians are busy trying to gas axe open our tape safe to see why it smells - You could probably fit it yourself though.."

"Really? I thought that was dangerous?" she says

"Nah nah, it's safe as houses, just remember to get the chips out of those stupid plastic bags before they stuff them up altogether"

"Really?! How do they do that?"

"Well, you've heard of static RAM right?"

"Yes..."

"Well, why pack static RAM in an antistatic bag? Sounds really suspect if you ask me!!! Yours might even be stuffed already, so you'd better remove them.."

>D.M. ON<

"Oh >crinkle crinkle< Ok. Now what do I do?"

"Ok, you'll need to get rid of the charge those bags have probably given your RAM, after all, you don't want to blow up your computer, do you? Get rid of any woolens that you're wearing and switch to nylon. Run round some cheap carpet, then comb your hair a couple of dozen times and then plug the chips into the comb to keep them steady. Turn your machine on, then plug the memory in and out about 10 times to get the slots warmed up. Then slop them back in, flick the power switch half a dozen times and that should do it!"

"Hey thanks!"

"Don't mention a thing, all part of the service"

I leave for lunch - after all I have been here for 10 minutes solid - and walk past the student labs. I hear a mass of beeping and look round to see a user's screen full of garbage. They've either typed an image file or fingered my account and got the core file I renamed as .plan. By the time he gets his terminal sorted out, his allocation of connect time will be all used up. A tragic shame.

I get back from lunch early a couple of hours later and slip into the Usenet news directory tree, slide on down to alt.binaries.pictures.erotica, then start deleting parts 3 or 4 of the really long gifs. (After taking a copy myself and overwriting them to the last user backup tape, of course).

Then I get ready to watch the videos I got out from the video shop by taking the printers offline and disconnecting the phone, and I notice that the frame grabber video player is gone from the office. Someone has obviously moved it while I was away...

I make some discrete enquiries under the threat of rm -r, and find out that the secretary now has possession of it. So I mosey on down and ask to take it away. Only I can't because I've got to sign *THE BOOK*, saying when it will be back, how many minutes of tape I'm going to put thru it, if I'm going to be watching PAL or NTSC etc. Then it's all fed into her *personal* computer (which I'm not allowed to touch because it doesn't belong to us) so she can produce full color plots about who's not working in the department.

I mention that it's not coming back - as I was the person that put the hammer through the frame grabber in the first place, I should be the one to hold the video. She then tells me that that's not acceptable, and I will have to find some other video to use, she needs access to get to the video 24 hours a day, in case someone needs it. And because she takes her PC home at night, I needn't think that I can fake any borrowing records. All this I see for what it really is - a thinly disguised attempt to gain access to the seat of power (The Operators Room) by the Bastard Secretary from Hell.

I decide to let it slide for once, after all she does get the snail mail into the correct distribution slots about 20% of the time, so that can't be so bad.

Next morning, I get in about 2pm and find that I have three departmental memos about the status of other stuff that is in the Computer Room that has been "incorrectly inventorised" as "Awaiting Repair" (The shithead technician has been leaking privileged information in an effort to score the secretary again - A tragic shame, I used to quite like him..) with a note from the Big Boss authorizing the secretary to investigate. Attached to all that is a note from the secretary herself stating that to action this she requires a 24 hour access key to the Computer Room.

ONCE AGAIN I realize that letting things slide never pays off. I look up the secretary's RS232, Ethernet, AppleTalk and Phone port numbers and yank them from the comms rack. What the hell, I kick the circuit breakers to her power points and lighting too while I'm at it. Then I strip off some mains cable & plug it in..

The phone rings a couple of minutes later.

"WHAT'S HAPPENED TO MY ROOM?!" the secretary screeches at me.

"Your room?" I say, in a pleasant and innocent manner, using caller ID to track down the room she's in. Ah! Just down the corridor

"Yes, MY ROOM! The power's gone off and everything is dead"

"Oh dear. What were you doing when the power went off? Perhaps you did something stupid?"

"I did NOT! I was working on *my* PC!"

The way she says "*my*" is really getting to annoy me.

"You were working on *your* PC?" I say, reflectively.

"Yes!" She snarls

"Not your *own* *very personal* computer?"

"Yes.." She doesn't know what I'm getting at yet.

And now I exercise the basic law of Bastard Operating which roughly says, Bastard Operators don't just win. Anyone can win. Bastard Operators win and totally DEMORALISE. That's *real* winning.

"I hope you switched your machine off before you called"

"Why?" she barks, a little uncertain.

"Well, it's just that personal property isn't covered by the site insurance policy. Why, if there was a power surge, heaven knows WHAT could happen to an expensive piece of delicate *personal* machinery like..."

I hear her place the receiver down *very* quietly and sprint on tippy toe to the door. As I repeatedly toggle her circuit breaker I start thinking about what I'll be watching on video this afternoon... Still on the phone, I hear a bang way in the background which probably means her pc has shit itself...

10 minutes later the phone in the control room. It's the secretary, and she sounds a little stressed. I manage to translate her sporadic outbursts into a request that her lines be connected to her terminal. I tell her they are, and has she got the technician to look at it. She hangs up.

No sense of humor.

10 minutes later still, the technician rings up and tells me all the secretaries' lines are dead. I tell him I'll check them out, then plug her Ethernet, phone and AppleTalk back in. Which leaves RS232...

Another 10 minutes later I'm startled out of my snooze by the phone. It's the technician still greasing the secretary by being super-efficient. He tells me the RS232 still isn't working. I make some excuse about dry joints on the plug etc, and ask him to put a new plug on the cable. I hear the >snip!< as he clips the old plug off, and the receiver rattle as he starts to strip the wire in a manly way with his teeth. Then I connect the mains cable to my end of the RS232.

As soon I hear the ">ERRRRRRREEEEERRKKK!<" coming down the receiver at me, I know that the "incorrect inventory" problem won't be repeated.

Another problem solved by the Bastard Operator from Hell

It's a dirty, filthy, stinking dog-kill-dog job, but someone's got to enjoy it

The LAST Bastard Operator from Hell!

I get back from Britain and return to my old stomping grounds to take up a post as an Analyst/Programmer... As an A/P I'm expected to work weird hours so I start putting in some 9 to 5 shifts to see what it's like.

It's weird all right. I don't like it.

I go to the computer room to check out my machine, only I'm not the Operator anymore, so I've got no access. I call the Operator. He answers.

Bad sign.

"Can I get access to the Computer Room?" I ask, respectfully

"Well..." he pauses "...what do you want to do?"

Indecisive. It gets worse! He should've come straight out and said that the day a user gets access to HIS computer room is the day he'll be crated up and freighted to the big Computer Room in the sky to meet the Chief Operator!

"Just look at my machines" I say..

"Um, well, we're not supposed to let programmers in here unless it's an emergency" he blubs.

Dear oh dear. It's almost as if he's apologizing! I can't take any more of it so I just wander off. He calls after me in apology and it turns my stomach. Watching something you've carefully built up with neglect and mindless acts of violence just crumble away in front of your eyes!

I can't let it end this way! There must be something I can do...

I go back to my room and open the sealed envelope that I was saving for my retirement nest-egg.

I shuffle through the signed bits of paper, photographs and Dictaphone tapes till I find what I want. The photo's a bit faded and blurred, but the people in the picture can still be made out. I get on the phone.

"HELLO?". The Big Boss himself answers

"Hi there, Simon from the Computer Centre. I think I found something of yours"

"WHAT?"

"A photo. One in a series of 24"

"WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT! I'M A BUSY MAN - DON'T WASTE MY TIME!"

"Well, it's a photo of you, a couple of female friends, and something that looks like it has some agricultural purpose"

"Oh..." ... ____ ... "...yes, I was wondering where that got too. If you could just drop it in an envelope and send it to me personally..."

"*I* *think* *not*..."

"Well, it's obviously a fake. Where would you get such a thing?"

"Your office. You left the door open one night"

"That's ridiculous, my door's electronically locked every night"

"By computer?.."

"Oh! What do you want?"

"The New Operators"

"Ok, I'll have them fired.."

"NO! Then you'll get some more and they'll be just as bad!"

"Then what do you want?"

"TO TRAIN THEM!"

.....

A couple of days later the training session begins. Unfortunately, I only get one operator to train as the other one resigned when he heard I wanted to talk to him. Still one's better than none.

We start from the very beginning..

"Ok, let's just go into this. How do you feel about users?"

"They're ok, I suppose" he answers

"OK?"

"Well, they can be a pain at times"

"At times?"

"Well, a lot of the time?"

"A lot?"

"OK, ALL THE TIME! I HATE THEM, I HATE THEM! ALWAYS RINGING ME UP WANTING TO GET MORE DISK OR CONNECT TIME, WHINING AT ME IN THEIR PATHETIC VOICES, COMPLAINING ABOUT RESPONSE TIME. I HATE THEM!"

"Right. There. You see, you did know the answer after all. Second question, what do we do for users?"

"What they want?"

"No"

"What we think they want?"

"No"

"What WE want?"

"No"

"I DON'T KNOW!"

"I see. Well, the answer is, we do nothing *FOR* users. We do things *TO* users. It's a fine distinction, but an important one all the same. Now, what do we do TO users?"

"What we want?"

"Exactly. And WHY do we do it?"

"Because they deserve it?"

"No..."

"To convince users not to call?"

"No again. We do what we do because we ENJOY it. And because we can get away with it."

"Oh! I suppose you're right"

"I KNOW I'm right. And if I'm not, I'm STILL right, because I'm the *OPERATOR*. It's that simple! If you remember that phrase, there's nothing you can't do. Now the last question. What exactly do we do to users?"

"Delete their files, scrap their backups, invade their privacy..."

"No no Agent Starling. That is a mere bagatelle. That is simply the method. We want to know the result. What we do is BREAK them. What's the point of deleting their files if they never use them? What's the point in reading someone's private correspondences if you're not going to let the user know you did it, then tell their friends or parents? Why scrap someone's backups unless

they need them? You have to break the user's will so that they realize that they're the simple-minded sheep we know they are!"

"I see"

"Of course. I'll be off now, don't ever let me catch me in the Computer Room again!"

"Thank you sir"

"Sir?"

"Oh. Get out of my Computer Room!"

"That's more like it!"

The mantle is passed.

"Oh" my new operator calls as I leave, "I can't remember what your backup tape looked like. Is this it here on the Bulk Eraser?"

>HMMMMMMMMMM<

AAAAAGH!

* * It's: "SPLAT - MY CAT!"

-//-/_

+>\ --__ Slower than a speeding DATSUN 180B. Much slower.

+>/ _-----_ Mortally slower, one might say. Rest in Peices.

-\\-\\--

* * University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton, NZ

It's a stinking hot day in my non-air conditioned office and I'm annoyed. The sort of annoyed that's described, mistakenly, as red hot. The correct color choice, is, of course white.

I login to my account and there's three helpdesk mail requests, all ticking away to expiration, then escalation, then further escalation, then follow-up mail message, then even further escalation, then 2nd follow-up mail message and casual phone call, then still further escalation, then non-casual phone call, then threats, then, ultimately, and sadly, violence. But not so sadly that I won't resort to it. And they know I will too...

Because I used to be...

THE BASTARD OPERATOR FROM HELL!!

...and sometimes, late at night I get these twitches. Like dead people get. (Or, as I prefer to call them, perfect computer users)

In the mornings I get them too. Like when the phone rings. And when I get email. And when people talk to me. AND when people are hogging the espresso machine to make fluffy milk. But apart from that I'm cured. A new man.

I smile at the thought and look, in reminiscence, at some reminders of my past. A couple of backup 8mm tapes with cartoons on them. The thank-you cards for my attendance at 23 separate funerals of computer center staff. The mains plug with the thinwire Ethernet plug at the end. I didn't ever get round to trying that one either, so I don't even know what it would've done.

I'm bored.

That's it alright. I am **absolutely**, **stinking**, **UNCONTROLLABLY** bored. I get up and slip a fingerprint free magnet on top of the reed switch that the Boss had installed in my display cabinet while I was on holiday, then pry the glass door open with a screwdriver. As far as I can figure, the switch is supposed to ring an alarm if the door is opened.

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times - "Inexpensive means Inefficient".

I open the door to the clamor of... silence. Well, silence and John Lee Hooker's "Mr. Lucky" from my CD. I grab my aforementioned etherkiller and wander down the hallway to the switchboard, applying another magnet and opening that to silence as well.

That's what's missing in society today - trust.

I pull the 15 amp breaker for the meeting room, then wander on round and plug the etherkiller into a cheap 24hour timer set to 5 minutes from now. On the way back to the switchboard I hear the first few murmurs about excessive collisions. I plug in my unpatented nail "fuse" (estimated fault current 200-300 amps) with a set of heavily insulated pliers and wander off to the tea-room to start my espresso brew. Halfway through the make, the machine stops. Now **THAT'S** what I call a collision.

I look around in a bewildered manner as panic erupts on all sides, half-made espresso in my hand. I step out into the hallway and behold pandemonium. Two programmers are fighting over a CO2 fire extinguisher in an effort to put their terminals out. I wander down to my room just as my X terminal, the unreliable piece of excreta it is, flames its last and lapses into a dull smolder.

"My cabinet!" I cry in 'horror' and hear the extinguisher struggle end abruptly. In a flash the two programmers concerned are behind me staring into my room. Shortly thereafter the boss runs up as well.

"What's this magnet for?" I ask, picking it up and hearing a bell start chiming in the distance.

"You bastard!" one of the programmers utters

"I'm sorry?" I ask, turning.

"YOU did it didn't you?"

"What? Break into my own cabinet? But I've got a key.."

That's the terrible burden of proof really - in this day and age, you need some to make an accusation.

The late-breaking news comes in that one of the consultants had a set of head- phones plugged into a CDROM drive hanging off their networked PC. But not anymore. Now there's an unexpected vacancy in the department. I blame the Ethernet Isolation specs. 3KV my backside!

Quicker than you can say "Help us with our enquiries" I'm "helping the police with their enquiries".

"What is this, can you tell me?" a burly officer asks, right up in my face. He holds up a magnet.

"It's a magnet. There was one on my cabinet!" I cry

"Yes. And where did you get them?" he asks, seizing control..

..and losing it. "On my cabinet! I just said!"

"No not this one. The others. Where did you get them?"

"Others? What others? You mean there were more on my cabinet! Why?!?" (I can play the "stupid game" forever, having had years of education at the hands of computer losers.) He tries a different tack.

"What would you say this was off?" he asks

"My cabinet! It was on my cabinet, I told you! I pulled it off... and I think I heard a bell ringing"...

.... .

A couple of hours later I'm back at my desk with Mr. Lucky, no charges pressed. I close my cabinet, satisfaction mine for the first time in a long while.

Then the phone rings...

-

The BASTARD IS BACK!

Programming is dull at the moment since the only "bug" in my software is now repaired. (The swipe-card door-access machine had some logic "glitch" that unfortunately no-one knew about until a particularly annoying Sales Consultant got accidentally locked in the secure area over the holiday weekend. The poor guy was a drooling wreck when they found him - apparently the sirens and sprinklers were playing up in there too, every 10 minutes. It all goes to show that you can't be too careful when stealing an ex-operators car park.

THE BASTARD GOES TO THE TRADE SHOW!

I decide to kill some time by dropping into a Computer Trade show to "sense the new direction of the market and Investigate emerging trends", i.e. I'll spend a shitload of the company's cash on food and drink and give a couple of salespeople a hard time they won't forget.

Well, that's how the normal bastard would do it, but not me. I really get remembered. All I need now is an acronym.... Hmmmm...

I get there and two stalls promptly close when they see me coming, (poor losers), but there's 4 or 5 newbie's that look like easy meat. I centre on a vendor that's trying to push their UNIX compliance with every ISO standard except hygiene and start talking 7-figure site upgrades. Ignoring his panting, I continue to talk, harping on about our requirement for compliance with currently emerging standards till he takes the ball and runs with it.

"Ah well, you see, we're THE foremost company in compliant systems" (turd) "In fact, our projected market share is.... blah blah blah.."

I let him dig his hole nice and deep. He's sure that 2 years at University has prepared him for the hardball arena of BIG \$ales.

"Yes" I cut in "But all this is irrelevant without a Dynamically Allocated Heap and some Transient Intuitive Hardware System. Are you D.A.E.H.T.I.H.S compliant?"

"Sorry?"

"Dynamic Allocation of Extra Heap and the Transient Intuitive Hardware Standard, D.A.E.H.T.I.H.S. It's THE most important thing to come out of ISO this DECADE! I guess you don't have an implementation path yet then?"

"Tell you what" he says, smelling a deal "The Regional Manager is on the Showroom floor somewhere. I'll track him down and get an answer for you?"

"Well, that would be great!" I say, trying to enthuse him and keep him from staring at the acronym for too long. "But I'm a bit pressed for time, I've got a flight in..."

He runs off. The Regional Manager is no dummy. They're trained to recognize "SHITHEAD" spelt backwards. And upside down. And reverse. And lip-read.

One stall down, 4 to go. I troll up to the next..

"Hi there, what form of hardware solution are you looking for?" Mr. Smiles says (In other words, how can I tuck you for an extra grand)

"Well I don't really know. I need a fast and expandable machine that's top of the line but also capable of talking to my old luggable laptop."

Mr. Smiles likes the words "Fast", "Top of the Line" and "Expandable". He runs over to a machine surrounded in glitter and advertising and gestures at it. "This is probably what you want then. The latest thing. There's only two in the country and luckily we have one here today"

"Yes yes, but will it talk to my laptop?"

"THIS baby will talk to ANYTHING. What's the interface, Ethernet?"

"No, a SCSI-1 Interface. My machine pretends to be a disk, ID 3. But lots of machines kill my machine's power supply with inductive transience backflow due to a non-standard SCSI interface...

>DUMMY MODE ONE<

He practically BEGS me to try the new machine out. Which I've been waiting for. I drag out my luggage, which is, admittedly, a bit of a beast.

"Wow! That IS old!! And >ungh!<.. quite heavy too. I guess you're quite attached to it?"

I mumble about legacy data, only use it at home, sentimental value and irreplaceable software while he plugs it in and starts the host machine.

"Okay, let's see what we can see" he says, and presses the power-on switch on my "portable" The 31 hefty NiCad batteries that make up almost the entire inside of my "laptop" pour grunt into a tripling inverter which in turn supplies RICH, CHUNKY VOLTS to alternate pins on the "SCSI" bus, whilst emitting a dull "uuurk" sound.

"My Laptop!" I cry, reaching for it, just as smoke starts pouring out the back of the display machine. Mr. Smiles dives for the demo machine weeping, while I exit, in "anguish"....

...resetting the circuit breaker in my machine as I go...

..to the next stall...

"Hi there, you look like someone who needs an upgrade!" the salesman chirps

"Well I don't really know. Is any of your stuff capable of talking to my luggage laptop?"

"HELL YES!"

One born every minute.

THE BASTARD'S STILL ABOUT!

It's a warm afternoon as I roll into work after a heavy night at my favorite bar.

I'm in such a run-down mood I almost don't notice the smell of deodorant in the air. Deodorant can only mean one thing - an outsider. No-one here cares if their smell offends anyone. The smell is pretty thick which means the bearer must have been here a while.

As these thoughts steam sluggishly through my brain, I trundle through to the espresso machine and fill my tankard with the syrupy dark roast Italian.

Barely have I time to turn off logins than I meet today's visitor.

"Simon?" the boss chirps from the doorway "Ah.. I'd like to meet John Stern, he's the speaker from "MOTIVATION 2000" that we mentioned in the departmental newsgroup last week..."

"HI!" John gushes, power dressed to the max.

"Oh, do we have a departmental newsgroup?" I ask the boss, toying with him.

"..and sent you email about.."

"Well, you know I don't read my email, it's just a load of mealy mouthed whining from malcontents" I counter

"But I send you mail all the time.."

"Like I said, it's just a load..."

"AH SIMON, John's here to talk to us about improving our department's morale"

"Morale? What's wrong with our Morale? Hell, I laughed THREE times yesterday"

"Yes, I heard the ambulance... Simon, this is a compulsory meeting. All the department will be there..." the boss urges, fingers crossed

"Ah yes, how is the flock?" I ask, disinterestedly

"I'm sorry? Simon, the whole department is going. It would be good.."

"Yes. Well, I don't think it would be *good* `morally' for me to attend"

"Simon >PREGNANT PAUSE< I'm not *asking* you to attend.."

Now THIS is a turn-up for the books! The boss, against all popular rumors, appears to have a spine. True, he's sweating profusely and has picked up a tremor, but he does appear to be holding his ground. I re-evaluate the potential threat of John, and decide to attend.

"Oh. Oh, Ok then" I mutter in a defeated manner

The relief on the boss's face is phenomenal. He immediately ceases radiating nervous heat and his bowels get a new lease on life. He smiles nervously and starts his exit to a new world of respect and authority...

We all have our dreams...

"GLAD TO HAVE YOU ON THE TEAM SIMON! YOU WERE MAYBE A LITTLE HESITANT TO START OUT WITH, BUT I'M SURE WE'LL GET TO BE GREAT FRIENDS!!!" John blurts

"Yes" I say, concentrating on remembering where I put my coffee

"YES. NOW COME ON, BUCK UP!!!"

"I'm sorry?" I whisper, instantly in attack mode - the boss freezes in terror

"BUCK UP!, YOU KNOW, MOTIVATION!!!"

"Oh, `BUCK' up.." I relax

The boss giggles nervously and resumes his exit waddle.

"YOU KNOW SIMON WHENEVER I HAVE MOTIVATION PROBLEMS I SAY TO MYSELF `IT'S A DAY TO CELEBRATE, 'CAUSE TO DAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF THE REST OF MY LIFE!'"

"I see. So it'll be a double celebration for you today then?"

"I'M SORRY, I DON'T GET..."

The boss `GET's all right, and hurriedly drags him from the room. I decide it's time to get some real work done, and call an ex-operator trainee of mine who works at the National Security Information Centre. A good trainee too, passed with flying colors. You can tell, he's still alive.

"HELLO!" he shouts "WADDAYA WANT!"

Old habits do die hard

"SIMON HERE" I shout back

"SO?"

I compliment myself on a job well done.

"I want some information on a John Stern"

"Stern. Isn't he that Motivation guy?"

"The very same."

"Yeah, I don't have to look him up, but I will anyway. He came here three weeks ago for a motivation retreat. I got a non-specific disease those days"

"Tragic. But what did I tell you about problems? CONFRONT THEM HEAD ON! DON'T AVOID THEM!! It's bad for your rep."

"Yeah, you're right. He's coming back in a couple of weeks for a refresher and I can't back out those days because we're updating vetting info on some national politicians and I'll want a copy for... backup purposes"

"I'm sure you do. Well, what can you tell me?"

"Well, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything Simon. As you know all our information is carefully monitored for compliance with the Data Security and Privacy Laws, and there's no way to extract information without it being monitored"

We laugh, and he emails everything to me. I look through the data and find that Stern is cleaner than the Watergate filing cabinet. A great shame.

Motivation O'clock arrives and I wander to the seminar room. John's setting up some display on his laptop, no doubt with lots of cartoon characters depicting co-operation and unity. Nothing turns my stomach more...

"SIMON! GOOD TO SEE YOU!!" John spurts. He slips his hand into mine with a non-threatening orientation. I grab it in such a manner that his ends up on top of mine in the classic repressive Body-Language manner. He immediately notes this, loosens his grip and starts to remove his hand, all according to plan. A squeeze and twist later and John's morale is a little less than 100% with two dislocated fingers.

"Oh! I'm sorry!" I gush, helping John back to the nearest available seat.. ..which unfortunately has his laptop with its fragile liquid crystal display.

Tragic.

>Whumph!< The room is plunged into darkness, the cause of which I can only guess at. Today's guess is the campus climate control computer started every heater and fan at the same time instead of one by one, resulting in a massive load on the campus power supply, popping all breakers. Just a guess of course.

"Nobody Move!" I call "It's dark and we don't want any accidents!!"

Everyone in the department freezes, knowing what this means. The god of computing wants a sacrifice, and volunteers are being called for.

"HOLD ON EVERYONE, I HAVE A TORCH IN MY BRIEFCASE!" John calls

If John were telekinetic, he would be reeling back from the mental shouts of "DON'T DO IT!". However, he obviously, and sadly, is not.

>WHOP< >WHOP< >WHOP<

Or should I say, WAS not.

Two minutes later the lights come on and the tragedy is revealed. The police are called.

"...apparently, fell forwards, head first into his briefcase, the spring-loaded lid of which slammed down upon his neck three times, snapping it like a twig"

I nod. The boss nods. The flock nods. One big happy family once more.

The Bastard Celebrates Christmas 95

It's a slow day on the systems front following a network outage that's chopped the site in half. No-one seems to know exactly what's happened to the backbone except that it's completely dead.

In fact the whole day has been rather slow. So slow I passed some time earlier in the morning helping one of our buildings people hang the annual executive's portrait photo in a place designed to inspire confidence and team spirit in the workers. Sure, using a nail gun just to hang a photo was a little excessive, but there was some obstruction in the wall which was difficult to nail through. An obstruction which was coincidentally thickwire Ethernet shaped. Anyway I hope they find that outage soon..

Meantime I kill a little time by trolling the offices of the Network Team for Xmas pressies. You know the sort of thing, "Thank You" bottles of Wine, Xmas Food Parcels, etc, from grateful suppliers. It's not like they'll report them missing, for to do so would be tantamount to admitting that you hadn't handed them over to the boss for him to "reapportion" as he see fit.

So I'm in the department Brown-Nose's office when the phone rings. What the hell, Xmas Spirit and all that, time to bury the hatchet.

"Hello"

"Hi, how long will the network be down"

"Should only be a couple of days"

"But I have to get these invoices rectified by the end of tomorrow!!"

"No Chance. I'm sorry, you should have thought about that before now. Honestly, we can't be expected to make allowances for your personal shortcomings"

"B.."

"No Buts, Maybes or What-ifs. It's your own fault."

"Do you know who you're talking to?"

"Well, my Caller-Id tells me that you're Charleston, Head of Accounts - and I would have to admit that you do have that whiney, beancounter telephone voice that denotes a white collar worker desperately in need of a good ten minutes alone with me and a staple-gun"

"WHAT?!"

"Oh, you're a DEAF whiney beancounter?!?"

"I. I.." he splutters

Hatchet FIRMLY buried, I hang up. I'm about to leave when I notice that he's left a privileged session open to the router. A quick >clickety click< later and the router reboot he'd forgotten he'd scheduled takes place. A quick >scrawly scrawly< later and a note appears in his handwriting in his desk diary mentioning this was going to happen.

Five minutes later I'm back in the computer room, stashing my spoils inside the covers of some old-style 12" removable disk packs. Leaving the disks laying around would only draw undue attention and suspicion, so I dump them in the bin where they should've been put years ago, except that they have valuable corporate data on them.

I hear the Operator's phone ringing and feel obligated by the past to answer it. Besides, the operators had heard a rumor that there was a 48 disk software install happening in the basement and had rushed off with the portable bulk eraser. If I taught them well (and I think I did) they'll only buzz floppy number 47 under the pretence of analyzing it for magnetic anomalies...

"Is this the operator?" I hear

"Yes" (A little white lie that won't do much harm.)

"I'm in a little bit of a bind. My supervisor has gone away he's still running some licensed software on his machine, so I'm locked out of it."

"Yes?"

"Well, is there anything you can do?"

"What sort of machine is it?"

"A Macintosh"

"Well, a lot of that licensing is network based.."

"So if I disconnect it from the net mine will work?"

"That would cause Defunct License Child Reflection on the net. You don't want that do you?"

>Dummy Mode On<

"Duh. No, I guess not"

"Right. What you need to do is to go into your supervisor's office, drag the documents they're working on into the trash can, which will relinquish the license they're working on. Then quit the application. Then EMPTY TRASH from the menu to force the license to be removed, then start the application up again"

"But won't that..."

"Delete the files? Of course not. Do files get deleted when you drag a floppy into the trash? No!"

"Oh. Ok, thanks"

"Hang on. Remember to leave a note on your supervisor's desk to tell them what you did in case they have licensing problems too"

"Oh. Ok"

Mission Accomplished, I go to the smoko room and check out the Xmas tree. Sure enough, the lights are the cheap, in series AC kind. I drop a bit of coffee and some water in the bottom of the boss's mug then fill the sink up with hot soapy water.

Bare minutes later the boss rolls in to get a coffee. Noticing the dirty mug, he proceeds to the sink of hot soapy water. Seconds later the Xmas tree, precariously balanced on its fiberboard base, lurches sideways into the bench area, dropping a few of the colorful bulbs into the water.

A promotion to a vacant position looks imminent...

The Bastard Quiz Page

Being a bastard doesn't come naturally, you have to work at it. And what better way to ensure that your hard work is paying off than sitting a quick impromptu test to make sure you've covered the problem areas - After all **BEING** a Bastard is a **journey**, not a Destination.

Now isn't that as esoteric as shite!

[How's your problem solving ability?](#)

[How are you at Tutorials?](#)

The Bastard Quiz ONE

The Bastard wants to know - How're your problem solving skills?

1. **The PRIMARY thought that should rush to mind when confronting a user's problem is:**
 - A. WHAT HAS CHANGED?
 - B. WHAT DOES THE CLIENT NEED?
 - C. HOW DID THEY GET MY PHONE NUMBER?
 - D. CAN THIS WAIT UNTIL AFTER LUNCH/WORK?
 - E. CAN THIS WAIT UNTIL THE NEXT PERSON TAKES OVER THIS JOB?
2. **In debugging a user's problems with a network, the most useful tool is often:**
 - A. The Activity lights on the machine's network card
 - B. The State and activity lights on the switch/router port
 - C. A LAN Analyser
 - D. A Lie Detector
 - E. Twenty feet of Duck Tape and a cattle prod.
3. **You're at an executive meeting when a manager claims that you failed to treat their problem with a correct amount of urgency. You:**
 - A. Ask for the Helpdesk Job ID so that you can track the call
 - B. Admit that it's sometimes difficult for a user to understand how jobs are prioritized
 - C. Deny everything
 - D. Admit everything, and say that prioritization is done at the helpdesk.
 - E. Say "Was that bestiality pictures that wouldn't come out in full color? No? Oh, I was sure it was you. Must have been someone else >wink<"
4. **Speaking of Priorities, you have calls from the Data Processing Pool, the Chief Beancounter and a plebe from P.R. Your priorities are:**
 - A. The Chief Beancounter, P.R, then the DP Pool
 - B. The Chief Beancounter, D.P Pool, then P.R.
 - C. The women in DP. The PFY will get the rest.
 - D. The women in DP. Were there other calls?
 - E. The women in DP. Followed by an informal feedback session at Karaoke night at the local drinker. Your shout.
5. **The Adage "Separate the Problem from the Cause" in computing terms means:**
 - A. Diagnose the actual problem as opposed to its effects
 - B. Prevent Faulty Software from further compromising data
 - C. Lock the problem down to a specific set of events
 - D. Lock the User's Keyboard in the Tape Safe.
 - E. Lock the User in the Tape Safe

HOW DID YOU FARE?

Mostly A's: You're a Computer Science student aren't you? Problem solving doesn't work like that in the real world.

Mostly B's: Yet another lean and green candidate! Did they teach you that at the Helpdesk training school. BAD HELPDESK OPERATOR, NO DECAF!

Mostly C's: You're soft, but you're getting the idea. A bit more overcaffinated coffee, a few sleepless nights, and you'll be A-Grade material

Mostly D's: You walk the walk, but the talk's still a bit of a mystery isn't it. Remember: They're lying to you!

Mostly E's: What can we tell you that you don't already know? Nothing - of course!

The Bastard Quiz TWO

THE BASTARD WANTS TO KNOW - HOW ARE YOU AT TUTORIALS?

1. **You're at a tutorial when the presenter steps up. He's wearing beige slacks, shirt, shoes and tie, carries a personnel disorganizer with his notes on it, and has two cell phones a pager and a large ring of keys and swipe cards strapped to his waist. You reach for:**
 - A. The water carafe
 - B. The breath mints
 - C. The free pens
 - D. Your Walkman
 - E. Your sleeping Bag
2. **Someone beside you CONTINUALLY interrupts to share their personal experiences and inane questions on the topics discussed. You:**
 - A. Embrace their anecdotes as empirical evidence
 - B. Draw similarities between their encounters and possible happenings at your own organization
 - C. Make "Duh" sounds
 - D. Wait till morning tea then spill something that stains down their front.
 - E. Wait till morning tea then spill something that scalds and stains down their front.
3. **You're at a talk on cryptography that's got most of the attendees so far out of their depth that they're wearing water wings and calling for snorkels. Even your eyes are starting to glaze slightly as you hear about XOR-ing data for the 24th time. To retain your consciousness, at the morning tea break you:**
 - A. Take a couple of extra notes
 - B. Take out your Dictaphone
 - C. Take a dangerous amount of caffeine
 - D. Take out the handout and tear out the boring bits
 - E. Take out the lecturer with a knee to the goolies
4. **It was terrible, but you survived. Your lecturer looks to you all and asks "Any questions?". You ask:**
 - A. Could you review the main topics again quickly?
 - B. Have you marked this up on the web somewhere?
 - C. Who am I? How did I get here?
 - D. Is that the quickest way out?
 - E. Anyone fancy a pint?
5. **You're evaluating the tutorial and feel like being generous, even though it was the dullerest thing since Gate's biography. You give your lecturer**
 - A. 8 out of 10 for knowing his/her topic
 - B. 8 out of 10 for Visual Aids
 - C. 4 out of 10 for turning up

- D. 7 out of 10 for ending 10 minutes early
- E. 2 in the goolies that you didn't give him in question 3.

HOW DID YOU FARE?

Mostly A: You're a card-carrying member of the furry tooth brigade - there's no hope for you.

Mostly B: You're just as bad as (A), only you have a different view on it all. Be careful who you sit by and recognize the sound of a cattle prod charging up...

Mostly C: Stupid - But savable. Remember - you have to work at it though...

Mostly D: You talk the talk, and almost walk the walk. Keep up the good work. Remember a good tutorial is a bad holiday.

Mostly E: (Enter your comments here. We trust you)

BOFH 1995 – 1999 Source Links

Really Old Bastard

[The 1995 Vintage](#)

[The 1996 Vintage, Part One](#)

[The 1996 Vintage, Part Two](#)

[The 1997 Special Limited Release, Part One](#)

[The 1997 Special Limited Release, Part Two](#)

[The 1998 Star Trek Enhanced Compilation, Part One](#)

[The 1998 Star Trek Rave Free, Part Two](#)

[The 1999 Series!](#)

BOFH 1995 The Bastard Operator from Hell - The '95 Vintage

At long last, the Bastard Operator from Hell 1995 Vintage is ready for its public. Aged in French Oak, and turned lovingly by the hands of nubile young nuns - their firm bodies straining against the rough hessian of their habits...

I'm sorry, where was I? Nuns. Yes. Nuns. Mmmm. Anyway, back to the Bastard Operator from Hell 1995 Vintage - A lovely year for Bastards. A little pretentious, but then aren't we all? - I know I am. But back to the aging bit. French oak, with a hint of fermentation which gives it that something extra you look for in something to waste your time on when you should be working.

Bold, yet unassuming, these episodes are the ideal compliment to red meat or pasta, and will probably have a shelf life similar to that of those nasty pickled challis with dust all over them that have been on your supermarket shelf since the place was built. Best served at room temperature on a hot day with a case of chilled beer, the conni-sewer will swear by them.

Meantime, Bon Appetite!

The Bastard Operator from Hell is back ...

So I'm in my office again, reconfiguring the router when the phone rings. Somehow I knew this was going to happen. I'm obviously going to have to change my number (and Operator) YET AGAIN.

I pick it up.

"Start talking."

"Is this the network engineer?"

Sigh.

"Yes it is," I say, resigned to my fate.

I check the phone - there's no corresponding name on caller ID, which can only mean one thing.

"You're new here aren't you?" I ask.

"Yeah, how did you know?"

"Lucky guess. Tell me, how did you get my number?"

"Oh, I just called the helpdesk."

How helpful of them..

"Anyway, I was just ringing to tell you that you've got a problem with the network."

"No," I answer, "no problems here."

"You do have a problem - I can't get my PC to work."

"Let's just look at this logically," I say. "You can't get your PC to work, so I have a problem."

"With the network, yes. It's probably a loose connector somewhere."

Of all the things that REALLY piss me off, the 'loose connector' and 'loose wire' theories TOP the queue. He obviously thinks that my day consists of sitting in a comms room somewhere 'wiggling loose wires' to improve network services. Or that I designed the network by calling up a cable supplier and ordering several drums of CAT-5 and asking for it to be "scattered about the building in a spider web shape".

Next thing I know he'll be telling me that maybe one of the 'bulbs' burnt out on my FDDI ring.

"Hey, maybe one of the bulbs.."

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

"No, it's not that! You've kicked out your patch cable," I say.

"I can't have!" he backpedals.

"You've kicked out your patch cable."

"No, all the wires are securely plugged into the back of my PC..."

"You've kicked out your patch cable."

"...and they all go to the box in the flo.. Oh, hey! I kicked out the patch cable!"

"Of course you did. It happens all the time. It's because the twisted pairs in your cable get tangled, shortening the effective length of the cable. It's just like the telephone cord when it gets tangled."

"Oh right! I think I read something about that.." he burbles. What a plonker.

"Is there anything I can do to stop it?"

"Well, all you need to do is unplug it from the floor socket and give the cable a really really hard yank. Then all the twisted pairs come into line."

"But won't that damage my machine?"

"Heck no! The connector at the other end is made to pop out when the strain might damage the cable!"

"OK, here goes..."

CRASH!!

"HEY! I PULLED MY MACHINE ONTO THE FLOOR AND A BOARD'S RIPPED OUT OF THE BACK OF IT!"

"Oh well, you obviously pulled too hard," I say calmly.

"WHAT AM I GOING TO DO? IT'S MY FIRST DAY!"

"I don't know," I reply. "It sounds to me like a hardware problem. I'm just a network engineer.."

"But..."

I hang up. It's time to have stern words with the helpdesk. First step, into the comms room to 'wiggle their wires around' and drop out their network. Step two, set their call-forwarding so all their calls go through to the boss.

I pick a floor at random and remote boot both the main and redundant routers.

REQUEST LINES ARE NOW OPEN!

Scant seconds later I hear the boss's phone ringing. I'll give the boss about 10 minutes of irate users, then wander round and suggest the helpdesk staff need a lesson on what's funny and what's not. Forwarding your phone to the boss at network failure ISN'T funny. Helpdesk personnel investigating the job market IS.

My thoughts are interrupted by a call on the Red 'Bat' Phone. It's obviously the boss.

"Is this the network engineer?"

"It certainly is, how can I be of help?" I crawl.

"Ah, you've got a problem with your network."

"Have we?" (grease grease).

"Yeah, I guess it's probably a loose wire somewhere.."

Sigh.

He'll have to go..

The Bastard trips up ...

"So what you're saying is that the network is wide open to hackers?" the boss asks.

The department Brown-Nose nods. I, however, shake my head.

Guess who he believes?

"Well, what have you been doing about these security holes?" asks the boss, now more than a little concerned.

"Ah..."

I consider the topic carefully for almost a nano-second prior to providing my answer.

"Not a thing."

"But our network is wide open. The security implications are horrendous!"

"That is correct," I say. "My much maligned co-'worker' has hit the nail right on the side with his diagnosis of our situation, which I will now attempt to summarize.

"In the unlikely event that someone manages to pick both the seven-pin tumbler locks on one of the comms room doors, bypass the alarm systems and security cameras, then open the locked FDDI cage, or alternatively, smash their way through six inches of reinforced concrete piping buried four feet under a busy suburban road, then tap into our fiber-optic cable without us knowing...then yes, we are wide open.

"However, if as I surmise this is a thinly disguised ploy by the departmental Brown-Nose to edge his way one rung up the perk ladder into a trip to look at new security software, then I believe that our exposure to danger is somewhat overstated."

"Did you say trip?" the boss asks, eyes gleaming.

EVERY TIME A COCONUT!

"Yes," Brown-Nose chips in innocently. "Just to a manufacturer in the US who has some software to quadrupally encrypt data streams while retaining data integrity and not impacting bandwidth."

Of course, as soon as the word 'US' pops up the boss has visions of himself overseeing the 'evaluation' procedure at a convenient beach, staying at the nearest resort because of its central placing.

Right.

Brown-Nose smirks as his dreams of a holiday on the company come to full fruition.

It seems almost a crime to take his dreams and strike them with the iron bar of reality, but network engineering is a dirty job...

"Well, that really does sound like a good idea. However, I believe that there is some quintupally encrypting software with a manufacturer who is presently on a six-week tour of the States that I'd already lined-up a meeting with."

To add to the impact of my statement, I flash a sheet of paper with impressive writing and letterhead as proof. They are not to know that it is in fact from my lawyer who is attempting to defend me from some libelous allegations of an illegal wiretap at my previous workplace (a sordid blackmail allegation completely fabricated by some other employees who were jealous of my six figure salary and my five minute working day).

Flashing the paper at this stage is of course unnecessary, as the boss wants to believe this...

I tip him the 'junkt-nod' with:

"Hopefully we'll be able to catch up with them as they had booking problems and had to review their venues and dates."

Now the boss has carte blanche at junket level. His two options are either he goes with Brown-Nose to the States for a brief holiday with a small amount of technical content, or he goes to the States with me, expenses-paid for five weeks, never quite catching the manufacturer, returning home empty handed and still needing to find some encryption software (in other words, up for another junket), no technical content, with the minor danger of alcoholic poisoning.

Choose the first option and Brown-Nose will wilt under their respective inspections.

The Boss smiles. I smile. We both smile.

Brown-Nose sobs - he knows what's on the cards.

"Of course," I say "we don't really want to muddy the waters of purchasing and spread ourselves too thinly in researching this. A small team to concentrate on the hardware should do."

Engage cover-up plan.

"Yes," the boss concurs knowingly, "...too many cooks and all that. Some technical reshuffle seems called for... I hear there's an opening for a technical consultant in our site maintenance division in Hartlepool."

Tears well up in Brown-Nose's eyes as he contemplates his next five years of gardening and rubbish bin emptying...

"That will do nicely sir. Book the tickets now?"

I try not to think of it as spite, just seeing the job through to completion.

The Bastard gives advice ...

I'm preparing for a six-week US junket on the company with the boss to look at new comms gear. This means I'm going to have to take on someone to do my job while I'm away.

The ex-office brown-nose applied for the position, but unfortunately he was late for his interview when the lift in which he was a passenger mysteriously blew a control breaker. A pity they didn't discover him till after the weekend, by which time he was a drooling vegetable. It all adds fuel to my argument that I require a larger 'miscellaneous' budget to employ part-time staff to check things like lift emergency telephones and alarm switches.

As far as the job went, within a couple of days I have a 'green and keen' contractor occupying the spare desk. Now to teach him the ropes...

"OK quick outline, we look after every communications entity in the building. And they all belong to me. Not the user. Me. Remember that, it's important!"

"They belong to you." he repeats

"No, never say that. Always say, they belong to 'ME'. You don't want to give the users the idea that comms is something they should get involved in."

"They belong to me. So we look after phones as well?"

"Phones, fire and intruder alarms, intercoms, networks, microwave link, miscellaneous control systems; hell, if they bought semaphore flags we'd probably be looking after them," I say, pointing out the respective chapters in my site management bible.

"How do you get away with it?" he asks.

"Simple. I apply the basic rule of standardization. Everything gets done in a standard way, and no-one but me knows anything about it."

"It's all in your head?..."

"No, no. It's all copiously documented in that safe over there," I reply, indicating a large armageddon-proof box in the corner.

"Who has access to it?"

"Me."

"And your boss..?"

"He has a key that he likes to think will open it. In actual fact, it's a duplicate of the key to the CEO's wine safe in the basement."

"Does the boss know?"

"How could he. He's not allowed in either area."

"He's not allowed in here?"

"Of course not. He's management and this is a sensitive area. Standardization, remember. Just mention to the CEO that we have phone-tap equipment and you get a fat security budget to play with."

"Aren't you worried the boss will find out about the key?" my employee asks.

"Not as worried as he'd be when I mention informing the CEO about it. There's been a surprising amount of pilfering going on. It wouldn't look good on his permanent record when he went looking for his next job..."

"What a tragedy. Okay, I've got all that, what do I do?"

"Nothing, I've done it all. Familiarize yourself with the site management bible. It'll tell you all the major problems that could befall us, what to do and who to contact. See that phone on your desk - don't ever answer it, it'll just be some user who's moved his machine and expects the data-sockets to be live."

"That's it?"

"Like I said, it's mostly in the site bible. Oh, remember to put the voice recorder tapes into the fireproof back-up safe!"

"That's in case we have a verbal contract disagreement?"

"No, that's so I can listen to the boss's personal phone calls. Honestly, it's better than 'Days of Our Lives'. Also, never mention the name 'Pooky' or he'll know I'm onto him."

"OK, what if the helpdesk corners me?"

"Hmmm. Well, as I haven't introduced you to them, you've got a week's grace. After that, use the excuse that you can't accept helpdesk calls until you have a username to receive the email so that the process can be tracked by me when I return. That'll buy you another couple of days. Add two more days for documentation on paper and then you might squeeze yet another week or two out if you use the old routine 'log a fault call' - preferably on some ancient notice board using the tried and trusted postcard method. Remember to make some number up and write it on the incident board as 'proof'. When you can't delay any more, use the network monitor to drop the CEO's data ports. He has priority and you can kill at least a day 'isolating the failure'."

"What happens if the CEO corners me?"

"Play it safe and brown-nose. Get him a coffee and take him on a tour of the central comms room. When he's mesmerized by the flashing lights, nudge his arm when you open a cabinet door so that the coffee spills through the floor tiles. The master breaker will pop so fast he won't even have time to say 'whoopsy'. After that, no-one's going to complain about anything. Got all that?"

"Sorted!"

"Right, get to work."

The Bastard gets non-PC

So I'm in the States with Sharon, the ex-boss's secretary, to check out some new networking hardware and software. The boss couldn't make it after unfortunately having a disagreement with the CEO when the CEO somehow got 'listen-only conferenced' into a telephone call between the boss and the CEO's wife. (The bit about the boardroom table got to him apparently). Being the only other person familiar with the whole deal, Sharon, a young, part-time aerobics instructor and non-subscriber to the motto "Don't screw the crew", was obliged to accompany me.

What a tragedy.

Strangely, it couldn't have worked out better if it were planned. (You know, someone telling Sharon to familiarize herself with only 10 of the 1000 or so documents that pass over her desk every month; someone accidentally tampering with the exchange configuration to allow listen-only conference calls; someone tampering with the exchange to make it auto conference calls to the CEO's home number back to the CEO's private phone that no-one but his secretary has the number to...) But of course, that's ridiculous.

Of course I blame myself. If I hadn't taken the boss for a 'working lunch', bought him 10 pints and mentioned the CEO's wife had a fixation on him, perhaps none of this would have happened.

Sigh. Oh well, at least I did my duty by the firm and made the most of it; difficult though it was. I must remember that at contract renegotiation time.

We book in at a modestly priced hotel - (modest by the standards of the Royal Family that is) and suffer an upgrade in rooms when it is discovered that due to some computing glitch a Mr. Babbage and a Mr. Pascal have been double-booked in our economy rooms. It's funny the number of times that has happened to me...

I ring my temp to see how he's doing in my absence. The phone rings about 50 times before finally being diverted to talking clock. At least I know he's read my Site Management Bible...

I then ring the boss's temporary replacement from the bar.

"How's it going?" he asks keenly, disguising the fact that he's annoyed at not being here.

"Well, we're having some trouble tracking down the supplier's tour dates, but we figure we'll track them down through computing magazines. Speaking of which, can you wire me another thousand quid for...miscellaneous expenses - the computing magazines, phone calls etc."

"I sure can," he replies amiably. "Of course, you'll be bringing these magazines back with you when you return so our accountant can rectify all this with the bean counters upstairs?"

Sneaky bastard - he's just upset that he didn't get to go and is obviously going to cause problems. Best to nip this in the bud right now.

"No problem - could you make that three thousand quid, the air freight costs are likely to be quite high for the 250 odd magazines..."

"Perhaps that IS unnecessary," he says, thinking about his plummeting operations budget.

"OK. Well I'll get back to you in a couple of days," I reply.

He hangs up and immediately I whip back to my room and dial through to my private modem pool at work.

I wait 10 minutes for the temp-boss to type and print the expense memo, then ether sniff his text and digitized signature on its way to the printer. I quickly bash up another expense report for a couple of hundred quid requesting some 'photographic' magazines from a dealer in Amsterdam appending his home address as the delivery point. I 'accidentally' queue it to print at Bean-Counting-Brown-Nose-Central then logout.

Knowing the religious background of the CEO I expect to find yet another empty desk on my return. Just applying the first law of networking - loose ends are bad, termination is good.

To enhance my job security, I make another phone call to a number that's permanently etched into my memory. In a darkened comms cupboard on the 5th floor, the call is answered by a 'Home Security Dialup Unit' and I type in my pin number. Then type a three-digit code and hang up. The clock starts now.

Six minutes and twelve seconds later the phone rings. The helpdesk has found me which can only mean that the temp-boss has given out my contact number, which in turn must mean the CEO is displeased.

"Something's wrong with the network!" the operator cries.

"I see. Put me on hands-free and tell me what's going on," I reply in a business-like manner.

The earpiece tells me I'm on hands-free, speaking to, if my calculations are correct, the helpdesk operator, the temp boss and the CEO (who likes to be around when major panics are in session to get firsthand knowledge of what the problem really is).

"What's the problem?" I repeat.

"The network appears to be bridged out somewhere in the computer room."

"OK, have you looked at the network topology in the documentation cabinet?" I ask, playing the knowledgeable and helpful network-person to the hilt.

"Your temp's trying to get into his office but there appears to be a lockout on the comms room swipe-card lock."

"Really? It sounds suspiciously like we've dropped a breaker in the distributed UPS Unit."

No-one has a clue what I'm talking about at this stage, but they also don't want to appear ignorant.

"Uh huh," the help desk operator says (probably accompanied by en-masse nodding in the room).

"OK, call the operations room, tell them to open the third UPS cabinet from the left, and they'll find a breaker, number 15 or 16, has tripped. If they reset that, the computer room repeater should come back to life and the door access system should start communicating with the office again..."

Five minutes later I'm back in the bar, with one of the safest contracts since Al Capone was alive. The CEO thinks I know each circuit breaker personally, and that my temp will have to go as soon as I get back. Situation Under Control.

Good networking depends on good planning.

The Bastard on a devilish buying mission ...

The story so far... The Bastard Operator from Hell and his ex boss's secretary Sharon are on a fact-finding mission to the States to check out on some security hardware ...

Sharon and I have to make the junket look more plausible so I track down several trade-shows for us to go to and pad out our cover story. I use the basic two-step junket cover-up plan:

1. Drop business cards saying I'm interested in everything so I get lots of correspondence when I get back.
2. Sign up for every free subscription and on-site demonstration (to be farmed off to someone once I get home).

I then engage the one-step Make The Most of It Plan - get to the bar as soon as possible and get freebies and drinks from suppliers.

Later that day at a sales stand...

"..combined with dual, redundant power delivery systems, opto-mode indicators, and rapid install strain relief fixtures"

"So what you're saying is it comes with a spare power cable, a 'power' LED and a bag of cable ties?" I ask.

"Ah well, you're obviously not aware of the full ramifications of system redundancy, hardware stressors and high availability."

"IT'S A BLOODY ROUTER!" I shout. "If the power goes out, it doesn't matter how many spare power cables, lights or cable ties you have, it still stops, you lose your net and get lots of phone calls!"

"Yes, but it does come in a nice black case with eight rubber feet instead of four!"

"WHAT I'M AFTER," I repeat for the fifth time "is an FDDI hub with IMPRESSIVE LOOKING ENCRYPTION built-in. I don't need another router."

"It's a nice router.."

"I don't care, I have routers. I want IMPRESSIVE LOOKING ENCRYPTION!"

"What do you mean by impressive LOOKING?" the guy asks.

"Something that'll fool a technical manager," I reply.

"What about converting everything to lower case?" he suggests, knowing the level of competence of the average technical manager.

"No, no we might get an intelligent one sometime in the future."

"Lowercase and all words spelt backwards?"

"Better.."

"Well, we do have this encryption chip set for terminal servers that we could whack into a hub.."

"What sort of speed would we get?"

"FDDI in."

"And out?"

"96K.. ...on a good day."

"NOT really what I want is it?"

"Well, that would be version one. But we promise that version 1.1 would have perfect performance, no lag, and so secure it'll seem like magic."

"You're lying aren't you?"

"Of course, I'm in sales!"

"What would we really get?"

"Like I said, version 1.1 would have the lot - everything you asked for."

"When would it be delivered?"

"Third quarter."

"Third quarter?"

"2012."

"Thought so. Perhaps we give this one a miss?"

"But it's the only hub on the market with high-speed-opto-interfacing!"

"They all have that - that's what FDDI means."

"Yeah, but no-one else calls it that in their brochures. And you get a couple of bottles of 40-year old scotch with every one as a product endorsement."

"Make it half a dozen with each one and I'll take 10."

Sharon looks a little concerned at this.

"We'll never get away with it," she whispers. "They'll cripple the net!"

"Sharon, Sharon, Sharon," I sigh. "We're never going to use them, that's the key. We'll buy them and mention to the CEO that we'll be able to ensure that absolutely no-one can snoop our networks without being detected. He'll realize that the piece of software he uses to detect the schemers among his junior execs will be compromised, and late one night all the routers will disappear from the storage cupboard to reappear in a landfill somewhere in Bognor."

"You mean the CEO spies on the other execs to protect his job?"

"Of course! I'd be most put out if I'd written that software for nothing!"

"What if he's not snooping anymore?"

"Please! Upper management has all the 'filial loyalty' of a piranha infested toilet bowl. And anyway, should that fail I will engage the old-favorite 100 per cent-foolproof kit-destruction ploy."

"What's that?"

"Switch the voltage to 115 and PLUG 'EM IN! Works every time."

"How much do they pay you to think up this stuff?"

"NOT ENOUGH!"

The Bastard wreaks his terrible revenge ...

The problem with being away on a jolly, sorry fact-finding tour of the States, is that there's a hell of a lot of paperwork to catch up on. Normally, I shove this to one side and if any of the paper pushers upstairs complain they get shown the door swiftly when the CEO receives insulting e-mail from their PCs. It's amazing the rude words the chair warmers can come up with sometimes.

But this time it's different. It's yearly budget time again, which means once more it's time to print the 'Basic Computing' OHPs so I can explain to the technical management committee why we should look at upgrading our network.

I briefly consider not printing the 'This is a BIT, This is a BYTE' slides, but reconsider when I remember that one of the committee avoids lace-up shoes because it takes him an hour longer to get ready for work...

While I'm planning the phone rings. Caller-ID tells me that it's a nasty specimen from Public Relations who just yesterday, as chance would have it, was lucky enough to slip into a parking space that I myself was about to enter.

Lucky is, of course, a relative term, and subject to revision over time. The time is now. I press the 'record conversation' button.

"Hi, network ops," I say.

"I need a PCMCIA net card for my laptop. By Friday, 9am."

Of course it's Thursday afternoon, 3:45pm.

"Ah, equipment purchases must go through your department," I say.

"Then you'll have to loan me one. The purchase order wouldn't go through in time. Besides, it's my personal machine, I've got a presentation to give to the CEO that I've been working on at home."

"Wouldn't it be preferable to transfer all this via back-up floppies to your work machine?" I ask, praying for the desired response.

"Don't be stupid, it'd take me a year to back this lot up. Just get me a card and I'll do the presentation from my laptop tomorrow."

"Well, I've got a ... doctor's appointment right now so I won't have time to configure your machine for the card," I say, giving him the chance to dig a nice big hole. "Also, I won't be in until about 9:30am tomorrow."

"I'll do the bloody configuration!" he growls. "It's not rocket science, despite what you geeks attempt to imply!"

Hole dug nice and deep. Now to work on the edging details...

"I don't know, if you get something wrong, or the card's incompatible.."

"IT'S A BLOODY PCMCIA CARD. HOW CAN IT BE INCOMPATIBLE!?!"

The hole is perfection, in fact it looks almost grave-like.

"Well, OK, I'll leave one in the equipment room. But take a network card and not a SECURE-network card. Do you know the difference?"

He's in a lather now and there's no way he'd admit ignorance.

"JUST LEAVE THE BLOODY CARD OUT AND I'LL PICK IT UP IN THE MORNING!"

"Well OK.."

He hangs up.

From the 'documentation' safe I pull out the 'special' PCMCIA card and pop it on the desk in the equipment room.

The next day I roll in at about 9:30 in time to be summoned to the CEO's office.

"WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON?" he rants.

"About what?" I ask, innocence personified.

"THAT BLOODY EXPLODING NETWORK CARD THAT CARSON IN PR GOT!"

"Exploding network card? What explo.. Oh dear. He didn't try to install a SECURE-network card in his machine did he? I told him yesterday to be careful about installing and configuring it. They're programmed to self-destruct if someone attempts to override their access parameters..."

"By self-destruct you mean..?"

"Well there's a tiny nitrate charge in them which burns out the circuitry.."

"Or perhaps blows a hole the size of a saucer through the laptop in question?"

"They DID have teething problems with the first batch, which is why I had them recalled to the equipment room in preparation to send them back to the manufacturer. But it shouldn't have been used in the first place. I warned Carson yesterday when he asked, it's all on the voice tapes..."

Much later as I'm watching the name 'Carson, MJ' being removed from the floor directory and 'Carson, MJ' in person being removed from the premises, I can't help but wonder what makes people think they can beat the system.

It's a good system. It's MY system.

I like it.

Now, to complete plans for the budget meeting...

The Bastard wreaks his terrible revenge ...

After a few days away I always attempt to come in slightly early to catch up. So when I roll up at 11 o'clock I find the place ominously quiet. This could mean two things; either my understudy didn't make it through my time off, or he's been brainwashed by the boss and they're both hidden away staring at the monitor of the closed-circuit BOFH-watching system that they somehow installed while I was away. A quick scan of all the suitable camera points shows that nothing quite so technical has happened (perhaps the boss remembered that it didn't work first time they tried either), so I wait for the knock at the door.

I'm not disappointed.

"Morning, operator," booms the boss as he strides in.

Odd, the boss and I are on first name terms, he usually calls me 'the bastard'.

Hang on, this is a different boss.

"You're probably wondering who I am."

He's on the ball, this one.

"You could say that," says I. "What happened to the previous generation?"

"Nasty business. Installing security cameras or something according to the paramedics. Something went 'bam' and there they both were, all kind of charred and surprised-looking. Still, I'm still around, so look on the bright side."

Nasty. Ah, so they did try the cameras. Lucky I remembered to wire up all the video cable to the three-phase supply.

"While you've been away, we've decided to make a few changes," says the boss.

"We?" (What I really hate is someone trying to change my system).

"We've noticed that the systems around here are slow," he continued, "and that we need some new kit to keep up with everything. It seems that the new stuff they bought last month just can't cope with all the software we run on it."

For a minute I thought I smelled trouble; but it seems that my clock-chipping exercise paid off. Neat bit of lateral thinking that - buy the box the supplier recommends, clock it down from 133MHz to 13MHz, and wait for someone to reason that they need something ten times faster to do the work. Not only that, but the supplier gets sued for selling us unsuitable kit.

"Really?" I inquire cheerily. "What did you have in mind?"

"Well, we figured you would be in the best position to tell us what to buy, since you're the one who understands the technology."

He's damned right; not just anyone understands how I get the pictures from the stationery store to the TV in the coffee room at that quality, especially with Nicam Stereo sound and zoom facility. "Leave it with me," I reassure him. "I'll see if I can milk a bit more performance out of this lot first." With a bit of luck I can get a couple of thousand a week for a couple of months for 'upgrades' and wind the clock back up a bit every Friday night (that's what they mean by incremental upgrades isn't it?). By the end of it, I'll have enough for that new 52-inch 'console display', which has a wide-screen TV and a built-in satellite decoder. AND the boss will be happy that he's saved a couple of hundred grand.

I sometimes wonder how I get away with it.

Unfortunately that just leaves the more mundane jobs of the day. The e-mail filter is disappointing; perhaps the CEO and the girl from Accounts are starting to catch on and are using code.

I flick through the excuse book. Oh no, not lunar disturbances; who will believe that?

The phone rings. Damn, that was careless, I forgot to have it diverted.

"Computer room."

"Oh, I'm terribly, terribly sorry. Really, terribly, awfully sorry."

That's nice, but perhaps a little less than descriptive.

"Could you elaborate?"

"I just broke the mainframe."

Interesting. We don't have one of those any more. I downsized it to something with faster graphics when Doom II came out.

"How did you do that?"

"I just added an entry to our mailshot with a spelling mistake in it, and now the mainframe won't respond. It's only my second day here and I broke the computer."

"Where are you calling from?"

"Marketing."

It all becomes clear. She's on the segment that's 'accidentally' shorted for the next half-hour. That reminds me, I must put in a random-fault-duration feature before someone notices that I fix every network fault in precisely twenty-nine minutes.

"OK, don't worry. How long ago did you send the entry?"

"About two minutes."

"No problem. Because it's your boss's database, the mainframe contacts an automatic system on his PC which has to confirm the transaction before the mainframe will accept it. As long as you get to his office in the next ...er ... 23 seconds, and pull out the network plug, the transaction won't have had time to get there for confirmation."

"Oh thank you, thank you. How can I ever thank you enough?"

I can think of a few ways, but she's dropped the phone and run for it, and I find myself shouting "It's the yellow wire" to nobody.

I wait for the phone to ring. Given that it's a 20 second run, and a further 15 seconds for her boss to comprehend why a secretary should suddenly barge in and rip out all the wires from his computer I take the opportunity of a quick 'grep' of the FTP log. Ten GIFs and fourteen JPEGs, they'll take a while to download, so I'd better just allocate myself a bigger slice of the Kilo stream...it won't do them any harm to share 8Kbps for a while.

The phone rings, three seconds early.

"Computer room?"

"Yes?"

"Can you explain why my secretary just charged in here and wrecked my PC, saying that you told her to?" he demands.

No, surely I couldn't get away with it. He's got to see through it...

"Lunar disturbances."

The sudden aura of sympathy at the other end of the phone tells me I've got away with it again. Not just a pretty face, more a Bastard Astronomer from Hell ...

The Bastard establishes his territorial boundaries

...

I'm sitting at my desk, reconfiguring my network monitor, when the phone rings. Caller-ID tells me it's one of the consultants in the Bean-counter department on the sixth floor. I pick the receiver up, say "Wrong Number", and hang up.

I know it's a wrong number - mine isn't listed internally. The number that is listed rings through (I believe) to a locked storeroom in the basement. Popular rumor has it that it was once answered... Network Engineering, like a major credit card, has its privileges.

The phone rings again and I'm getting concerned. Twice in one day is a little excessive.

"Hello?" I ask, not wanting to give any clues away.

"Is that the network engineer?" a voice asks.

This concerns me even more. There's only one person who knows my extension number - that's the system operator, and he knows better than to divulge it to a user. At least, I thought he knew better.

"Yes?" I reply.

"I've got a little problem with my connection," the voice says.

"Call the helpdesk," I reply, and drop the receiver back into its cradle

Yet again the phone starts ringing.

"I already rang the helpdesk!" the voice wails. "They told me to call you!"

Oh dear. There are three things wrong here: one, a user knows my extension number, which means: two, the helpdesk has been talking to the operator again; but more importantly: three, the operator is giving out my extension number to people.

This is not a good thing. If I'd wanted calls, I would have put an advert in a personal column. I'd best get to the very bottom of this before things get out of hand.

"Why did the helpdesk tell you to call me?"

"Because they don't know what the writing on the patch-panels means."

My network monitor is now beeping at me, which brings the concern level into the upper percentiles.

"On my patch panels?" I say.

"No, the ones up here in our section on the sixth floor."

"Yes. My patch panels. The ones I lock away from everyone," I fume.

"Well, I ... "

"Just a minute. One question. What were you doing in the Comms Cupboard?"

"Well, my connection went dead, so I ... "

"So you broke into the Comms cupboard?"

"No, not broke into - the operator gave me the key."

"The ex-operator gave you the key?"

"Yeah."

I grab the phone, go to the inspection window, and get the operator's attention. He exits to the corridor heading in my direction.

"And you've touched something haven't you?" I ask down the phone, knowing the worst.

"Uh ... I ... er"

"You got drawn in by the pretty lights, and you touched something. Don't bother denying it, I know you did, and you know you did. And pretty soon, if I'm not mistaken, most of your division will know you did too. What did you touch?"

"Well, I thought the router might have crashed, so I ... "

"Wait! Another question. Where did you hear the word 'Router'?"

"I read it in a manual that I got at Dil... "

"WHAT?! You've been reading forbidden literature as well?"

"It's not forbidden to read ... "

"Stop! The book was in the technical section wasn't it?"

"Well, it ... "

By this time the operator has arrived at my office and has realized the significance of the tones coming from the network monitor.

"What were you doing in the technical section? You know you don't belong there! But let me piece this together. You skim-read a technical tome, wait for your chance, impress the gullible

ex-operator with a host of buzzword lies, then, under the false impression that the router had gone down, rebooted it. Didn't you?"

"Uh ... Yes. Sort of. I didn't know which of the three routers was at fault, so I ... "

"You booted them all didn't you?"

Sure enough, my screen shows the sixth floor as a sea of red.

"Uh, yes. I was just wondering if there's anything else I should've done."

Looking directly at the 'ex' operator, I reply: "Well, come to think of it, yes there is. Usual procedure after causing a major network outage is to collect your personal effects from your desk and work area, not forgetting your coffee mug, then sit in a large open area until security comes to escort you from the building."

"But I ... "

"Oh, and make sure they don't have to search you for your keys or ID card. I've heard people have nasty accidents that way. Bye now! Oh, and if you've written my extension number down anywhere, I'd advise you to dispose of it carefully."

He hangs up, and I prepare to show our operator why the electric stapler has all those warning signs about keeping the body clear.

The Bastard negotiates around 'budget constraints'...

So I'm at my first budget meeting of the month, which has one and ONLY one purpose - to increase the size of our modem pool by 10 modems.

Small potatoes on the budgetary scale, but it does set a precedent for future meetings, a fact which is never overlooked.

Normally I'd get about a quarter of whatever I ask for (due to 'budget constraints' - i.e. the technical managers want the latest flashy status-symbol toys), however today I'm feeling lucky for some reason.

"Well, I still don't see what the problem is," Technical Manager One says. "It's not as if the modems are used 24 hours a day!"

"No," I say, "But at peak times they are 100 per cent utilized causing us problems."

"Perhaps our staff should be educated in modem use?" Tech One says smarmily.

The other Tech Managers fall into line with this statement with lapdog-like nods.

Time to play the ace up my sleeve.

"Yes, education is an answer, however it achieves little when modems are in use for excessive periods of time..."

"Meaning?" Tech Two asks, smelling a rodent-type creature in the immediate vicinity.

"Mainly people downloading large files from Internet's Usenet News..."

"Ah," Tech Two chips in quickly, "Perhaps there is a measure of expansion needed."

"...Large downloads," I continue, "Probably picture files of some description."

"Yes yes, I'm sure there's no need to go into extraneous detail on this."

Tech Two interrupts sweating slightly...

"No, you're right," I say, "None whatsoever. But newsgroups are only one problem. There are a lot of heavy image downloads from Web-Sites as well."

Tech One is suddenly fully awake. He knows (as do I) just which sites I'm talking about here and what images. AND what they depict. AND more importantly, who's downloading them...

I continue...

"Of course, should 'budget constraints' require usage statistics from our News host and Web-cache server, I'm sure I can dig up what articles and images were downloaded, when and by whom. In fact one site is getting fairly heavy access by only one user at our site and..."

"Yes, yes. Shall we move along? " Tech One pleads, "I believe you have a valid point and I am fully behind the move to get more modems."

"I would agree," Tech Two adds.

The Technical Lapdogs once more fall into line...

"Certainly," I say, "I think those 15 modems will be most helpful."

"FIFTEEN!" Tech One says "Your proposal was for TEN!"

"True, but on second thoughts, I feel it prudent to leave room for expansion in this area. Don't you agree?"

The moment of truth. Will he fold or not? Better safe than sorry...

"ESPECIALLY if modems are going to be used to access sites that have dubious relevance to the purpose of the company, such as..."

"ALL RIGHT!" Tech One cries, "Fifteen seems quite... reasonable."

I'm out of the meeting a record two hours eight minutes and back in my office in time to hear my phone ringing. What the hell, I answer it.

"Network Engineer."

"Hello is this the Network Engineer?"

"No, I'm sorry this is the Mail Room. Please hold, I'll put you through."

I forward the user to the talking clock and look over the error reports that have accumulated in my absence.

I grab one at random to give the impression of service. I ring the user.

"Hello, Payments"

"Hi, I'm Simon the Network Engineer. I gather you had a problem with telephone call-pickup."

"Yes, I can't pick up the phones in the office like everyone else."

"And you logged this as a Priority One call?"

"Well it's quite important!"

"OK, your problem is obviously an... EEPROM CONFIG CHARGE LOSS."

"Uh?"

"The battery that saves your phone's information is flat."

"But it's just new!"

"Of course. But it's been sitting for months in a storeroom."

"Oh. Should I get a new battery then?"

"No, no," I chuckle, "It's rechargeable! Just whip down to the basement car park and borrow the vehicle jump starter. Put one of the big clips on either side of the battery and press the red button. In seconds your battery will be back to new."

"OK, thanks."

"Don't mention it."

Five minutes later I'm sitting in the comms room by the exchange. One of the line level LEDs glows very brightly for a fraction of a second then goes out.

Some users have it coming. I'm just a delivery mechanism.

The Bastard dislikes his boss's use of foul language

...

I'm not impressed. The Boss has just said the "C" word, and with no provocation either.

"What did you say?", I ask, still not believing what my ears tell me I'm hearing.

"Oh, don't put on the shocked look. I thought you'd enjoy having a consultant to play with; it'll take your mind off annoying the users."

Me?? Annoy users?

"So when is our new friend coming then?"

"First thing after lunch"

Yes, that should give me enough time.

"And might I ask who ... errr ... 'invited' him?"

"Well, the Finance Director did actually. He's worried that we're open to hacking, and that people might get at confidential and potentially damaging financial information, so it was decided that an outside opinion was the best thing. In fact, the FD recommended this chap himself".

Ah, I knew the bean-counters had to have a hand in it somewhere. I've known for some time just how much they spend on hotels for "one-to-one briefings", but one wouldn't want just _anyone_ to know, would one?

"And how much is he charging?"

The number quoted by the boss closely resembles a telephone number. I wonder ...

No time to lose. First thing is to shift a bit of kit around the building; that doesn't take more than half an hour, so I'm soon on-line with that password I found recently. Ah, just as I suspected ... now, just a quick Email (anonymous, of course) to the Personnel people ...

Just then, the new arrival knocks and waits to be asked before entering. He's obviously come across electrified door handles in his career. The Boss strides confidently in after him.

"Good afternoon,", spouts the Boss cheerily. I get the feeling it's going to be. "Welcome to our machine room. Let me introduce Simon, our BOFH"

Nice firm handshake, but a little sweaty; he didn't ask what BOFH stands for, so he's obviously used to accepting acronyms he's never heard of without flinching.

"Simon will show you around", adds the Boss. "Can you present your preliminary report to the CEO and myself last thing this afternoon?"

"Certainly. And don't worry about showing me around; I've been in setups like this before".

Oh, no, you haven't ...

He heads off in the direction of the comms room, and I wait for the scream. Silence. Must be wearing rubber-soled shoes ... this guy knows what he's doing.

I busy myself with the tasks of the day, and wonder what he's up to. He certainly seems to be spending a long time in there looking at the firewall, which is reassuring - while he's playing with that, he can't be bugging something else up. I put the coffee pot on, sit back, and watch the CCTV monitor ... now ... all we have to do is wait ...

I remotely drop the main hub from the management console, and the alarm pierces not only the dull hum of the air conditioning but also probably one of his eardrums.

"WHAT'S THAT ALARM MEAN?" he shouts over the alarm.

I silence the alarm with an accurately thrown manual

"WHAT DID YOU TOUCH?"

"NOTHING ... HONEST" - a standard admission of guilt.

Obviously deaf as a post. Nice bonus. I stride into the comms room and grab a bunch of unconnected wires. Okay, they have never been connected to anything, ever, but this is a minor detail.

"So what the hell are these?"

"Pardon?"

"I SAID, WHAT THE HELL ARE THESE?"

"I ... THINK I'LL JUST GO LOOK AT THE REMOTE BRIDGES"

Five o'clock comes, and we're all sat in the CEO's office. Me, the FD, the CEO, the Boss, and our aurally-challenged friend who is shouting his report so he can hear himself.

"... SO WITH SUCH DISORGANISED CABLING AND A SIXTY-GRAND FIREWALL WHICH IS KNOWN THROUGHOUT THE WORLD TO LEAK LIKE A SIEVE, YOUR NETWORK IS FULL OF HOLES. WHOEVER PUT THIS KIT IN IS AN IMBECILE".

The CEO looks at me.

"Well?"

"Well, sir," (creeping usually helps), "I wonder if I might just explain a few facts. First, the cabling arrangements weren't helped by our colleague here and his size-tens; didn't you hear the alarm when he trod on something important? Second, I didn't actually order that firewall".

"So who did?"

All eyes turn to the Boss, who remembers an important appointment and dashes out with panic in his eyes. One down, two to go.

"One thing". I look at the CEO. "How long was our consultative associate in your office for this afternoon?"

"Well, I hadn't seen him before this meeting. Why?"

"Because our active firewall is in that data closet over there," I answer, waving toward a door in the corner of the office, "so unless our friend here had been sitting in your room for a couple of hours or so there's no way he could have evaluated our security. Perhaps he just invented a damning report so we could pay him to 'fix' our security on top of the fat consultation fee. That's fraud, isn't it?"

"But what about the firewall in the comms room?", asks a worried-looking consultant.

"Oh, well, when the Boss ordered it I thought I'd better put it somewhere, even though as you rightly say it's no good at all; after all, he could lose his job for blowing sixty grand on something that just sat in the cardboard box, so I thought I'd help him out. Didn't you notice it wasn't connected to the LAN?"

A few choice words from the CEO, detailing where he thought he might insert the check for the consolation fee, and our numbers are again decremented.

BONG!

The silence is broken by the CEO's PC telling him he has new mail. I know this has to be from Personnel (I filtered everything else to /dev/null earlier lest this message get lost among a flood of trivia). I excuse myself, reasoning that I probably couldn't keep a straight face as the CEO inquired of the FD whether he thought that a director who employs a crooked consultant who happens to be married to his sister could possibly stay in office.

As I sit by my console and gaze out of the window, I see our ex-FD drop the contents of his ex-desk all over the car park as Security body-search him for the keys of his company Jag. On-line registers of births, deaths and marriages are a wonderful thing ...

The Bastard blasts the confidence of the most well meaning souls ...

It's a slow day network-wise, and for some reason I'm feeling a little like Clint Eastwood ...

"I know what you're thinking. You're thinking, is he monitoring the fourth floor or the fifth? Well, to tell you the truth, in all the excitement, I haven't looked at the screen myself. But, taking into account I have a defined key to invoke a kernel debugger on the server which can erase even the MEMORY of your database process - and the work you've done this morning - I'd like you to ask yourself one question: do I feel lucky? ... Well, do ya? ... Punk! ?" I demand.

I hear the clatter of the receiver on the wall, and in my mind's eye I can almost see the frightened accounts clerk scurrying back to the office to close the connection to the database in an orderly fashion before failover time.

My mind's eye being not what it once was, I flip through my CCTV monitors of the fourth floor until I see a geeky guy, laden with lunch, beating a hasty path to his office.

I click on the security window and deactivate the 'Door Open' knobs on the stairwell.

I almost wish I'd turned the CCTV sound on so I could hear the thud when the door didn't open, but you can't have everything.

Rule 75 of Network Ops: never log a fault on a device from the lunchroom. Especially if your office is up a flight of stairs and on the other side of the building.

I get on with my work, which today is 'fixing' the swipecard door-access machine. Apparently there's some logic glitch that no-one knew about until a particularly annoying sales consultant got accidentally locked in the secure area over the holiday weekend. The poor guy was a drooling wreck when they found him - apparently the sirens and sprinklers were playing up in there too, every 10 minutes.

It all goes to show that you can't be too careful when you don't hold the lift open for someone laden with networking magazines ...

I upload the original swipecard microcode over my specialized patched version, and give the system a clean bill of health. It was obviously a freak hardware problem, and nothing to do with the network whatsoever ...

While I'm in the computer room, a hard drive arrives in preparation for a disk replacement, which means the engineer can't be far away.

Quick as a flash I have the box open, wind a couple of paper clips round the power terminals at the back of the drive and return it to its packaging.

Scant seconds later a pin-striped service engineer arrives.

"Hi, I've come to replace the faulty drive," he buzzes.

I lead him over to the machine with the Fault Status on it and he goes to work.

"Will you be wanting me to have the system shut down?" I ask.

"Oh no, didn't you know, this machine is mirrored and hot-swappable. I just pull the cover off like this."

Clip!

"Loosen these two retaining screws, grab the new disk and ... Hey, did you open this bag?"

"No, it must have been sent like that."

"Oh. It was probably the office when they pre-formatted it."

He has now added 'lying to the client' to his list of sins. Tragic.

He continues: "I get the new drive in one hand, slide out the old drive like so ... place it on the ground like so ..."

Clunk!

"And slide in the new one like so ... and ..."

BANG!

The smell of ozone tells me that both the paper clips and the power supply are no more. Time to play dirty.

"What the hell happened?!" I demand.

"Er, it appears that the replacement drive was slightly faulty, and the extra load may have overworked your power supply."

"You blew up our machine!"

"No, no, it's only a power supply problem. All I need to do is slide the disk out like so, switch the power off and flick this switch to change over the power supplies. Now I switch her on, and ..."

Nothing happens.

"Nothing's happened!"

He hits me with the old engineer special: "That's interesting!"

"Yeah, that's what yesterday's engineer said when he blew the other power supply."

A network loading alarm shakes me awake in front of my terminal and I realize that it had all been a pleasant dream. Ah well, I guess a network engineer's got to know his limitations.

The phone rings, I pick it up.

"I know what you're thinking ..."

The Bastard maintains his level of bad taste and seeks sweet revenge ...

It's New Boss time yet again and, because it was caused by politics that I was uninvolved in, I'm worried. Doubly worrying - the official office grapevine (Sharon the ex-ex-boss's secretary) has it that the new boss is a Bean Counter!!!

A new boss is bad enough, as they all want to distinguish themselves by re-arranging the department hierarchy to transform it from a stunted money-soak into a glittering and applauded service division.

But a Bean Counter is bound to be much worse!

Bean Counters have a reputation for reshuffles that are worse than a half-blind, epileptic poker player in a disco.

To get to this position he must have:

- * got the CEO completely suckered with his glittering dream, or

- * found out that while the interior decorating of the CEO's office cost the company tens of thousands of pounds, the redecorating of the CEO's entire home only cost 47p.

Amazing what you find out when you throw a passive fax-receiver across the CEO's personal fax line ...

It's 9.15am on Monday morning, and the entire department waits with bated breath for the arrival of Gerry, the new commander in chief.

He emerges from the rear stairwell catching half the department lift-gazing - quite a change from the normal clock watching.

Straight away he calls a meeting to discuss his 'departmental economizing'.

None of the staff really care, they've been moved around so much in the last couple of years that the walls are on wheels and the room directory is a blackboard. Not even X.500 can keep up.

The meeting trundles along with the usual nightmarish staff regroupings (PC support with the telephone operators; Unix operators with the tea lady, and so on).

Groups are renamed 'Knowledge Units', so everyone gets a warm feeling from the reshuffle shafting they just got.

The meeting takes a turn for the worse as the bifocals of death come to rest on me.

"Simon, as network engineer, you will be invaluable in your position on the help desk. Your co-operation will ensure network fault resolution times drop dramatically ..."

I don't think I need to mention that the chances of me accepting a position on the help desk are so slim that it would make an anorexic Ethiopian on a hunger strike look like Porky Pig.

On the way back to my office I realize that I can make the most of this by rising from the hell I've just been placed in, or by wasting my time in pointless revenge.

I let a coin decide by flipping it ...

Heads.

Revenge it is then.

A freak earthquake shocks the coin to 'Tails'.

Revenge it is then.

'Edge' was so close too.

The way is clear. Gerry has obviously spent a weekend formulating this and will shortly fire a salvo of memos both around the department and up to the Execs.

I dust off my Router Text-Change software (a simple piece of code that simply watches packets go by and occasionally introduces a spelling mistake or adds a zero to the end of a figure), make a few modifications and upload it to the network hardware. To be on the safe side, I upload the duplicator code as well.

Scant minutes later my workstation beeps as e-mail from the boss comes in. A memo confirming the decisions made at the meeting if I'm not mistaken. (Never am. Never was. Never will be.)

I don't need to open the message to know that the 'To:' line has been written with an inventive expletive sequence.

Two minutes later the phone rings. Caller ID returns: 'Big Guy'.

"What the hell's going on with the system?" The CEO growls.

"What do you mean?" I ask, caring and concerned.

"My printer's spewing the same memo over and over and I've been receiving repeated e-mail messages"

"That's not from Gerry is it?"

"Yes, why?"

"Oh, he's probably been playing around with his printer and mail client settings again. I'll sort it out post haste."

The CEO hangs up, and I drop the router out, so solving the problem. Round One to me, I think.

I would ring the Boss, but he appears to be talking to the CEO about something quite pressing at the moment. Perhaps later ...

To be continued ...

The Bastard gets his retaliation in first ...

It's a hot morning and I've forced the security windows open for air conditioning. This has the unfortunate side effect of illuminating a warning lamp on the security desk, but due to a CAD wiring design flaw that was never quite explained, there's only one lamp for the 204 windows on six floors, so it will take about an hour for security to find me.

In the meantime, the Boss has charged into my soon-to-be-ex-office because he noticed me chatting to the CEO this morning and wants to know what it was about ... After last-week's e-mail/print debacle, he's keeping a low profile until his master reshuffle produces the sweet fruit of victory. The Boss's command of small-talk doesn't even extend as far as weather, so it only takes him 10 seconds to get to the point.

"So what did the CEO want this morning?"

"The CEO?" I ask, playing dumb to the limit.

"OUR CEO!" he repeats a little harshly. "You were talking to him outside the building."

"Oh, that CEO," I say. "Well, he was worried that we didn't have sufficient higher-level redundancy."

"Really?" the boss exclaims, eyebrows in flight. "I didn't think he knew anything at all about networks".

"He doesn't," I reply smugly. "You're fired!"

"What are you talking about?" he demands

"Fired. You know, dismissed. Let Go. Terminated. Made redundant!"

"I don't believe you!" He sneers.

"Of course you don't. The CEO DID want to tell you himself, but he owed me a favor ..."

"He owed YOU a FAVOUR?"

"Yes, for bringing that Invoice to his attention".

"Invoice?"

"Yes, from you for those two big-screen TVs you had delivered to your home this morning, filed under 'enhanced communications equipment'."

"I didn't order any TVs!"

I carefully shuffle out some papers.

"So this isn't your signature?" I ask, pointing.

"N ... Well, I admit, it does bear a resemblance, bu ..."

"It should do, it took me a week and two of your souvenir airline pens to perfect!

The paper's even got your fingerprints on it!"

"It can't have! I've never seen it before in my life."

"So you didn't fill your laser printer with paper when it ran out yesterday?"

"I ..."

"That was silly wasn't it?"

"I can't bel ..."

"Believe it. But it's not that bad. If you'd trusted the digitized signature service, we would've had this conversation a week and two pens ago, so at least you bought yourself some time. That's one more week before your mortgage foreclosure notice arrives ..."

"You bastard!"

"In the flesh, the very same, on the job and tampering with your outstanding holiday leave! Oooh look! Isn't that security, looking for you?"

He backs away, straight through the open security windows and down two floors below.

Nothing like a couple of fractures to slow you down at work. Security is, of course, on the scene in less time than it takes to fully reconfigure a 10-slot WAN router over a 150 baud modem. (Not quick, in case you're wondering). The CEO is also present.

"What happened?" the CEO asks.

"Well," I say, "it's hard to say. He was babbling about some order and televisions and things. I don't like to say it, but I think the stress was getting to him. The suicide attempt was just a cry for help ..."

"Not a cry that's going to be answered by this company!" the CEO growls. "He's out of here!"

Good old CEO, loyal to the bitter end! And to think, only this morning he was as cheery as pie when we had that nice chat about his excellent choice of tailors.

They say I play a mean game of poker too.

The Bastard finds a new use for an electric wheelchair ...

It's a strange Tuesday morning. Despite his unfortunate fall from the window, my Beancounter ex-boss apparently wangled (with menaces no doubt) a job back at Beancounter Central on the sixth floor.

Yesterday, electric-wheelchair-dependent, he initiated an asset audit of the entire department, down to the last router cable. An asset audit of the big stuff alone takes four people about a week to complete, so this is just bloody-mindedness after his tragic misadventure with the roadside two weeks back. Some people just never learn ...

The asset audit is a potential problem. I'm not sure I want anyone finding out about my unique and quite lucrative asset-disposal policy ...

His previous position in our department has been temporarily assumed by one of the technical managers who's done this before. In fact, so many times before that he has two sets of business cards.

Temp-Boss rolls in at about 10am.

"Simon?"

I look up from my Ethernet monitor. "Yup?"

"Have you seen Gerry this morning?"

"Gerry?"

"Your last boss? You know, the one with half his body in plaster, strapped into a wheelchair?"

"Oh Gerry! No, not this morning."

"Strange. We called him about this audit thing and Accounts hasn't seen him."

"Really?"

"No. And apparently they called his home and he'd left at 7am."

"Mmm. Well, I've got no idea. Speaking of missing things, have you seen that SNMP-managed antenna servo set and the Cell-Phone-based SNMP link box?"

He frowns for a bit. "... No."

He thinks for a bit "..What was it for?"

"Well, together we were going to use them to control the direction and altitude of our satlink antenna."

He thinks for another minute. "You haven't!"

"Haven't what?" I ask innocently, secretly surprised at this guy's technical competence and sheer vision.

"Lost them!?"

Once more my faith in the system is restored. Had he said, "SNMP-managed Gerry's wheelchair," I would've had a serious ethical crisis on my hands.

"No no," I say. "I'm sure they're around here. I was just configuring them yesterday."

"Oh."

Topic ended, he looks around for something to fill in the day.

"New game?" he asks, pointing at my laptop complete with spanking new modem ...

"New game? OH! Yes, new game. Very new. A day old. Only started playing this morning."

"What do you do?"

"Well, the object is to maneuver the, er, robot through the streets of what looks like Cornwall."

"That's it?"

"Uh huh."

"Not much of a game, is it?"

"I don't know about that. I get a measure of satisfaction out of it. I've been playing since 7am this morning. Especially satisfying when I put it through one of those automatic car washes three times ..."

"Oh yeah! OK, mind if I have a go?"

"Be my guest!"

Five seconds later ...

"Whoopsy."

"What happened?"

"Ah, I wasn't used to the controls, I drove it down that manhole thingy and it's disappeared. How do you get a new man?"

"Appoint another accountant as boss?" I suggest, removing the cotton wool from his clouded brain.

His eyes widen slightly as my copious stack of clues adds up in his grey matter.

"You didn't!"

"No. You did. I just watched. 'Witness for the prosecution', you could say."

"But I thought ... You bastard!"

"Don't worry" I say. "They're fairly good about grievous bodily harm these days. You'll be eligible for parole in two or three years as a first offence, assuming it's your first offence. Oh - and only if he lives, of course."

He wastes several lungfulls of perfectly good air burbling on about department loyalty, and so on. I mentally switch off for a bit till the droning stops. He finally notices.

"OK, what do you want?"

"Two new routers, a back-up FDDI hub, and full ISDN to my home, for testing purposes."

"I see ... OK."

"Excellent. Sign here."

"But it's a blank order form!"

"That manhole did look rather deep didn't it ..."

He signs, I smile benignly, he leaves.

Networking is a funny old world ...

The Bastard spreads peace and good will among colleagues ...

The season of goodwill is upon us once again, and the endless round of Christmas festivities is just about to start. Gerry, the ex-boss from beancounter control was pulled out of the manhole with only minor injuries to the SNMP servo set attached to the wheelchair. Unfortunately, the casing was slightly damaged by the soapy water from the carwash, but nothing too serious.

I sit back in my armchair, and think about informing all users that they must log-out for vital maintenance work, so Systems can settle down to a serious game of network DOOM II.

I think again, and just finish rebooting the server and changing the log-in script when the phone rings. No caller id shows up. Bad news. I have all the office, mobile and home numbers logged on call-line identification. I pick up the phone.

"Start talking."

"Simon, Gerry here."

"Hi Gerry," I say, matter of fact.

"You won't get away with this you know. I know you remote-controlled my wheelchair. You really are a complete and utter bastard."

Now what's the point of calling THE Bastard Operator From Hell a bastard. I mean, what does he expect? This conversation is going nowhere. "Stop talking," I say, and place the telephone back gently on the desk. Short but sweet. I like that.

I record the number Gerry rang from on the database. It's the pay phone at the company's BUPA hospital. Some people just never, ever learn ... I get to work. Christmas is such a good time for dabbling in office politics.

I dig out the automatic phone log on the boss's mobile, and do a quick search for 'I'm sorry darling, but that's the day of the office party'. It's amazing what CTI technology can do nowadays.

I dive into the e-mail and write a simple little rules-based filter. I divert the 'to everyone' memo from office services about the Christmas party straight to me.

Back to Doom II and happiness. Later in the afternoon, I get the e-mail. Office services are sending out a request for Christmas party suggestions. How good of them. The venues are a boat trip or a barn dance on the 14th. What are these people on?

I check Sharon's (the boss's secretary) personal organizer. So far so good. I send the e-mail on, and all the punters have their vote for their venue of choice. How democratic.

The e-mails come back to me. It appears the majority want the boat trip on the 14th. I add up my version of the totals for office services automatically - I'm helpful like that.

Before forwarding to office services, I also add a little note to say that I'd had a call from Gerry, and thought it would be a seasonal gesture to club together and buy him some flowers, champagne, chocolates, and maybe even arrange for him to get a chauffeur driven limo to take him back to the party - presuming the doctors had finished operating.

I add that I'd prefer it if office services could do the running on this one for me. It's so vulgar to display your charity. Charity suffereth long and is kind, and all that ... Office services duly receives my helpful e-mail and announces the decision on the Christmas party. They've raised a great deal of money for Gerry, and the venue is to be the barn dance - but as many people unexpectedly can't make the 14th, the date is now the 13th. Unlucky for some.

I wait 10 minutes. Right on call, the boss comes in very pale and tongue-tied. I help him out.

"Problem, guv?"

"Sort of ..."

He pretends to hide the serious nature of the situation. I'd seen how much he'd had to put on his Amex card so that poor Sharon could stay in a luxury hotel in the Mambo King suite on the 14th instead of braving a taxi home. I also knew just how difficult it was to arrange the office party for the same night as his wife's night out with the girls. I almost feel sorry for him, but recover immediately.

"I heard the news. I couldn't believe it either. A barn dance. Still, at least Gerry will be happy."

"Gerry ...?" growls the boss.

"Yes. It was his idea. He didn't want to miss out on the party, so he's ordered a chauffeur-driven limo to take him there on the 13th. And of course, he can join in on the barn dancing from his wheelchair, unlike a traditional disco."

"Chauffeur-driven limo?" exclaims the boss, now back on fine form with the blood running to his cheeks. "I'll kill him."

"No need to do that. The doctors are already on the case."

I hand him the BUPA bill, along with other assorted receipts for champagne, chocolates, flowers and one very, very large telephone bill, which helpfully lists all the 0898 numbers Gerry has called from his hospital bed, as well as the police report citing him for careless use of a wheelchair.

The boss goes through the receipts and says the fateful words. "He's fired."

"But you can't fire a hospitalized man," pushing him that little bit further.

"Just bloody well watch me," says the boss resuming command. "And another thing, can you say there has been a systems error and that we are going back to the boat trip on the 14th. You'll know how to fix it won't you."

No problems. I think I can sort it.

BOFH 1996 Part 1 Bastard Operator from Hell, 1996 Vintage, Part One

Congratulations Reader

In this, the second chapter of "How to make a fortune by torturing neighbors pets", we look at the uses of the common garden spade, the 2-Iron golf club, and the Delicatessen-Issue Ham Slicer.

Now, for those of you who've followed the step by step procedure outlined in chapter one, you should now have in front of you a large pot full of animals slowly coming to the boil.. To continue from here, all you need is some cayenne pepper, a mallet, and an extra-large..

IT IS WITH DEEP, LASTING AND SINCERE REGRET THAT WE APOLOGISE FOR THE PRECEEDING WEB PAGE, WHICH WAS LOADED INTO YOUR BROWSER BY A ERRANT JAVA ROUTINE WHICH HATES ANIMALS. LET US ASSURE YOU THAT THIS SCRIPT IN NO WAY REFLECTS THE FEELING OF THE AUTHOR OF THIS DOCUMENT, HIS FAMILY OR FRIENDS. THEY LOVE ANIMALS.

Especially with chips and Salad....

The Bastard kicks in the New Year with a few sex aids ...

It's a very sad time of the year. Having spent the Christmas period in the office, neatly combining the filling in of a timesheet liberally scattered with numbers in the 'overtime' column with the avoidance of certain members of the family, it's terribly irritating to see all these hung-over employees dragging themselves miserably back into the office with the sole intention of breaking my network.

You see, during the shutdown period I received not one single support call, confirming my theory that my network is indeed perfect, and that all faults are user-inflicted.

It would seem from the system logs that I wasn't the only one in over Christmas: looks like the head of engineering has been around, faxing out dozens of orders for bits and bobs to put in the new shake-test line they're hurrying to build down in Quality Assurance.

The gossip around the office, though, is that the CEO is really mad - the line was meant to be running in time for the New Year, and from all accounts, it's nowhere near completed.

The most interesting snippet from the network fax log is that the software patch I installed on the server seems to have kicked in for at least one outgoing call ...

It's an entertaining little patch, and fixes the most common problem with all networked fax systems around the world - the fact that they're terribly dull.

The update in question is simple, yet brilliant: the network manager specifies search and replace filters for outgoing messages, which can brighten up messages immensely if used properly. You can even program it to divert faxes to a different country according to your own parameters ...

The phone rings.

"Good morning, you're the first caller of the year, how can I help you?" (Sometimes, my charm surprises even myself)

"Chief engineer here. Is the fax system working?"

"Certainly is, in fact, I've just been checking it a moment or two ago. Why? Are you having problems?"

"Yes. I ordered some kit for the new QA line before the break, but the supplier reckons the fax never arrived. Can you check it out for me? I sent it on December the 22nd, and it claimed to get there OK. The purchase order number is PE4456."

A quick 'grep' on the fax log turns up the fax in question.

"Well, it's here in the system log, and it certainly went OK. Quantity 48, product description 'Vibrator (three-phase, heavy-duty)'. Perhaps your supplier is trying it on."

"Yes, that's probably right. Many thanks."

"You're welcome".

I wonder ...

The phone rings. CLI says it's Goods Inwards.

"Machine room."

"Goods Inwards here. We have a delivery with no contact name. The supplier says it was ordered by fax - can you find out who sent the order with that fancy gadget of yours?"

"Sure, no problem. What's the order number?"

"PE4456."

"Let's see ... Yes, that was ordered on the 22nd of last month, by the head of engineering."

"Thanks mate."

I'm sure I hear sniggering as the phone is put down.

Time, and several levels of Doom III (beta, naturally) pass uneventfully before there's a knock at the door. Deftly switching Doom to 'Boss Mode', I motion the chief engineer to enter.

"Something's wrong with your fax system," he blurts.

"Really? How come?"

"You know that fax I mentioned? I just tried to re-send it, but it hasn't got there."

"Well, let's test the system."

I compose a quick fax on my PC, plug one of the old fax machines I've got lying in the corner into a spare line, and click 'send'. The machine springs into life, faithfully reproducing the test message.

Well, it would, wouldn't it - I didn't put the word 'vibrator' in my message ... so it didn't get redirected to Siggis's Sex Emporium in Rotterdam ...

"There you go," I proudly exclaim to my spanner-wielding colleague. "Nothing wrong with that. You'll have to tell your suppliers that their machine is on the blink."

"Oh well, thanks for checking."

Serves him right for doubting my systems.

The phone rings again.

"Machine room, BOFH speaking."

"CEO here. Tell me, have you seen Bradshaw from engineering? They tell me he was on his way to see you about a system problem."

"Yes, he just walked out of the door. Why?"

"Oh, I'm just wondering why Goods Inwards have brought me a box containing four dozen three-speed sex aids, as ordered by our engineering friend from Sigg's Sex Emporium in Rotterdam. Don't suppose you can shed any light?"

"Well, I can certainly go through the fax log for you - it's all here in black and white ..."

The Bastard has an appraisal meeting ...

It's a nippy afternoon when I get to work to find an e-mail memo indicating that the computer has randomly selected me for a supervisor appraisal scheme. My supervisor is especially surprised because he distinctly remembers having my name removed from the list. "Random" can be such a misleading word.

Late in the afternoon I get to the interview with one of the senior execs and a Mr. Grey (by name and nature) from a staffing resource company. The interview kicks off with:

"Simon, I believe you're aware of the purpose of this interview?" Grey smarms.

"Yes, where you discover that my supervisor ALMOST has the technical competence to remember his phone number if prompted eleven times."

"I don't think it's quite that bad" Grey chuckles..

The exec looks slightly uncomfortable.

"His HOME number. His office number is 4 prompts. That's only an extension."

"Yes. Well, he must be technically competent to be in this position!"

"Or be related to the CEO or the CEO's wife. Or plays golf at the same club. Or knows someone who plays golf at the same club. Or knows what a golf club looks like ..."

"I take it your opinion of your supervisor isn't particularly high?"

"No."

Exec looks distinctly uncomfortable now.

"For what reasons?"

"Well, let's be honest. Prior to this position, my supervisor paper-shuffled in a large factory known for its baked beans"

"I see. His network experience?"

"..resulted from him being the CEO's wife's second cousin" I reply.

"Ah"

"In all honesty, the guy couldn't examine a litter and find a runt, let alone a network. When I told him we should consider getting ATM in the Computer Room he ordered a new Barclaycard. I told him we had an internet firewall and he asked about extinguishers to go with it."

"I see. Perhaps his knowledge is more the planning field, as expected from a supervisor?"

"Possibly. Still I wonder why, when I suggested a heavier move to fiber he thanked me but said he was quite regular as it was."

"Ah. Well, what do YOU expect from someone in that position?" Grey asks

"The ability to add, subtract, read and write without having to stick his tongue out. The sense to sign his name to everything I put in front of him no matter how controversial it might appear"

"So you envisage that he is nothing more than a 'yes man'."

"Yes."

"Well, We'll perhaps agree to disagree on that one. Surely you can't expect him to sign anything without a thorough examination; after all, a delay of a few days is not likely to inconvenience anyone. As to your relationship, whilst it seems apparent that your supervisor is not optimum for the position, your opinion seems stunted and mostly reprehensible"

"Hmmm." I say, feigning concerned thought, "I see that we've probably reached an impasse" then I get up and leave.

On the way out I hear Exec warning Grey not to use the lifts or get into any computer controlled access areas. For that he shall be punished ...

....

I'm watching the closed-circuit-tv at 6:17pm when a shadow detaches itself from the others and breaks for the doors ...

A quick >clickety< >click< on the keyboard and the revolving door halts mid-spin as the security alarms activate.

I wander downstairs 20 minutes later as if to exit via the doors. A crowd has gathered to watch security attempt to free Grey from inside the door. I smile benignly as Grey catches my gaze.

"DON'T WORRY" I shout "WE CAN ALWAYS BREAK THE GLASS TO GET YOU OUT!"

"Armor Glass" a guard chips in. "Have to put a car into it to break it - wouldn't do him much good"

"There's always the emergency override" I add helpfully

"Something went wrong. The whole panel's dead"

"Really?" I say, looking at Grey. "Well, the maintenance contract was part of the budget request MY SUPERVISOR REFUSED TO SIGN THIS AFTERNOON. STILL A DELAY OF A FEW DAYS IS NOT LIKELY TO INCONVENIENCE ANYONE. "

The guard mumbles. "We thought if we cut the wires to the locking plate it would release"

"If it were that simple any burglar could get in." I say, "NOW IT'S ON AN INTERNAL INDEPENDENT BATTERY. TAKES 48 HOURS TO DISCHARGE!"

"What can we do?" the guard asks.

"Well, Taco Shells and cheese slices sound like a good idea"

"?"

"To slide under the door to him. He's got to eat! I just hope he's BEEN TO THE TOILET RECENTLY. WOULD HATE TO SPEND 48 HOURS LOCKED IN A GLASS CABINET WITH FULL EXPOSURE TO THE STREET AND ONLY MY BRIEFCASE AT MY 'CONVENIENCE!'"

Life can be so cruel especially when you're trying not to think about things ...

The Bastard educates a PFY ...

It's a quiet Monday morning as I wander into my office and make for my desk, only to discover its pristine surface has been taken over by what can only be described as a Pimply-Faced-Youth.

"Hi!", the PFY gasps ", I'm the new network trainee you organized last week"

Instead of stopping, I drop my case and about-face to the Boss's office. He informs me in no uncertain terms that the salary review he suffered after my report to the supervisor review last week has in no way contributed to what might appear to the casual observer as a vendetta. Pure coincidence.

He also informs me that the PFY is not only here to stay (at his appointment), but might even stay longer than myself. I'm to train him to the point of absolute confidence ...

Sadly, there's only room in my office for one, but that can wait.

...

"I've been answering the phones while you were away!", PFY cries as I return, brandishing a huge wadge of "While you were out" messages.

I decide to give every impression of complying with the boss's wishes.

"OK, file them then look at this", I say, switching on the network monitor.

"Where should I file them?"

"The filing cabinet", I say.

"But I can't see a ..."

"The round one ..."

"... on the floor ..."

"... IN THE CORNER !!"

"One was important!", he gasps.

"This is networking, they're all important. Now, it's imperative to be able to recognize important users when they phone".

"Oh. How do I do that?"

"You don't, it was a joke. This is networking, remember? They take what they get and are happy with it or they get an 'upgrade' to a 150 baud modem on an unfiltered power supply".

"How've you managed to stay here?"

"Hmm. A clever mix of superior intelligence, indispensability and ruthless blackmail where required. Hasn't failed me yet. Now, I'll wager my next pay check that 90 per cent of those complaints you took this morning were from the payments department - am I right?"

"Yes! Is their network faulty?"

"No, it's more of a protocol problem".

"What, protocol as in TCP/IP and stuff?"

"No, more like protocol as in 'When Simon asks to be reimbursed for some technical manuals, reimburse him straight away'. True, it's mostly undocumented, but around here it's pretty much a defacto standard".

"So what do we do about the errors?"

"Nothing. We mention that it's a network error we haven't seen before that's probably described in a technical manual somewhere, then we implement the 'never-fail network error resolution technique'".

"What's that?"

"We solve all problems with a 'Router Reset'"

"I don't understand ..."

"Simplicity itself!! Someone calls up with a 'networking' problem; you go and power-cycle their router. Then you wander round their department and say that you simply had to do it because the person concerned had an urgent problem that couldn't wait. You'd be amazed at the departmental hostility you can generate in just one week. If you really want to stir things up, do it 10 minutes prior to lunchtime - no-one saves their work before then so applications hang and people lose everything".

"What happens then?"

"We're 'just doing our job', of course! But up in the departments it becomes a demilitarized zone! Things start disappearing, lunches start getting doses of cayenne pepper, then, slowly but surely, the calls stop. If someone has an outage, they won't dare call us, they call the helpdesk."

"And what do they do about the errors?"

"They write out a 'while you were out' message".

"And then?"

"Then they pass them on to us".

"And we ..."

"FILE THEM!"

"What do we do for the rest of the time?"

"Monitor how the network is REALLY working, where bottlenecks are occurring, and also plan for upgrades in the next budget round"

"Really?"

"Don't be stupid. You any good at Immortal Kombat?"

"I'm OK.."

"Right, doubles. Winner does the next reset, loser buys the doughnuts".

It's a tough life at the top, but life is what you make it ...

The Bastard meets his match, but keeps a hold ... just ...

Things seem to be working out OK with my pimply-faced-youth trainee, surprisingly enough. He's keen to please, but I'll cure that in a couple of weeks after exposure to some of the more demanding clients ...

Speaking of exposure and clients, one of our more annoying ones resigned recently after some rather personal images were left in the memory of the "loaner" digital camera. It's all very strange too, as the erase function was working perfectly when I 'serviced' the camera a week ago. The incident would've been less severe had the finder of the images not downloaded one into the Windows Start-up Screen of everyone on his floor. The victim claimed in his defense, of course, that the image had been touched up, but consensus of opinion was that it wasn't the image that was getting that treatment. Dirty sod.

PFY is concerned, and obviously needs counseling about it.

"What's the problem?", I ask.

"Well, it's just that I don't understand how the image could have got onto all those PCs".

"I see. I guess someone managed to break into the application server and forced it to upload it to certain desktops".

"But the server is protected by a password and so is the version control program, so how did they get in?"

"Someone must have found out the passwords", I reply, waiting for the inevitable.

"But only you and I know the passwords, and I only found out yesterday".

"Did you write the passwords down?"

"Well yes, but they're locked in my drawer".

I shake my head sadly. "And who has keys to your drawer?", I ask.

"Just you and me".

"And did you do it?"

"No".

"Then, by a process of elimination, it must have been me that opened your drawer, read your passwords and logged into the server as you".

"You did it?!"

"Of course. You don't think anyone else in the department could, do you? Hell, the only other person with overriding access is the system manager, and he's so slow he needs a tow-rope!"

"Why did you do it?"

"Because you needed to learn the value of security. I'm sure that piece of knowledge will serve you well in your next job which will probably start sometime after tomorrow".

"B..b..b"

"No use butting".

"But, I was going to say that surely you're not going to make me tell Uncle Brian this was my fault, are you?"

Warning Bells On!

"Uncle Brian?"

"Uncle Brian, you know, on the 6th floor. The big office with the leather furniture. I'd hate to disagree with your report to the CEO".

UNCLE Brian ... Uncle Brian, the CEO. I should have known that this wasn't a run-of-the-mill shafting. This was big-time.

"Well, perhaps it's best to put it down to some outside hacker", I say, in what I believe to be a kindly manner.

"Or some inside hacker ...".

PFY smiles, looking menacing.

The sneaky bastard! Perhaps he has potential after all!

"... like our Boss", he adds, letting me off the hook entirely.

There but for the grace of god ...

"OK", I say, seizing the opportunity before he can realize the enormous potential of blackmail. "You tell Uncle Brian and I'll slip your keys into the top desk of his drawer".

"Done!"

Ten minutes later we watch on with interest and sugary donuts as yet another boss is escorted from the hallowed halls of hell.

"You realize he was the one that got you this job", I say.

"Yeah, but no point in being sentimental", he replies.

Definite Potential.

"Right, what shall we do now?" he asks, keen to learn.

"Well, I think it's about time we pull the plug on a remote site, then phone them to tell them it's because the labels on their EPROMs have expired and they need to remove them in a well-lit area, like some bright sunshine .".

"Won't that ...?"

"Yup."

"Let's do it".

You can't PAY for a job like this ...

The Bastard won't stand for interference with his printing systems ...

It's a pleasantly cool morning as I lie back in my armchair and plot the next surprise in the users' lives. Well, it's pleasantly cool for me, anyway - due to a tragic error in the air conditioning system, every other room in the building is alternating between temperatures more normally associated with the arctic and the tropics.

Some of the brighter staff tried jamming the stairwell doors open until a fire alarm was strangely triggered there a couple of times in succession, and security arrived to ensure that their smoke-stop capability wasn't being impaired. It's for their own good.

Because of all this activity my room, which is normally very busy at this point in the publicity year, is fairly quiet right now. Amazingly, my pimply-faced trainee has turned out to be a fiend with a scarcely human face. He's managed to 'persuade' the personnel manager to send him on a 'First principles of management' course... in Paris. Not bad for a non-manager and a newcomer - could it have been something to do with the e-mail filter he placed in the human resources department? Tut, tut - all those young secretaries.

I'm thinking that my whole day will pass by peacefully, without being disturbed by pointless queries. Touch wood.

Too late, the phone rings. It's a user.

"Hi, I'm writing this program to poll our printer to see if ...". I hang up.

It rings again: "Hi, I'm writing ...". I hang up.

Once more it rings: "Hi, I ...". I hang up.

The learning curve of these people is so near to horizontal you could play bowls on it, so I leave the phone off the hook. Ten minutes later the geek's knocking on my door. I just have time to replace the phone on the hook before he comes in.

"Hi, I was trying to ring you but your phone must be broken ...".

I point at the "Console of Hell" and shake my head. "It's the console," I say quietly. "It never breaks."

"Oh, well, then it ..."

"Your phone", I continue, "has a life expectancy of three to five years, but this will be here on judgment day. It'll still be taking calls from dumb users, too".

Geek is momentarily stumped. He manages to recollect his thoughts. The phone rings. "See what I mean?", I say, lifting the receiver.

"My PC's crashed again. It does it every time I try to access my network disk", a user sobs dejectedly.

"Ah," I say, flicking up today's excuse on the calendar. "That'll be TRANSIENT NODE DUPLICATION."

"Huh?"

"Well, your machine's crashing because it's seeing duplicate files on the network file server and on your machine".

"Oh. What do I do?"

"Well, your best bet is to just login to the file server and do a remove-rename."

"Oh. How?"

"Do an `rm -rf`. Which means remove minus rename files. Any non-duplicates won't be renamed."

"Oh. OK, thanks".

"That's OK," I hang up. Geek is still here. "I'm writing a program ...", he retires.

"... to poll the printers", I finish.

"Yes".

"MY printers", I state.

"Ah ... yes".

"Why?"

"Well, I thought that I could poll them every second to see what jobs they were printing and how fast their throughput was".

"Why?"

"To see if there are any network bottlenecks ..."

"Like, for example, a bottleneck caused by a printer having to respond to an 'intelligent' poll once every second?"

"Oh. I hadn't thought of that being a problem".

"No, I didn't think you had", I say, changing the stairwell temperature to zero and cranking up the humidity. "But you've been running your program on the system already, haven't you?"

"Well, maybe once or twice".

"No, more like ..." (I count the red dots showing on the print queue monitor) "17 times by my count. You talk to a printer with a poorly parameterized SNMP message, it doesn't answer you, so you go and run it again on a different printer".

"I ... well, I might have done ..."

"Now MY problem is this: who should I choose to pass YOUR problem on to? Maybe my borderline psychotic trainee, who has been taught to hate unnecessary traffic more than he hates re-runs of Emmerdale Farm? Or perhaps to the programmers who hate cowboys more than they hate working when the pub's open? I tell you what, I'll ask them both".

He's made it out of the room and is planning that six-month holiday in Spain before I've even managed to lift the phone off the hook.

I watch the monitor as he rockets to the stairs to make clean his getaway. Sadly, an amount of condensation has built up on the lino floors of the now chilly stairwell and he slips, bumps and rolls down a couple of floors on his way out of the building, knocking down a group of salivating bean-counters hungry to get back to their sums.

As he limps his way out of the building a thought occurs to me: you just can't plan job satisfaction like this. Well, I guess you can really ...

The Bastard gives a helpless salesman a run for his money ...

So I'm sitting in the office when I get a call from a salesman trying to flog me some ATM kit. He got my name from one of those magazine 'free subscription' forms a couple of months ago, which contains information inaccurate by a factor of 10, (except the 'Spending Authority' which I inflated by a factor of 100). A little white lie never hurt anyone and periodically dispels the rumor that there's no such thing as a free lunch.

I mentally switch to junket-mode, and tell him it's the technical manager he wants to speak to and can he hold. Two seconds later he's talking to my party-stopping imitation of one of our better-known technical managers.

"I'd like to come and meet with you to discuss a future-proofed network solution, if that's at all possible", he gushes.

The last thing I want him to do is come to the office and ask around for "the technical manager", so I go for the quick junket.

"Well," I say, "I'm a little tied up with some equipment reviews this week".

He's pausing a little too long for my liking. This probably means he isn't fully committed to crowbarring open the expense account.

I turn up the heat a little.

"Then I've a budgeting meeting next week to earmark spending in the next quarter, so I'll be busy preparing for that as well".

He smells dosh and goes for it.

"Tell you what - how about meeting for lunch - you've got to eat, right? No obligation, I'll just outline our products and I'm sure you'll see the advantages for yourself".

"Well ...", I stall.

"Luigi's, 12 on Thursday?"

"I, ah ...", I burble, playing hard-to-bribe.

"OK, I'll make the reservations", he closes, like a true sales champ.

I get into our electronic meeting planner with the manager's password (his wife's name - I mean, if they're not going to try to be secure ...) and make the entry for Luigi's. I make sure to select 'Hide Appts' option, as three can be a crowd.

Thursday rolls around and I show up at the bar at 11.30am and work my way through 'imported spirits' while the tab's open. By the time the sales guy gets there, I am, as we in the Ethernet trade say, in a promiscuous mode. I will buy anything. Or at least I would if I had any money. Which I

don't. However, I do have several of the manager's business cards and a fairly acceptable version of his signature down pat.

The next three hours whirl by as I look through several catalogues of shiny, beta-tested, 'top-of-the-line' hardware, drooling as only a technical manager can, and dropping comments like: "nice lights". By about 3pm I feel it's time for the stress period, so I tell him that there is no networking budget for the year as I spent it all in advance last year.

He starts crying in an attempt to make me feel guilty. I pretend to fold and tell him to order me a truckload of goods which I'll fake as last year's order.

"Will it work?", he sniffs.

"Of course ...", I say. "Now, you go and clean up, you're a little bit of a mess".

He exits for the bathroom, and I quickly check his wallet. There's about £70, so I remove about £40 of it - I don't want to leave him totally broke. While I'm at it, I remove his last payment method by jiggling my trusty permanent magnet around the magstripe on his credit cards, then make my way to the bar to order another drink.

I talk to the barman till the sales guy returns to the table.

"Well", I say. "I have to get back to the office".

He eyes me suspiciously.

"Tell you what", I say. "How about I sign an order form and you can fill it in back at your office?"

A salesman's dream.

Just time to whizz through the manager's signature, pocket the dosh and I'm halfway back to work as the police roar by on their way to Luigi's.

Obviously their treatment of defaulting clients hasn't changed recently. With any luck, it'll just be the one kneecap - unless, of course, the chef's throwing arm is back in ...

The Bastard brings his boss crashing down with a little bribe ...

It's a quiet morning recording calls to the medical officer when I get a call from reception asking where I want some new equipment delivered.

It takes me a couple of seconds to remember the meeting with the salesman in Luigi's and a few more seconds to contemplate the talking necessary to get the ATM guy out of Luigi's when he didn't have any money. Mind you, his two front teeth were gold-capped, so perhaps they worked something out. Or possibly pried something out ...

This probably means that my boss now owns some extremely dodgy hardware that's likely to destroy anything it's placed into.

As I have no idea what's been ordered, I ask them to send it all up to the boss.

"There's quite a lot of it ...", security informs me.

So it was both teeth then ...

"... would take up the whole of the lift, I'd guess".

And perhaps some jewelry ... retrieved post-amputation ...

I tell them to send, then prepare to meet my boss's doom.

Five minutes later the goods lift wheezes up with hundreds of shiny boxes of various sizes.

The boss looks confused. With a budget that would run to a couple of packets of networked crisps, he's a little concerned by the arrival of lots of shiny new kit. Especially as he's the only one with spending authority.

I wait till he gets the invoice with attached order. From his expression he has, as we in the trade say, rapidly downloaded some brownware.

"There must be some mistake!", he burbles, just as a particularly troublesome auditor enters, inventory register in hand.

"This the new stuff?", he asks.

"Apparently so,", I say. "But haven't we run out of money?"

"We have!" the boss bleats.

"Then why", I ask, pointing to 'his' signature, "did you order it?"

"I didn't!" he backpedals, at 28.8bps [backpedals per second].

A crowd has gathered, so I appeal for calm. "And after you turned down the request for better air conditioning too!"

Mumbles of dissent indicate the level of support the boss can expect at this stage. (A large number multiplied by nil.) This hostile audience isn't going to be receptive to denials, especially after the past years' weather extremes.

His razor-sharp vision spots a saving straw: "Hey! this order is six months old. I wasn't even here then!", he cries. "Pre-dating orders to escape the Inventory System!", I cry.

Brown-nosing auditor's eyes light up like a Christmas tree as he contemplates the kudos from discovering this fraud.

"But ... I ...", the boss pleads.

I spot a box and wind the heat up a little.

"Hmmm. ATM cards for XT compatibles. How useful".

The dissent grows in volume. The boss gives up all pretence of innocence and tries for a plea bargain.

"We have a lot of legacy equipment!", he gasps.

"The card could run DOS faster!"

He's completely cornered with no escape. I know it, he knows it. The staff know it.

"What on earth is that?", I ask, pointing at the back of the goods lift.

The boss rushes in, hoping to disguise further implication.

"What?", he asks as I catch up.

"Oh nothing, just all this. The auditor, the staff, the useless kit. Everything. It's not good for a career man you know".

"But I ..."

"I mean when your boss finds out about this ..."

With his vocabulary bucket empty, the boss just stands there.

"Unless, of course, it were to all just simply go away ..."

A gleam of hope registers.

"Away?"

"Like a bad dream".

"How?"

"Well, you give me the invoice then sign this Course Approval Form".

He examines the form:

"But it's a two week course in the States on basic networking. You know all that stuff!"

"Then I'll have lots of time to revise, won't I?"

"But ..."

"Oh. Isn't that a Commodore 64 ATM card?"

"All right, all right!"

He autographs my form and we exit. I put all the kit back into the lift, walk back to my room and give reception a ring.

"Something's wrong with the lift", I say, as I use its service console to wind the acceleration way past the red line.

Popping back to the lift, I see that the auditor is not letting go on this one.

"You think that's bad", I say. "You should see everything at reception!"

The emergency stop goes off with a click as he goes to investigate.

Exactly 23 seconds later the building resounds with the impact of a fully laden goods lift striking the bottom of Basement Two at high speed.

As the ambulance siren approaches, I start looking through travel brochures for good places in the States to do my "revision" and ring corporate insurance about all that top-of-the-line equipment that just got destroyed ...

The Bastard makes sure everyone else feels the heat ...

I'm sitting in my office listening to my personal stereo when a co-'worker' from a few offices along pops into my doorway.

"Mmm?" I say, looking up.

"Ah. Could you wind your stereo down a couple of decibels - I'm trying to get some work done and it's difficult to concentrate."

Without thinking, I reach for my soldering iron and flick it to 'paint-strip'. I pause mid-'scorched earth policy' and reconsider. He's new, he deserves a chance.

"Sorry", I say, seeing what it feels like, while turning the volume from 11 to 2.

He wanders off happily to the astonishment of the others in the department who have already rung personnel to advise them of the vacancy.

The Boss pops in to make sure that I'm really in the office and has a look around. As he exits I notice a hint of a smile on his face.

Five minutes later he's back asking me to help him install the back-up program on his laptop. For some reason, instead of copying the DELETE.EXE file to BACKUP.EXE I actually load the backup software ...

Something's wrong, I'm sure of it now. I call my fiend-like pimply-faced young assistant over and ask him how he is.

He tells me that today he's solved a couple of users' problems and helped repatch an accountant's machine after a move.

Now I'm worried. Something's definitely wrong! He used the 'a' word (rather than bean-counter).

The next day dawns and I start out with a couple of random telephone repatches, but my heart's not in it. By mid-afternoon I've patched them back and apologized for the inconvenience. The boss is still smiling.

I've been careful and not eaten anything, so it's something else. Something insidious. After a long battle with my conscience, I look into the recent purchases authorized by the boss, telling myself I'm doing it to check that all the orders total-up properly.

I find what I think I'm looking for in the form of 10 'ultra-positive' ionizers recently installed into the air conditioning system. I can't yet bring myself to do anything about it, so I stand in the printer room, air-conditioning off and laser printers full-on. Half an hour later I'm almost normal. I break for home to make my plans.

Next morning I rise early and slip into work unnoticed in half-scuba paraphernalia.

First stop, the air conditioning tower on the roof. I locate the offending units and reprogram them repeatedly with a claw hammer.

Next stop, the CEO's office with a similar ionizer of my own design. I hide it away then wander down to the telephone operator's room, divert her line directly to the CEO, then lock-out her console.

Down in the comms room I fashion a trip-wire out of the power cables to the main database applications and network servers. Back in my office, windows open, I await the start of work. Nothing happens till 9:45 when the CEO, after 15 minutes of phone calls and exposure to my positive ion generator, calls the boss. I watch and call him immediately the boss hangs up.

"THIS IS NOT THE OPERATOR!" he shouts.

"Yes sir, I know that", I say, all kindness and understanding. "I just noticed that your phone seems to be receiving all the calls for the telephone operator and her console appears to be locked. She's been acting a bit strangely the last couple of days - well, as a matter of fact we all have I suppose. Now I'll pop into the comms ..."

The boss, in panic mode, sweeps through my room and rams the comms door open, ripping the power cables from the servers.

I flip a quick cheesy grin at the boss as he looks in horror at what he's just done.

"Home Team ONE, Your Future Job Prospects, NIL", I call out with my finger on the mute button. "Oh dear", I utter into the unmuted phone. "The boss has just had a little accident ..."

The Bastard won't stand for poseurs in posh cars ...

I'm in the workshop when the boss comes in with a perplexed look on his face. Discarding the thought that he might have found a higher meaning to life than taking the world record for impersonating a paper-weight, I decide to see what's on his mind.

"Is there a problem?" I ask, appearing concerned with his welfare.

"Well ... no. No problem. Just having some trouble with my car as it happens".

"The royal blue monster in the basement? Not starting then?" I prompt.

"No, no, starts well, runs well. Too well in fact. That's the problem".

Knowing what's coming, I prompt yet again. "Too Well?"

"I got another speeding ticket this morning".

"Really? How many's that in total then?"

"Three. But the strange thing is, the car was on Cruise Control and well under the speed limit. Yet when I looked at the speedo later on, I was way over the limit".

"Really?"

"Yes. But the really strange thing is that the radar detector noticed nothing".

"Well, the police do switch bands from time to time to defeat the detectors", I say, trying to ease his curiosity.

"But I've only had it a week! If I didn't know better, I'd swear the car picks the worst time to accelerate. As if cruise control and the radar detector are working in cahoots!"

"Out of the mouths of babes ..." I mutter. "Pardon?"

"I said, the police must be hiding out of the way".

"Oh".

He wanders off contemplating life without a license while I pop down to the basement and swap my recently created radar peripheral into the pimply-faced-youth's car. He's been getting complacent recently, so it'll do him good to get a small reminder of what life on the edge means.

With that little trick nicely transferred to the next recipient, I head back to the lift. I am suddenly assailed by twin-tone air horns at close proximity. Behind me, a sporty red convertible and owner are impatiently awaiting my progress. The name on the car park plaque is transferred to long-term memory in an instant.

Back in the office, I realize I've been neglecting the education of the PFY and decide to rectify this forthwith. I recount to the PFY the events in the basement concerning the rather too impatient sales manager in the sporty convertible.

"Shall we disconnect his line?" The PFY asks, keenly interested.

"No, no", I reply. "This is a special case calling for a special measure. Grab that book over there".

"The one with the metal covers?"

"That's the one".

He grabs the book, lifts it and falls to the floor. Seconds later he regains consciousness.

"What happened?" he asks in a daze.

"The oldest trick in the book. 'Which book?' you ask ... the Bastard Operator Guide. The Tome of Hell".

"But what happened?"

"When you picked the book up, the microswitch in the basement activated the chunky inverter which supplies a healthy dose of voltage to the covers. You can't be too careful with the Book".

"Oh".

He's not happy, but good education has never been cheap.

"OK", I say. "Grab some rubber gloves and turn to page 43, bottom paragraph".

"This it? About Internet news?" he asks.

"The very one. Now, perhaps you can help me compose the message that our friend will be sending to a large number of sex-based newsgroups. What sort of perversion will he be interested about in hearing from people?"

Five minutes later we have a virtual masterpiece, guaranteed to appeal to a large number of the strangest people on the net.

"Shall I post it now?" the PFY asks.

"Not quite yet. You realize that this is going to generate an enormous amount of e-mail that will flood the server, causing the system administrator, a man with all the discretion of a loud hailer, to investigate?"

"You mean he'll tell?"

"We can't rely on that. Make the return address the head telephonist. It'll be round the building before someone has the guts to tell him!"

"You really are a complete bastard!"

"In the flesh, on the keyboard, and wading through people's personal lives!" I reply, with a measure of pride.

Later that day, I pop down to the basement to watch a figure emerge from the lift and slink to the little red convertible. From the look on his face, the propositions haven't only come from external sources ...

As he rockets off for a long memory-obscuring holiday, I head back to my office to finish the day's labor, pausing but momentarily to drop his sump plug into the rubbish bin ...

The Bastard experiences his very own Black Wednesday ...

It's a fateful Wednesday when I'm called into the boss's office for some important news. Present are a technical manager and the department's personnel manager.

A collection of three like-minded peers one might say - or five, if we were to count the paperweight and rubbish bin, which do more work and provide far more value for money to the company.

"We've, err ... decided not to renew your contract", the boss blurts out after a couple of seconds of tense silence.

The technical manager and personnel manager have suddenly found interesting things to look at on the roof and floor. Meantime the boss, by the looks of it, is making an attempt at the world mass-sweating award. He's expecting the worst, so I let him have it.

"Okay", I say quietly. "I leave four weeks from tomorrow, I believe".

"Ah, well, we've decided to pay you off for the last four weeks of your contract", the boss fawns.

"In fact, you can leave right now if you like. Actually", he blurts, "we'd prefer it".

"Sure", I say. "I'll just get my things and be off then".

"Ah, we've had security do that just now", the boss says, waiting for the eruption. "There's a box outside".

"Okay then, I'll see you around", I say, step outside and grab my belongings.

In the lift on the way down the pimply-faced-youth is astounded.

"What are you going to do?", he asks, shocked.

"Me? Take a holiday, read some books, no plans really".

"No, I mean about being let go".

"Oh that! Nothing really. I'm sure you'll cope without me".

A grin slips across his face as he contemplates the future.

"I'll see what I can do ..."

Three days later the phone rings. It's the boss.

"Ah, just ringing to see if you could take your contract back", he grovels.

"Why, surely my trainee's doing well?"

"Ah no, not really".

"Strange, I taught him everything I know", I reply, keeping the ball rolling.

"Yes, that's what we were afraid of".

"Pardon?"

"I don't know. He just keeps making mistakes. At least he says they're mistakes".

"What sort of mistakes?"

"All sorts! The other day he 'repaired' an 'unusual' temperature control setting on a probe in the boardroom and boiled the CEO's tropical fish in their tank; his 'Lift Maintenance' had myself and one of the managers riding between floors three and four over the lunch hour; the share-price monitor only picks up Dutch porn channels; the security doors keep locking people out of the toilets - except on one occasion when it locked a particularly nervous secretary in - and one of the board member's hearing aids feedback so badly when he went near the sixth floor comms room he was clinically deaf for four days afterwards!"

"Well networking is a touchy business and he is still learning I guess".

"Yes, yes, but can you come back and fix things? The network server passwords expire every day and the minimum password length increases with it. By the end of the week it'll be 15 letters, and you know what the big boss will say about typing his initials five times".

"Well, I don't know ...", I say, holding out for the inevitable.

"An extra £5,000 a year?"

"Ten?"

"Okay, ten!"

"And I never did like that personal liability clause".

"IT'S NEVER STOPPED YOU BEFORE!"

"True, but it gets to you after a while ..."

"All right, all right, it's a deal. When can you start?"

A day later the status quo is restored. The PFY gives me a quick run-down on what happened in my absence. Apparently the turning point was after an accident on the mezzanine escalator involving the boss's wife, his surprise birthday cake, the CEO's suit and a sudden change of escalator speed. An extraordinary coincidence ...

The phone rings and, as I'm in such a good mood, I pick it up.

"Is that the networks guy?" a voice asks.

"Yes ..."

"I've got a problem with this new machine and the network".

"A Pentium?" I guess randomly.

"Yeah".

"Uh-huh. The manufacturer faxed us about an electrostatic build-up problem".

"Errr?"

"To fix it, just slide the lid open ..."

"Okey dokey".

"Pull the network card out ..."

"Yup".

"... and put tin foil along the edge connector to ground static charges".

"Oh. Okay".

"Now plug the card in and switch her on".

"Okay. I'm switching it".

BANG!

"Agghhh...!"

It's funny how you always miss the good times ...

The Bastard and partner take revenge for stolen comms space ...

"There he goes ..." the Pimpily-Faced-Youth mutters as the department's latest programmer sneaks out of his room and goes off home. The poor guy's got a persecution complex which has absolutely nothing to do with his office being constructed from an area stolen from the comms room by the bosses.

Sadly, I didn't get to the plans before they left the drafting machine, but the PFY did manage to 'recalibrate' the builders levels and cable detectors. Funny how the walls seem to lean inwards and every time the air conditioner comes on the door handle heats up.

In the spirit of re-use, the boss had trolled all the offices for unused furniture prior to the programmer's arrival. From us he scored the drawers of death. Previously used to hold the bean-counter back-ups, the drawers of death look like an ordinary set of drawers, and even behave like an ordinary set of drawers. Until they're closed.

That triggers a five second hummm. Moments later, the programmer finds all his work for the day has been mysteriously wiped out; amazing how small you can make a bulk eraser ...

The remote control on his gas-operated chair was the PFY's idea. The chair plummets to the bottom of its movement at irregular intervals, and the poor guy has since developed a bit of a limp. Probably a lumbar problem.

The boss realizes something's happening - as he should, considering he masterminded the room seizure. I'm sure he thinks of that every time he changes the bandage on that nasty doorknob shaped burn on the palm of his hand ...

After a heart to heart session the programmer had with the boss, that the PFY and I accidentally overheard because of the microphone pickup inadvertently cabled onto the redundant UTP connection, the programmer asks us to stop by, obviously believing the scandalous mistruths passed to him by a soon-to-be ex-boss ...

"I hear you're responsible for all this", he says.

"For?" I ask innocently.

"These annoyances! And I want them stopped. I'm working on an important project and I will not tolerate interference".

I'm not a hard-line fan, and by the looks of it neither is the PFY.

"Do you know how much I get paid?" he continues.

"Not a clue", I lie, so that I don't have to pretend not to be annoyed that he's earning more than the PFY and I put together.

"But I'll tell you what - you share your good fortune with us and we'll see what we can do. A couple of hundred quid a week, each. Call it Comms Room Rental",

"NEVER!"

Meeting at a close, the PFY and I wander off. Two days later, following a minor first caused by some faulty wiring on his desk lamp (I blame cheap imports), we're invited back.

A generous donation to the Operators' Christmas fund later, we return to our office.

Sometime later, the programmer again asks me and the PFY to stop by his office. He has that smug look that can only mean some form of trouble is brewing.

"I'd, ah, like my money back please", he says, striving to appear nonchalant.

"Sorry", I counter, just as calmly. "It's been invested in operational expenses."

"Well, perhaps you can uninvest it. Unless of course you wish this to appear on the CEO's desk".

He clicks on an icon on his screen and a recording, obviously made by his laptop's vidcam attachment, pops up on the screen. A recording of our last encounter, sound and all.

He smiles.

I smile back. And nod to the PFY.

One standard issue, trip-on-the-floor-mat later, the programmer's machine lays in ruins on the floor, with a large heel mark decorating the hard drive.

"Whoopsy", the PFY gasps. "Must have low blood sugar or something".

"A good attempt", he sneers. "But not good enough. I have back-up tapes".

"I see. Aren't you a little concerned that I'll get to the tapes somehow?" I inquire, trying to sniff out their location.

He chuckles.

"Not in the slightest. Not when they're safely locked away".

>SLAM!<

A five-second hum and chuckle later the PFY and I are heading back to our office to resume normal life.

"Shall I crank up the voltage on the doorknob?" the PFY asks.

"All the way! Oh, and that desk lamp looks a little dim while you're at it ..."

With initiative like that, he's bound to go places ...

The Bastard verges on the edge of insanity but the PFY steps in ...

It's a quiet day in my office when the boss trundles in with a bundle of official looking papers, which can only mean one thing - he's trying to get rid of me again. A great personal tragedy is about to occur. To him.

"Simon, glad I caught you!"

Considering its 2:30pm on pay day and a mass of expensive hardware that would fit rather well into my briefcase has just gone missing, his surprise and gladness are faked.

He's trying to cover up an ulterior motive.

"I've just had a directive from the top about staff appraisals. The Big, Big Boss wants us all to go through personal interviews this year prior to any increases ..."

Dangling the 'increase' carrot has been used before, and usually precedes an attempt at a monumental shafting. However, a raise is a raise, so I just nod.

The boss takes strength from getting this far and continues.

"Yours, if it's OK, is tomorrow at 10am. Could you make that?" he says, all sugar and spice.

"Of course I could", I reply, smiling with Bambi-like innocence.

The boss thanks me and wanders off, barely suppressing a smug grin. Yep, it's a shafting all right ...

Next morning dawns and I'm in at 9am for a change, watching the entranceway.

Time ticks by and it gets to 9.48 when my suspicions are proved. A pale, emaciated figure, sporting a thoughtful beard, glasses and medical issue white-collar shirt with non-threatening tie, wanders in.

A plain-clothes psychologist if I am not very much mistaken.

I get the PFY over for a quick gander. He nods. Not a word is spoken as he logs into the various control systems, shaking his head.

At the interview, it's the usual psych-type thing, Ink Blots, stories about childhood, recent dreams, and so on.

I decide to go for the high score, and find lots of witches and murderesses in the ink blots, 'remember' some disturbing incidents from my childhood, and tell him that all my recent dreams involve axes and guns and things.

An hour later, he's appearing calm and smiling a lot, but his eyes never leave me for a second.

I smile back.

"Coffee?" I ask.

Afraid to refuse, he nods.

Barely a minute later the PFY brings some coffee in and raises an eyebrow to see how it's going. I keep smiling to maintain my power base.

A couple of security guys pop in mid-coffee and I realize it's the full 101 per cent shafting and they're not only trying to lose me, they're trying to have me committed at the same time - probably to secure the PFY's loyalty in my absence...

It looks like speech time, by the expression on psych-guy's face.

"Simon, I find you to be what we clinically refer to as a sociopath. You have some deep-set adjustment problems that I, as a government appointed health counselor ..."

Government? The Bastards!

"... am duty-bound to relate to the proper authority, as I feel you may pose a danger to yourself and to others".

He's quick isn't he?

He's also starting to look a bit uncomfortable, which is not surprising considering the strength of the laxative that the PFY put in his drink, but there you go.

Losing his great mental struggle to stay and see this out, he breaks for the toilets, only, if I'm not mistaken, to find them locked.

Strange that, the only key that locks them is the building master, and that's kept in the security's hi-tech safe (three turns to 37, two turns to 12, one turn to 45) which no-one has the combination to.

While he's hitting the stairwell at a run, the boss comes in and grabs my psychiatric evaluation with an evil grin. He wanders back with me to the office to gloat, but I'm too busy watching the closed-circuit TV screen over his shoulder to pay much attention. Psych-guy makes for the quickest source of toileting in a building like ours - the floor below.

It too is strangely locked

The door on the floor below that, which doesn't have a lock, is blocked by eight large boxes containing 28-inch boardroom-style video monitors which weigh about a ton each and require a trolley to move ...

He knows he's not going to make it back up the stairs in time, but then he notices a shining beacon presenting itself to him in the form of a rubbish bin at the cafeteria freight entrance.

His relief is immense, but not shared by the cafeteria stores person who emerges at a bad time, nor by the boss when my moral obligation prompts me to point out the CCTV screen to him.

"Ahem. So good to have a profile of your employees done by a fellow of such discretion and taste", I chirp, as I nudge my profile from his hands into the bin that it can now call home.

The Bastard sings tunes to melt his boss's ears ...

The boss has become a liability. Sad, but true. Still, it's all part of the Pimply-Faced-Youth's training, so it has to be done.

He knows something is up, and is trying to ingratiate himself with me by asking for technical advice all the time and thanking me profusely for it. In other words, sucking up.

On the ingratiation scales, it's right up there with hitting an alligator's snout with a stick to make it friendlier. If I'd wanted work, I'd have left the phone on the hook in the first place.

The final snout-rap came when he brought his home stereo in for some installation advice. I don't know why, but he seems to believe that simply because I do some work at the nuts and bolts end of the computing spectrum, I'm bound to know about everything from the rating of the third fuse to how to program a Beta video to get Coronation Street in the least amount of tape.

I give it a quick once-over to see what's wrong with it, noticing almost immediately that the tape IN and OUT leads were the wrong way round.

"So what's the problem?" I ask.

"It's the tape," he whines. "It stopped working after we moved the stereo into the drawing room. If you turn the volume all the way up, you can just hear the sound of the tape".

"Hmm", I murmur thoughtfully. "We'll probably need the speakers to get the complete picture".

"I'll get them at lunchtime", he enthuses.

Three hours later we have the little beauties on the desk. I jam the overload cutouts closed while the PFY puts the bags of isopropyl alcohol and ignition circuits into them. Half an hour later we have a masterpiece and sneak off into hiding, priming the halon system before we go.

Fifteen minutes after that we're playing poker in the storeroom when we hear the first strains of a Neil Diamond number thumping. I look to the PFY.

"The loudness switch should do it", he murmurs, taking his electrical apprenticeship quite seriously.

Scant seconds later there is a >Crump!< from the control room as Neil fires up not only a guitar solo, but also a very expensive pair of speakers.

The PFY and I can hear the beeping of the Halon warning, which means that the boss has to make a decision - save the speakers and be suffocated, or watch them burn and live.

The silencing on the warning tells us that the boss has subscribed to the motto "Choose Life".

We give him a couple of minutes of respectful silence then grab some equipment and wander back, pausing only to knock over a huge box of thinwire terminator.

"Whoopsy," the PFY mutters. "We'd better pick those up ... later".

By the time we locate him, the boss is sobbing into an oxygen mask in the sick bay as he recounts the horror of it all.

"It just caught fire", he bleats, "and then those job sheets caught light, then those folders, then the wooden door wedges stacked on top of them like kindling, then ..."

A thought crosses his mind, watches for traffic, and seeing none, crosses back. He stares at us both.

"You bastard!" he utters in a state of shock.

The PFY and I exchange shocked glances.

"We were in the store!" I cry, lamb-like innocence.

Tossing the mask aside, he makes a break to verify this.

And that's not the only break of the day. An arm and a clavicle follow in short order as he rockets across the floor on terminator rollers into the poorly loaded paper shelves, which promptly fall on him.

Nasty. We tell the officer that when he comes to investigate. (The boss's new corporate policy requires all incidents to be reported to the police.) Fitting that he should be a test (and basket) case. The officer sadly takes down the details, then goes to get a statement from the boss. Two hours later he discards the pages of notes in favor of a "Workplace Accident" verdict and leaves with an expensive speaker less stereo that we had no need for. On the way out he pauses.

"You're a computing guy?" the Cop asks me.

"Yep", I reply, nodding.

"You know anything about Beta videos? My wife likes ..."

Hanging's too good for 'em ...

The Bastard counts on the fact that managers never remember ...

It's quarterly budget time again and I'm trying to convince the managers that we should upgrade the thin wire Ethernet in one of our remote offices. An hour into the meeting the conversation goes something like ...

Manager 1: "So basically you're saying that 10 million of these 'bit' things EVERY SECOND isn't fast enough?"

Me: "No, not really."

Manager 2: "He's right you know, I've been to that office, the network speed is abysmal!"

Manager 1: "It just doesn't seem possible! Hell, I can't even manage TEN bits of stuff a second."

Me: "That doesn't surprise me."

Manager: "Pardon?"

Me: "I said the numbers really surprise me. Too, I mean..."

Manager 1: "Oh."

Me: "You see, when my predecessor put that net in, he did it on the cheap. All the devices were connected to the same piece of net. It's like everyone using the same road to get to work."

Manager 1: "But we paid a PREMIUM for that network!"

Me: "Four years ago. Cabling was more expensive then. And...."

Manager 1: "And?"

Me: "And the original spec was for individual segments."

Manager 1: "So?"

Me: "Well basically, everyone was supposed to have their own network 'road'."

Manager 2: "What happened?"

Me: "Well, it was probably a combination of financial and distribution considerations."

Manager 2: "Meaning?"

Me: "He daisy-chained one segment through all of the offices, sold the remaining cable off, and charged you through the nose for labor."

Manager 1: "Really?"

Me: "Yes, it happens with the less reputable network engineers."

Manager 1: "I find this all extremely hard to believe. There must be some mistake. He assured me that it had been done."

Me: "Ah, he probably assured you that YOU had been done."

Manager 1: "No! I'm sure he wouldn't have taken advantage!"

Me: "I see. Tell me, what money was he earning back then?"

Manager 1: "Seven fifty an hour."

Me: "And the car he drove?"

Manager 1: "Mercedes convertible."

Me: "And how did he dress?"

Manager 1: "Nicely - Italian suits."

Me: "Are things becoming a little clearer?"

Manager 1: "You mean to say..."

Me: "I do."

Manager 1: "He..."

Me: "He did."

Manager 2: "How bad IS this?"

Me: "At the time it wasn't bad, but with all client server upgrades, staff are wasting valuable time waiting for networks."

Manager 3: "What should we do then?"

Me: "Well, as you see in front of you, I'm recommending UTP to the desktop, Cat 5 so that we can upgrade to ATM when it becomes a more widespread and viable technology. This will save you the expense of having to recable in a couple of years."

I pause in my delivery to let their minds recover from acronym overload.

Manager 1: "How much will it cost?"

Me: "Well, it won't be cheap. However if you look at the cost over five years, it's fairly small, if, of course, you accept that the cabling will be done out of hours by me and my pimply faced youthful assistant at the standard double-time overtime rate. We could get a contractor in, but as you can see on the paper in front of you, it would be about three times as expensive and only slightly quicker that way. And, given that we will have laid the cable and are likely to know more about it if problems occur in the future..."

Manager 2: "We get your point. Well, it seems that you've covered all aspects of the problem, I for one agree. Everyone else concur?"

Two weeks later, the PFY wanders out to the site and starts the job.

"So we change the existing UTP patch cables to a new color, drop some Cat 5 off-cuts on the floor and kick a hole in the plasterboard every few offices or so?" he asks.

"Yup! For a week or two."

"Won't someone find out?"

"Well, they WOULD if there was any documentation saying that there was Cat-5 to the desktop here already, but unfortunately that information accidentally fell in the shredder this morning," I reply.

"So we really ARE just changing the patch cables to a new color?"

"Yup!"

"How's that going to improve performance?"

"It's not. But switching off the traffic generator in the 2nd floor comms cupboard which has been increasing its traffic by one per cent a week since the beginning of the year will."

"So we're just screwing them for lots of labor."

"And those drums of premium Cat-5 which have excellent re-sale value."

"You bastard!"

"Hey! I was this close to charging them for new network cards too, but I relented."

"So that stuff about your predecessor was all lies?"

"No. He did all that, just to some of the other offices..."

The Bastard senses something fishy and casts his net ...

Something's a little fishy in the department. I recognize the signs when I reach my floor - the air of restrained anticipation.

First stop, my internal mail slot - bombshells usually get placed there by the boss prior to him scuttling to the relative safety of his office. Naivety knows no bounds.

Sure enough, there's a bombshell measuring on the red-tape Richter scale.

In an effort to standardize a coherent future direction, the bosses have decided to appoint a 'Director of Future Planning'. Couldn't be fishier if it came with tartar sauce.

Sure enough Jeremy, the appointee, has all the initiative and forward thinking of wheel-clamps, and was recently responsible for purchasing 10 multi-mode analogue recording devices for a bargain price of 6,000 quid. The most expensive box of pencils in the history of the company ...

Unless I'm very much mistaken this is yet another salvo in the 'bean counters versus techies' war. I read further and discover that all purchases have to be approved by the DFP to ensure that they conform to the direction the company has chosen for its future ...

I get two weeks' respite before the you-know-what hits the fan with a knock at my door. Jeremy enters.

"Ah, Simon, just a couple of points," he says. "This wireless LAN stuff. You realize that we're not equipped to deal with this just yet?"

"In what way?" I ask. "Not having several open-plan work areas that are hell to cable - you know, like the WP pool, the PR offices - or not having a single free AUI connector unless we unplug the unused terminal servers?"

"Oh. Ah. Well, no, not that exactly, it's just that according to my calculations ..."

He bashes a couple of figures into his personal organizer, an item that appears to have been distributed far and wide amongst the upper echelons, a move no-doubt designed to cover up for the stupidity of a prior purchase.

"... we would be spending almost 300 quid per multi-peater more than we need to if we buy from our current supplier."

"Ah. Our current supplier of ... analogue recording devices?" I ask.

He pretends to ignore me. "No, our current supplier of personal organizers. And we have the added bonus of being able to transmit and receive information from the organizers through them which is not available on any other equipment."

He toddles off leaving me feeling that the outcome was: "Future Planning, 1, Simon, nil", so quick as I can, I bash out a memo about the potential security implications of uploads and downloads taking place from these devices. There's a rumor of a takeover flying about and the last thing we want is sensitive data being intercepted.

My warnings fall on deaf ears, the marketing has already been done in secret and accepted as gospel. Not good.

The kit duly arrives and I reluctantly install it. However, the manual is most instructive on the upload and download features, and to remain an interested party, I read it ...

A week later I'm listening to a boardroom conversation, as is my wont. It really was an amazing coincidence that a couple of highly sensitive microphones ended up being placed near the panel when the room was recabled recently.

"Well, quite frankly, I'm tired of it all," a manager whines.

"Why?" Jeremy asks, a little stress registering on my accompanying voice analysis software.

"The bloody thing keeps turning itself on in the middle of the night and ringing an alert for my wife's birthday, which was three weeks ago. I can't put it in the lounge because it switches my TV on now it's learnt the controls like you suggested. And, if that's not bad enough, it keeps switching the bloody thing off just before Inspector Morse finds out who the killer is!"

"Mine does that too," another boss adds.

"Mine added one to the street numbers of all my addresses," yet another voice announces.

"You think that's bad," another snuffles, "mine rang an alarm and displayed 'Dinner with Trudi' with three stars by her name one night when my wife was using it. I don't even know a Trudi!! But I've got plenty of time to find one now!"

"These are obviously teething problems," my ex-nemesis oozes.

"I'm sure it's just some redundant information"

I tap away at my keyboard and a chime is heard from the boardroom.

"Good Lord!" a voice exclaims. "Mines just told me to ring the doctor about the HIV results!!"

"I think we've heard enough," the CEO interrupts.

"Until further notice, we're withdrawing these devices from use. Thank you gentlemen. Jeremy - a word."

I listen on while Jeremy is promoted to another position of responsibility - head window cleaner. Only, we have contractors to do that ...

A pity really. Still, it doesn't pay to dwell.

The Bastard sets about averting a company takeover bid ...

I'm barely into work when the boss and CEO crash the door, looking worried.

"We're in trouble," the boss says.

"We're being taken over," the CEO interrupts, slipping past the boss.

"Why tell me?" I enquire, innocence oozing.

"Because you have a way of 'fixing' things ..." the boss hints.

"Routers?" I respond, all innocence.

"No. You know what I mean!"

"Networks!" I cry, happily.

The CEO starts getting agitated so I put him out of our collective misery.

"OK, who is it?"

He spits out the name of our hated rival. Later, behind closed doors, the PFY and I form a plan, then invite the boss et al back again.

"Step One: Fire the PFY!"

"How? Why?" the boss blurts.

"Embezzling something."

"If that were grounds for dismissal, you would've been ..."

A stony gaze at the boss silences him and I continue.

"Step Two: I have lunch with one of their network guys and on the way out I drop (in front of their security cameras), and then quickly hide in a suspicious manner, a data tape with their company logo on the front.

Step Three: The PFY, invaluable in the future plans of our takeover because of his intimate knowledge of the way we work, steps into a recently vacated network guy position."

"Sounds good," the boss chirps.

Three days later we're set. I'm making our company look an unattractive investment by falsifying memos about future criminal liability from defects in the furniture production line, then leaking them to the press.

Of course, no pressman worth his salt substitute would believe the memos without proof (being men of integrity), so I sacrifice a couple of bean-counter limbs for the purpose of, "Stress Testing Production Line Furniture," ("the cause") and make sure the papers are on hand to see the ambulance being loaded.

Meantime the PFY is stepping through the entire first three chapters of the Bastard Manual, wrecking havoc all round. The oxy-acetylene in the halon canister was a nice touch, and took out half a warehouse before they realized what had happened and switched the automatic extinguishers off. A simple typo on a refill form can make such a difference ...

His technical advice appears to be second to none judging by the continual arrival of replacement equipment and deskside fire extinguishers.

Meantime their Fire Alarms have been used more in last three days than in the previous two years and the route to and from the Fire Station has a 24-hour parking ban.

I tried calling him but due to a wiring maintenance mix-up people are too scared to answer the phones. Must be the stigma attached to electrical burns. Page 73 if memory serves me correct.

I'm continuing as normal, repatching a repeater when the boss comes to see me.

"It's about these accidents," he says.

"What accidents?" I ask

"You know what accidents. They have to stop. Why is the equipment being sent to the accounts department for testing anyway? We've got a perfectly capable testing team."

"Yeah, but they're all good sorts," I reply.

"What?! Well, I don't care, it has to stop! There are only three accountants left!"

"No ..." looking at my watch, "... there's ..."

A thud and a muffled scream from the floor above punctuate my sentence.

"... Two. I'm guessing the wardrobe and drawer unit he was looking at did not pass the 'heavy weight placed in an elevated position' test. Speaking of heavy weights, you haven't seen the large box of full-height hard drives normally in my office have you?"

He trundles off without a word to rest in his office ...

I get to my office and the phone is ringing. One of our equipment suppliers wants a site visit with a prospective customer. What the hell, it'll kill time till the real action starts...

The phone rings and as I'm in time-kill mode, I answer it.

"My phone's broken!"

"Then how are you calling me?" I ask.

"I'm using another phone, stupid."

Stupid?!?!

"I see," I whisper, "and what was your number?"

He tells me. I look it up.

"Ah, Mr. 0898"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Are you sure? I have several VERY PROGRESSIVE tapes here for you to listen to if you'd like."

"Err ... that won't be necessary."

"Are you sure?" "Yes, forget I called."

"Well I'd like to forget you called, but the only thing that makes me forget is a couple of bottles of single malt scotch. The good stuff, not that cheap crap they serve up at the bar ..."

"I'll drop them off shortly."

Ten minutes later the transaction is completed and I end the day by playing one of the tapes into his home answerphone. It was for the best, those calls were just a cry for help ...

The Bastard meets an unexpected guest - the opposition's BOFH ...

It's a calm morning network-wise when I arrive at the office to prepare for a site visit and to continue defending my company's recent bad name and business from the potential takeover.

I realize once more why I discourage site visits normally. Their only purpose is to pretend to a customer that the stuff really does work like it says in the brochure by finding a site that's worked out where the manual went wrong and fixed it.

If it wasn't for the free lunch and the chance to blackmail a good price for our next order, they'd never make the front door.

The visit should follow typical form: supplier lies to customer; I extort goods to support this flagrant misinformation; a walk-around tour; a free lunch, and promises from me to help out if they have any future difficulties.

In other words, a day that would turn Pinocchio into a kindling machine.

As 10am rolls around, I get a call from the front desk about my visitors.

A quick look at the CCTV shows me everything is as expected; our supplier with his customer. Except for one small thing; the visitor is none other than the head network guy of our rival company. Something smells a little rotten, and it's not the Danish cheese in the staff cafeteria.

I slip downstairs with the boss wondering exactly what the purpose of this visit is. Some show of strength probably, but what form this will take is unknown. Obviously a lapse in reporting on the part of the Pimply-Faced-Youth which I'll rectify with a cattle-prod at our next meeting.

The technical competence of my rival is identified when I notice his rubber-soled isolator shoes. The electric doorknob was a waste of time ...

... but then again, perhaps not, as the supplier gives himself a belt he won't remember in a hurry, along with his name and who he works for.

The opposition immediately identifies himself as a network professional by perusing the bosses swipe card PIN number, 'accidentally' shutting the bosses hand in a door - twice - then snaffling the access card while the boss is busy blubbing. Smooth - 11 seconds in total.

He flexes some more muscle by popping a couple of earth leakage detectors as he passes by some equipment. The old high-powered-transmitter-inducing-current-in-the-leakage-wire trick.

His attempts at conquering the comms room in the same manner fail dismally, though. I operate under the assumption that anyone who should be playing with electricity knows the dangers and wouldn't need safeguards anyway...

It's the price you pay for being good. And who'd lose a whole network just to save the mind of someone who's playing with something they shouldn't?

Getting to the point, my counterpart speaks in crypted 'NetSpeak'.

"What's that unit like?" he asks, gesturing at the supplier.

"A little 2400. No actually, this one's probably 300 synchronous. On a good day."

"Yeah, it was transmitting nulls earlier".

"Nothing a repeated Control-Alt-Delete wouldn't solve."

The boss returns in bandages for the free lunch. And over lunch, my counterpart and I talk turkey.

"I favor the previous configuration," my rival states.

"Yeah, a bit too much SNMP at the moment, but that's always been the case."

"Yeah, me too. So ... a reinstall of the original specs..."

Two weeks later the takeover threat is but a memory. I have a brand new Bean Counter department in the sights and am raring to go. Some of the upper middle management who favored a protracted takeover as grounds for a pay rise took early retirement - the 40s are such a difficult time of life, especially when you find a photo of yourself in women's underwear (in the confines of a very progressive Soho club) in the top drawer of your desk.

I get a call from my counterpart on the secure line.

"All clear?" he asks.

"Yep. You?"

"Not a worry. Had to let your PFY go, you know how it is. A real pity."

"Not to worry, he's back at his desk, playing with the temperature of the fridge which is storing tomorrow's chicken lunches. I'll probably eat out..."

The world is full of networking victories - this has been one of them.

A brief Bastard Net Speak glossary ...

* 2400 - 2400 baud.

* Slow300 synchronous - so slow he needs a tow-rope.

- * Previous Configuration - the way things were.
- * SNMP - stupidity of non-technical manager's proposals.
- * Transmitting Nulls - talking bollocks.
- * Repeated Control-Alt-Delete - lots of boots - a good kicking.

The Bastard involves himself with the CEO's pet project ...

The PFY and I are having a quick chuckle when the Boss is passing, so he stops in - probably to see who he should send the condolence card to.

"Is there something funny?"

"No, no, not really. It's this memo. For a minute there I thought it was a real one where you were asking for the root passwords of our machines."

"I did" he says straight-faced.

"Stop, you're killing me", I chuckle. "Why would YOU want the root password?"

"Why is irrelevant. Just do it", he snaps.

"You realize it's insecure?"

"I'll lock it in my personal document safe".

"You mean three turns clockwise to 37 ...", I say.

"... two turns back to 18 ...", the PFY chips in.

"... then back to 43", the cleaner finishes.

"Then scream in frustration and get your secretary to open it for you".

The boss does his impersonation of a stunned mullet then continues.

"Alright, I'll put a new safe in - and I WILL have those passwords", he says as he storms off.

That night we do some sneaky miniature CCTV installation in his office ...

The next day the floors groan as a huge grey monster is delivered to his offices. The boss himself supervises its placement.

"We can't see a thing", the PFY moans as the hidden camera gives us a view of the top of the boss's head.

"Not from that camera", I reply, "but from this one ..." >click< "... a full frontal!"

Sure enough, the boss's lamp-cam reveals all.

"So why did we put the camera in?", the PFY asks, perplexed.

"A decoy. The boss was bound to check the room after last time, so I wanted him to find that particular camera".

"Why?"

"Well, if you look carefully at his room, there's only one plausible place he could put the safe out of the camera's eye whilst maintaining the illusion that he knows nothing".

"Sneaky ..."

"Doubly sneaky", I add with a hint of mystery.

Pretending to fold, we give the boss the passwords, then the next day when he's checked they're legit, change them to something else. Raising the stakes, we deal ourselves into the CEO's pet video-conferencing project downstairs so the boss can't "call us urgently away" when he finds out ...

"How are things going?", the CEO asks benevolently.

"Great sir", the PFY gushes.

"We should be ready to go tomorrow", I add as I cable up the cameras to the video multiplexing unit - the device that cost a quarter of MY budget for the year - that the boss recommended after the salesman took him on a two day bender ending up in his arrest at a pub in Brighton for showing some women his rendition of Trafalgar Square's tallest monument ...

Bad thoughts aside, I run some diagnostic images through the machine and show the CEO how the pictures will look to our overseas offices.

"The images will be displayed across the screen like this," I say, "one for each person present. Sitting on a chair activates the camera".

"And this will all work straight off?" the CEO asks, barely suppressing his excitement at being on corporate TV.

"There might be a few teething problems, but I'm sure that my trainee and I will be able to go to there and sort them out. Most should go smoothly except perhaps for the Rome and Florida offices, which may have solar interference during the summer".

The CEO might smell a junket, but he's not going to risk delaying his baby. "Of course, I'll see to it that your Divisional Head is aware".

An hour later we're in the boss's office as he seethes with impotent fury.

"Oh! Did we forget to tell you about the password change? And the Video Conferencing? Take a note of that for the future", I mention to the PFY.

The boss seethes some more.

Three hours later we're knocking back a few lagers as we draw straws for vacations. I mean assignments.

Two hours after that, we're in the off-license purchasing two cases of gin which we slip into the grey monster later under the cover of darkness.

"What did we do that for?", the PFY asks.

I say nothing but jump in the air, landing heavily on the floor. A creak from the floorboards enlightens the PFY, and he joins me. Seconds later a sound not unlike a heavy safe falling through a floor greets our ears.

The next morning as we watch the boss pack up his things the PFY muses about the fickleness of life. "You know, he might've got away with it if the safe hadn't landed on the video multiplexer ..."

"Yeah," I reply, "what a terrible coincidence. It was probably the password book that broke the camel's back ..."

The Bastard finds there are 'mistakes in training' and 'training in mistakes' ...

I'm doing some important network response testing with the PFY when the phone rings. It's the PFY's line and it's never rung before, so he celebrates by unplugging it from the wall. While his attention is otherwise engaged, I shoot him a couple of times in the back.

Networked DOOM II is an excellent breeding ground for the Machiavelli in us all.

"That was the boss," I mention, easing the tension in the room somewhat.

"Contract Renegotiation Time," he says and trundles off to the boss's office. Five minutes later he's back with a not-too-happy expression on his face.

"Problems?"

"He doesn't believe that I've the experience to warrant an increase in my hourly rate." This, I don't like - if it can happen to him it can happen to me, and I have an irrational fear of anything that looks like the thin end of a wedge.

I'm on the phone to personnel in a flash. "What do we have to do to prove that my assistant deserves a raise?"

"Typically there's a meeting with the head of personnel, an independent expert and the candidate himself. The idea is that the candidate's networking knowledge is put to some form of test."

I arrange the test for the next day and instruct the PFY to do his homework...

The next day dawns and at 10am everyone shows up for the main event. Except for the independent expert, that is. However, he's unlikely to be heard of for another couple of hours... providing the lift maintenance contractor is as slow as usual.

I offer my services as an independent expert.

"OK, a couple of questions," I say. "Shoot," the PFY responds.

"What criteria do you use when determining whether to remove a user's files?"

"How much sleep I had the night before?"

"Fair enough. When pushing a user's machine off a desk, what should you ensure?"

"That their keyboard is below."

"Half marks. Keyboard and a valued personal possession."

"Of course."

"When should overtime be scheduled?"

"When circumstances make an operation hazardous during normal hours."

"More information?"

"When I'm in a bad mood because I've run out of money that month."

"Correct. A colleague asks for your advice purchasing a machine for their private business. What do you recommend, Macintosh or PC?"

"Neither. I'd recommend the Commodore 64 with twin tape drives that I use as a doorstep - priced at 600 quid."

"And when it failed?"

"It wouldn't."

"More information?"

"It's rigged up to catch fire when it's plugged in. I'd claim he plugged it in wrong."

"Excellent. Phones are running hot with complaints that sessions on the 4th floor NT server are being lost randomly. What is the problem most likely to be?"

"The problem, as I see it, is that the phone is on the hook."

"Correct."

Half an hour later ...

"Well I'm convinced - he has learnt a great deal."

"And I am unconvinced!" the head of personnel cries. "This trainee was brought in to address the problems of poor service and lack of accountability that were prevalent in your reign of terror. Instead of doing that you've twisted him into a nastier version of yourself!"

"Yes, good isn't he?" I comment.

"NO! And if you think, even for a moment, that I'm going to OK this .. this TRAVESTY of skills evaluation, you are sorely mistaken. He STAYS on our trainee contracting pay-scale."

It's true, there is a tool for every job. Yet it still amazes me how many 'jobs' benefit from a little tweak with the 'blackmail' tool.

"Fair enough," I say. "You're probably right. After all, he is a beginner at this sort of thing and as a trainee I suppose you could pay him less as a result of the mistakes he's bound to make. You know the sort of mistakes I mean - like e-mailing personnel's international phone logs to the

CEO instead of the head of personnel. How is your daughter Sir - still working in the Cayman Islands?"

"Ah. Well, on second thoughts I can see how his skill set might be more.."

"Mistakes like accidentally misconfiguring the network back-up server to restore pictures from the directory named SMUT on a personnel machine to.. say... the directory containing the slides the CEO will be using for his next talk to the board of directors."

In the international unit of operator success, Backpedals Per Second, the head of personnel is dangerously near redlining. Half an hour and a sizeable trainee-raise later, the PFY and I are sitting back in the office.

"What should I do with these phone logs?"

"Send 'em on."

"Head of personnel?"

"HELL NO! The CEO's office - you're a trainee - mistakes happen."

Needless to say, I believe my renegotiation will slip through without a hitch.

The South of France beckons for the BOFH under the guise of 'Network Professional of the Year' ...

It's a quiet day in the office. Perhaps it's got something to do with me relocating the helpdesk to the recently-vacated Boss's office and accidentally putting an axe fifty-three times through the phone cables down that corridor. Forget using pink noise tapes for relaxation, there's nothing quite like the distant sound of phones being slammed frustratedly into cradles to help a BOFH chill out. Our telecoms system is in a shocking state; must be down to all the users taking out their anger on the handsets.

I make sure the door's closed and electrified appropriately (in case any of the braver users get the rash urge to come round in person), and settle down with my reading material.

Normally, this is the time to catch up on those Dutch magazines that were inadvertently delivered to the back door a couple of months ago - and which seem to have been delivered equally inadvertently ever since. You wouldn't believe that the same mistake could be made again and again, would you? Someone, though, seems to have found my private stash, since it appears to have grown legs. I suspect it's my PFY, as he's been walking around recently with a knowing smile on his face. He'll soon learn the perils of being nosey when I've figured out just what to do with the electric stapler, though. Anyway, in the meantime, I'm stuck with reading networking magazines.

Pausing only to fill in a 'please send a barmy UPS salesman to see me' form in the name of the guy from accounts who cut me up in the car park this morning, I start to wade through the surprisingly tall stack of unopened networking mags. One item catches my eye, though: the Networking Professional of the Year award. I laugh inwardly - it'll probably be won by some sad anorak who spends his weekends up to his ears in UTP, spends his evenings retrieving lost files from users' PCs, and who earns crap wages and no gratitude. I read on, however : "... presented at a special ceremony at L'Hotel Ambassadeur in the south of France"

Ah, now, let's not be too hasty. There is, naturally, a lot to be said for the unsung heroes of the networking world. At least that's the line I'll use when I try to persuade the CEO to let me enter the competition.

Up in the CEO's office, the man himself stares at me glassy-eyed for about a minute. The words finally emerge in a croak. "YOU want to put in for the Network Professional of the Year?"

"That's right. Just think of the credit I'd bring to the company"

"I'm thinking of the bad publicity you'd bring to the company"

"That's not very nice!" I adopt my most aggrieved expression, combined with my most innocent tone of voice. "And after all I've done for this company, too"

"Don't you mean '_TO_' this company'?" The CEO looks at me and starts reading from the entry form. "Helpful to his/her superiors? You've gone through five bosses in the last year!"

"So I've had to cope with five different working methods - it's a much more demanding part to play. I think it demonstrates great flexibility."

"But you're responsible for all of them leaving!!"

"Coincidence... they all seem to remember another job offer somewhere else. Perhaps you ought to look at your working conditions and salaries", I suggest slyly.

"Perhaps I ought to consider whether I need as many support staff as I do"

Ouch. That was a little below the belt. Oh well ...

"Perhaps the Inland Revenue might find out about the secret account that was mysteriously set up on a computer outside the main system."

The CEO reddens and suddenly seems to find his blotter fascinating. He recovers slightly and reads on from my form.

"And what about this," the CEO is almost shouting now. "A good team player"?

"Yes. Naturally I'd expect my pimply faced assistant to be included in the entry. As a good team player, I'd expect members of the team to be included."

"But he's a psychopath!"

"So? Are you going to hold that against him? It's not very supportive of you. I personally think the climate in the south of France will do wonders for his temperament and the experience of going to such an event will do wonders for his social skills."

"There'll be a diplomatic incident!"

The CEO carries on reading. "Nominations for the awards must be accompanied by three signed endorsements by the nominee's colleagues." He paused; "There's no-one here who would agree to sign such a statement. They all hate you."

"So I can enter the award if I can get the form signed?"

"If you can find three of our employees who will sign it, you can enter. But I'm only saying that because I know nobody here will sign it". He exits, laughing silently to himself.

A miracle, eh? Nothing's impossible in the world of networking, as I never tire of telling users whose hard disks have been miraculously wiped clean. After all, who said getting someone's signature on a form actually needed them to write it ...

To be continued ...

It's the sweet smell of success for the Bastard Operator as he wins the day in France ...

It's a glorious day in the south of France, especially since my room at L'Hotel Ambassadeur managed to somehow get double-booked and they upgraded to me to a suite with more rooms than I've had bosses. Getting the signatures on my entry form for Network Professional of the Year was no problem - I knew that digi-sig facility on the network fax server would be handy for something - and so here I am to pick up my award. Okay, there are half-a-dozen other finalists, but I have this suspicion that there are numerous skeletons due for synchronized cupboard exodus very shortly.

Down at the awards dinner, with the sound of an alleged 'entertainer' rambling on in the background, I get talking to a rather nice PR bimchette, who is fascinated by the modern networking methods we use.

"So you've tuned the ATM backbone to 827Mbps?"

"Only on the test network of course, we couldn't use something that fas ... err ... early in development for the real users"

"Naturally. So how do you measure the throughput?"

"Doom II between half-a-dozen SGI Challenge boxes, of course. Comes out around 45,000pps"

"45,000 packets per second doesn't sound very quick". Hang about, a PR woman who knows how fast a network should go ... scary thought.

"No, it's points per second. You don't get packets for killing things in Doom, you know.

"Oh, I see. You must have a major budget each year, too, if you've got six Challenges on your test network alone".

"Ah, well, you see, they're eventually going to the CEO's pet videoconferencing project; we bought them with the insurance money after the Pentium 75's from the first project met an accident"

"That's some difference in cost"

"Well, yes, but we have a friendly insurance company". And a rather nice home video of their board at a conference in Amsterdam ...

"Nice one. So let me guess, you've had to clock-chip the Challenges and tweak their ATM cards, thus making them 'experimental' and giving them to you for a month or two for 'testing'".

This girl is on the ball ... I'm almost impressed.

"Well, yes, but it's a complex job so testing will take a bit more than a couple of months ... 2004 would be a good year, I reckon".

"You're a bastard, aren't you?"

Catches on quick, this one. As we're chatting, some TV personality (a contradiction in terms if ever there was one) is introduced and given a shiny gold envelope to open. This he manages without needing to read the instructions, though only just.

"And the Network Professional of the Year is ..."

Later in the "winners' enclosure" I again find myself chatting to my PR friend; it's terrible, this animal attraction I seem to have. She appears surprised at my victory.

"So how did you manage to pull that off? I must admit, I wasn't exactly expecting you to get it, given your apparently unconventional outlook on network management. Did you hack the entries computer or something?"

Hack? She must be an oldie - nobody with any self-respect would ever call themselves a hacker these days, unless they owned a seriously bad anorak. I call for more drinks (the expensive stuff, naturally - I already have the root password to the hotel's systems, not to mention the room number of the old goat from the telly who bored us so much over dinner), take a deep breath, and explain.

"No, I didn't _hack_ ..." (it takes all my effort to say the word) "... anything". Anyways, the shortlists and stuff were all done in hardware and weren't possible to access over the hotel LAN.

"In hardware?"

"With a biro and a piece of paper. These judge types have trouble with technology"

"Ah, _that_ hardware"

"Yup. Anyway, I didn't have to hack anything; all but one of my competitors pulled out at the last moment. Well, actually some of them didn't, if the polaroids they received in yesterday's mail are anything to go by".

"What, they were _ALL_ having a bit on the side?"

"Two of the six were - it's a side-effect of having to spend so much time in hot countries at networking shows and conferences"

"What about the ones that weren't?"

"Simple. One of them works for the company that's sponsoring the awards, so the small print got to him before I could. Of the others, one now has a photocopy of a vehicle registration form and the other was fired inexplicably after an anonymous, untraceable phone call yesterday afternoon

and had his nomination withdrawn by his now-ex-employer". I must put the PFY in for a raise - he did that phone call business without me even asking.

"I see. What's this about a registration form?"

"Oh, just something about a vanishing company Rolls and a known black-market car trader"

"I see. You really are a bastard, aren't you?"

"Naturally. Though it's taken me a while to perfect, of course."

"So what about the one competitor who didn't withdraw?"

"Oh, I beat him fair and square; the directors' words of recommendation on my entry were far more flattering than those on his". At least they were _after_ the form got switched in the chief judge's briefcase on a train to Doncaster last week.

"So what's next?"

"Back to work, a nice pay rise as thanks for raising the company profile, thank the temp for keeping the users on their toes while I've been away, then the occasional after-dinner speech with a five-figure fee".

"What if someone blows the whistle?"

"Oh, I don't have to worry about that"

"Don't you?". I don't like the look in her eye, or the tone of her voice for that matter. "What would you say if I told you I taped this conversation?"

"I'd point out that the dictating gadget in your top left pocket has no record head, so you've got a blank tape. As we're on the subject, what would you say if I told you that the phone in your room was bugged? Now what were all their names ...". I pat my pocket, and hear the reassuring rattle of microcassette-in-plastic-case.

Sense of humor failure is instant, and she turns and wanders off to sulk.

My mother was right ... you should never trust someone in PR.

BOFH 1996 Part 2 Bastard Operator from Hell, 1996 Vintage, Part Two

Congratulations Once More Reader

If you've got this far you really must have at least half a dozen or so of the neighbors pets almost to the boil by now. To test if the creature concerned is what we (in the pet torturing trade) call 'Al Dente' - from the Latin to leave marks on motor vehicles when struck at excessive speed - grab it with a pair of snap-jaw Vice-Grip Plie...

WE INTERRUPT ONCE MORE WITH AN APOLOGY REGARDING THE JAVA SCRIPT WHICH HAS AGAIN BEEN ACCIDENTALLY LOADED ONTO YOUR MACHINE AND WHICH HAS SUCH LOW REGARD FOR HOUSEHOLD PETS. WE CANNOT STRESS ENOUGH THAT STEPS HAVE BEEN TAKEN TO ENSURE THAT IT, JAVA SCRIPTS WHICH LOOK LIKE IT, AND ALL IT'S SCRIPT FRIENDS AND RELATIVES, HAVE BEEN TAKEN OUT BACK OF THE COMPUTER AND SHOT IN A PROFESSIONAL MANNER

Now, back to the sunlit and snowcapped mountains of things more artistic!

Looking for new challenges, or just more dosh, the BOFH risks it all in the agency shark pool ...

The boss is being a little reticent about my rate so I decide to twist the knife a bit by calling up some contracting agencies. My only worry being that if I called up a good agency, I'd probably get a job - which rather defeats the purpose of the exercise. My purpose is to make the boss wince every time there's a contracting rate review. And to rake in more dosh of course.

Bearing in mind my job prospects, I put some feelers out with a couple of the large but mostly dodgy agencies. The sort of agency that will 'smooth out the wrinkles' in your CV before faxing them on to a prospective employer.

Wrinkles like, 'I done DOS once,' and 'I know how to turn my screen on,' become 'Wrote DOS from scratch,' and 'Extensive Hardware Support Background'.

I expect the worst and get it. I meet my placement consultant at a local pub, where he buys me a beer to prove that he's really my friend, and not someone who wants a criminal percentage of my wages.

"So," my personally assigned, widely experienced, computing professional placement consultant says: "You're looking for a position in networking?"

"Yes."

"What sort of experience do you have?"

I run through a quick synopsis of the past 10 years.

"Excellent. Now, have you had much experience of DOS?"

"Why?"

"Well we have an excellent position in DOS consultancy at the moment."

"And you feel that's a networking position?" I ask, already annoyed.

"Well, not exactly. Initially it would be more of a help desk role."

"Not interested. I'm networks, not systems, and definitely not support."

"Ah. Oh well, it was a thought. What about VAX/VMS?"

"DECNet? TCP/IP? Dare I say it, CI?"

"No, more in the lines of Cobol Programming. Great position there. In Milton Ke.."

"No."

"Very good pay..."

"If I'd wanted to do Cobol Programming I would have said so. But I didn't, I said 'networking'."

"Of course, so you did. hardware engineering doesn't interest you?"

"What sort of hardware?"

"Dead terminals mainly. But when they're working they're connected to a terminal server, which is on a network..." he calls out as I leave the pub, drink only half finished.

The boss meanwhile has been playing my game and has faxed out to a couple of contracting agencies himself, obviously in an effort to show me how cheaply he can get a replacement. It's sad how people delude themselves sometimes.

My next few days are punctuated by offers of data entry, fill-in secretarial work, tape monkeying etc. Which I decline. At long last one of the agencies comes through with a price that would bring tears to the boss's eyes. I get the details and am thinking about it when the boss walks in.

"I'll take it," I say, as the boss discreetly tunes into my conversation.

"Take what?" he asks.

"The job I was just offered," I reply, smiling cheesily.

He rallies under the pressure and responds: "And just in time too!"

"For what, Christmas shopping?" I say, applying pressure.

"No. Just in time for us. I've found your replacement!" he gloats, shaking a wad of barely readable faxed paper.

"You're not serious!" I say, pointing at the paper, "you can't even read it!"

"Don't need to," he smirks, "I rang them and verified the details."

"You're not going to trust THAT agency are you?" I cry. "They can't even place an advert properly, let alone a computing professional."

"That's where you're wrong!" the boss snarls. "They HAVE found me someone. Far more experienced than you, and only a fraction more expensive. And he starts this afternoon. SECURITY!"

The moment the boss has been dreaming of for months has arrived.

"Escort this member of the public to the street. Don't let him touch anything, and take his access keys off him at the door. He's to speak to no-one. And have him removed from the contractors' register IMMEDIATELY! Have his personal effects checked for items of the company's, then forward them on to him."

Job done, he swaggers back to his office, the John Wayne of networks and systems.

I am escorted to the street and hand over my access keys. I take a quick survey of the building that was once my workplace, then wander back in to reception.

>Ding!< "Hello," I smile to the receptionist. "I've just been appointed to a position as Network Administrator. Could you ring my supervisor please..."

Can't wait to see John Wayne's face. Or my new pay check. Or the memo saying that as a new entry on the contractors' register I am required to attend a paid week's-worth of safety lectures.

A pay rise in his pocket, and an admiring pimply-faced-youth looking , the BOFH plays safe ...

Today, to fulfill the terms of my employment as a newly arrived contractor at my old job, I'm attending the site safety course. It's the usual routine of switching equipment off when not in use, and so on - kids' stuff.

"Does anyone know what this is?" our instructor asks, holding up a section of mains flex with exposed wiring.

"An accident waiting to happen," I answer helpfully.

"Excellent. Completely correct," he gushes, pleased with the audience participation so far.

"And what about this?" he asks, holding up a length of data cable in a similar condition.

"An accident waiting to happen," I reply once more.

"Ah well, not exactly," he chuckles.

"It is if you tie it two inches from the ground on the third step from the top of a darkened sixth floor stairwell."

Our instructor's eyes narrow for a moment as he tries to place the face ...

Recognition strikes.

"You've done this course before, haven't you?"

"Well, yes I have, but I didn't get the certificate at the end. No-one did as it turned out; not after you fell down that stairwell, broke your clavicle and lost our evaluation papers. Lost your footing on the third step from the top, didn't you?"

He snarls lightly as it all comes flooding back. The fall, the ambulance ride, the chance statement beforehand that my policy of 'Plug and Pray' was not company policy. His manner warns me that 'forgive and forget' is not company policy either...

Sure enough, slipping back early from morning tea, I notice that my chair isn't where I left it. A quick once-over informs me that it's missing some vital supportive parts. I slip it to the back of the room and select another.

As I'm still alone, I check out the presentation on our instructor's PC and make a few modifications to his slides. As everyone returns, I fall back into my new chair with a comforting 'thump'. I can't help but notice the look of irritation on our tutor's face, an expression which gets progressively worse as we're entertained by his most interesting display of slides. The slide about not picking your nose and eating it in the lift seems to be a real crowd pleaser.

"Well, thanks very much for that," I say at the end of the course. "And rest assured I will pay close attention to that slide on not eating the local beef. Valuable advice - and such a change from the usual warnings about checking the floors in cable ducts."

The next morning the boss wanders in looking harassed.

"Ah Simon, I have a complaint here about you."

"A complaint! About him! I can't believe it!" the PFY cries, clutching his hand to his brow and, it must be said, overplaying the shocked co-worker just a little.

"Yes, our safety tutor has complained that you tampered with his presentation slides."

"TAMPERED WITH HIS SLIDES!" the PFY continues, silenced with a dry look from the boss.

"Well, I may have made a few grammatical corrections," I admit. "But nothing that didn't improve the document overall. Anyway, if it was that bad he could always recover his old presentation from the back-up system."

"Yes, that was the first option - until we found the missing screen degaussing wand in the tape rack."

The PFY stifles a guilty giggle.

"The off-site back-up tapes?" I suggest helpfully.

"Yes, there seems to be some problem with that," the boss replies suspiciously. "The tape content doesn't match the barcode index."

"Well, the barcode reader on one of the drives has been playing up," I reply. "It's possible his archive was written to a tape with a similar checksum."

"And how many tapes could that be?"

"About 2,000 - they all have the same checksum unfortunately - it's a bug in the software that I noted in a memo to you about, let's see, two months ago?"

"Ah. Well, I don't see why he can't type it in again," the boss says, sweeping the whole thing under the carpet and wandering off.

"Was there really a memo?" the PFY asks.

"Yep. A Buck-Pass memo with lots of buzzwords at the top to scare him off. Now he'll read it and find out the buck stopped with him."

"So what will happen?"

"Oh, the usual cover-up - an apologetic phone call in a couple of minutes followed by the rapid and angry entrance of a safety instructor through that doorway over there..."

Twenty five minutes later my practical demonstration to the PFY about the dangers of tying a piece of data cable an inch from the ground in a darkened doorway is complete. I grab a blank certificate of attendance from the pile left on the floor by the First Aid nurse and get the PFY to fill in the blanks.

The world of networking is full of accidents waiting to happen.

The Bastard suffers from some temporary telephone trouble ...

"We might have a little problem with the UPS", the PFY calls as he passes, indicating with a sneaky nod the comms room. I grab the laptop with the UPS diagnostics on it and follow him.

Having no real need for the laptop I slip it onto the floor as soon as I'm inside and "stress test" any listening devices that may have been "accidentally" left there by the boss by inserting my pen into the cooling fan at the rear of the UPS

"What's the problem?" I ask, shouting over the noise of a plastic ballpoint being buzzed away by the heftiest cooling fins in the room.

"The boss has found out about the help line" he shouts, looking around warily, expecting capture and torture at any moment.

Oh dear. A great little money spinner that too. A reasonably simple idea in theory - automatically divert every newly disconnected phone in the company to an 0898 number which gives you sound computing advice.

Advice like "Your problem sounds like inadequate air cooling. The only possible solution is to water cool your computer. Go to the water fountain..." etc. Amazing how many calls a person receives once they leave - at 99p a minute - and yet more amazing how many phones don't have forwarding toll-bars.

As quickly as possible I ring the 0898 people and reluctantly shout to them that we wish to discontinue the service, then get the check sent on to my accountant under my little-known pseudonym of "Deceased". (no first or middle initials - Great for tax purposes). The figure they mention cheers the PFY and me up though. Obviously more calls than I'd imagined.

"How did they find out?" I ask

"I think I might have keyed in a typo the last disconnect and got a live one instead" the PFY confesses, with a due amount of trepidation.

Forgiveness being the key in times of crisis, I figure we bide our time looking like we're fixing the UPS until the Boss can't take it anymore.

Minutes later the boss bursts in full tilt to collect what his listening device can't and collects my laptop with his shoe instead. His tardy reflexes divert his shoe mid-stomp so that he catches the side of it, flipping open its cover and sending him hurtling face first into a comms rack.

Nasty.

"Oooh" the PFY mutters, "I bet that hurt".

The look on the boss's face as he roughly extricates himself from the dangling cables confirms this guess..

"What the hell are you doing in here?" he snarls, dabbing at his grazed facials with his handkerchief

"Just checking out this noisy fan. It looks serious", I say, giving it a hefty jab out of his sight for old times' sake.

Did I say old time's sake? I meant last time's sake. The fan, having had enough of the extra load of my pen, stops completely, emitting nothing but a tiny >click< and shuddering to a halt.

"BLOODY HELL!" the boss shouts over the UPS alarm, which is no mean feat considering it's made to be heard through the sound-proofed wall.

"SWITCH IT OVER T...o the other unit" he finishes as I press the Alarm Silence button

"There's not much chance of that", the PFY calls, bringing over the shredded remains of the laptop, the condition of which would seem to have got a lot worse in the last few seconds.

"Sorry about that", he says, "but someone left a cable laying on the ground ..."

We turn to the boss.

"...which I tripped over."

"Well it's too late for that - get another one!" the boss shouts, self-preservation at the management meeting key in his mind.

"We can't", I chip in. "The backup's got a dead hard-drive that you wouldn't let us replace", I add, applying a recent situation to my advantage.

"Whew!" The PFY mutters, "wouldn't want to be in your shoes. It won't look at all good that - your budget being the cause a site outage ..."

"A SITE OUTAGE!?!!" the boss gasps.

"Well, you did say that all faulty UPS units in the comms cupboards should replaced with a feed from the central UPS to cut costs ...", I add

The boss gets that hunted look.

"All right, what do you want?"

"I think you already know that", I smile, benevolently. Or is that malevolently, I always get those two mixed up.

Ten minutes later I have the printed copies of his telephone enquiry as well as the photocopies he hid in the safe just in case.

I pop back to the UPS as it's nearing its temperature cut-out point and demonstrate how simple it is to manually reset a fan circuit breaker ...

It's funny how things work out for the best, isn't it?

A heated exchange with the boss over air-conditioning raises temperatures all round ...

It's a balmy mid-morning when the PFY slips back into the offices with this morning's purchase following my specific instructions.

"One finely crafted plastic electric kettle, with safety cutout to prevent element burnout," I say, smiling at the perfection of my plan.

"But we've got a coffee and tea maker!" he cries.

Filling the jug from the water fountain I shake my head. "What happens every summer?" I ask.

"It gets hot?" he guesses.

"Correct. And our air conditioning system does what?"

"Fails."

"And we have to what?" I ask.

"Sit in the comms room all day."

"Correct. Grab the variable step-down transformer and meet me in the comms room."

He does as I bid and moments later I've set the variac at five volts, plugged the jug into it, and hidden the lot under a sub-floor ventilation grill.

"Your mission, should you choose to accept it - you don't have a choice by the way, it's just an expression - is to keep this jug topped up while increasing the voltage by five volts a day."

I take him over to a wall thermostat and pull the cover off.

"Step 2, turn the set screw on all the thermostats anti-clockwise by five degrees every day, making the air-con think it's getting cooler in here. Now - any questions?"

"Yeah, what happens when the variable transformer gets up to 200 volts?"

"Twenty quid says the jug won't get past 50."

"You're on!" the PFY gasps, seeking easy money.

"And no cheating by not filling the jug!" I add, knowing his nature.

The bet agreed, I busy myself on network load testing for a few days. When I'm sick of networked Doom-II, I ring the boss up and tell him about the air-con problems in the comms room. True to form, he wanders around the comms room tapping the thermostats and sniffing the

air for moisture. Exhausting his technical repertoire, he calls in some heating professionals who inform him that our measurements are OK.

"You'll need another unit," the technician tells the boss. "Your current ones look to be overloaded."

"I told the boss last summer that this was going to happen," I add, "but he did nothing about it and now look what's happening."

The slight throwing down of the gauntlet here will set his mood for the entire event. He probably suspects something is up but can't think of what it is and is desperate to thwart me - especially with my recent UPS fan victory.

"Yes, well, we'll have to put another unit in, but where..." he smiles realizing the prime location right in front of his eyes. "What about there?" he asks, pointing to the wall between the comms room and the networks room.

"Not a good idea," the heating tech says, "the heat exchanger exhaust would make the room behind there a sweatbox."

"Well it doesn't look like there are any viable alternatives," the boss replies smugly.

"What about over there?" I ask, pointing to a gap between air conditioners in the opposite wall.

"No can do," the boss chimes in "too many units there already which would make the building structurally unsafe."

Something tells me he's done his homework on this one.

"So that wall it is," he smiles, gleefully indicating an area which would be right between my desk and the PFY's.

The PFY's look of horror speaks volumes.

Two weeks later, the control room is getting a tad uncomfortable, especially since someone authorized our windows to be riveted shut.

Visitors are at an all time low, with only the boss stopping behind the double-glazed viewing window to gloat every day or so.

Until D-Day that is.

The PFY and I are in exceptionally early to take my plan through to completion. Completion being removing the air-con from its mounting, turning it, and slipping it back in.

"The boss is bound to notice!" the PFY cries.

"He doesn't come in here anymore - no-one does," I reply, soothing his fears.

"But he does go through the back way to the comms room and he'll see the back of the unit."

"Not when you swap the covers he won't."

"That won't fool him!"

"I believe it will - he only found out I swapped the covers of the fax machine and the shredder the other day. Pity the 'shredder' autodialed the newspapers with that expenditure blowout report of the other day. Tabloids can be so irresponsible."

"What did the boss do when he found out?"

"What do you think? Admit he was responsible for making us a laughing stock? Now I've got a quick job for you."

"What is it?"

"Redo your time sheets - they were his last 'fax'."

"You bastard!"

"In the flesh, on the prowl, and waiting for my 20 quid..."

The BOFH becomes a contract killer as he undoes some damage caused by the boss ...

I'm not happy. True, that's not such a rare occurrence, but today I'm VERY unhappy.

The boss has just dropped a bombshell in that he has single-handedly negotiated a bulk deal maintenance contract from one of our hardware suppliers entitling us to a 50 per cent discount on the maintenance of a machine.

Now I'm as much in favor of maintenance discounts as the next Systems and Networks Administrator who believes that most maintenance engineers should be struck about the head with a rugby sock full of thin-wire terminators, but this sounds a tad suspicious.

The boss, well known for having problems negotiating hallways, has somehow managed to cheat the highly skilled, money-grabbing, shafting professionals that make up the maintenance sales team at 'Rob-me-blind' Corp.

Uh-huh.

And while he was at it, he found his office without asking for help.

I don't think so.

So all that remains is for me to see what sort of complete pants-downer we've got.

"So what sort of contract is it?" I ask him, once he's back in his office gloating.

"Standard contract as before, only I've got the bastards LOCKED INTO IT for 20 years!" he cries gleefully. "IT'S AIRTIGHT! I had their lawyer squirming!"

"And OUR lawyer?" I ask, expecting the inevitable. "Overrated!" he replies. "Could have done it with my eyes closed"

Looking over the contract, I see he probably did.

"Mmm. One small question," I say, teeing up for a long drive down the fairway of hopelessness.

"Yes?"

"You do realize that WE are also locked into this deal for 20 years?"

"Of course."

"Well, bearing that in mind, could you point me to any - ANY piece of equipment we've had for more than five years, let alone 20?"

A penny starts the long drop.

"Uh...Ummmm...well...nothing?!?" he squeaks as his penny investment policy matures.

"Not quite true," I say. "We do have the large IBM card punching machine in the computer room. And do you know why we have it?"

"To punch cards?"

"Not when we don't have the corresponding reader..."

"Air conditioner ballast!" he blurts, just guessing.

"No. True, switching it off would relieve the necessity for a couple of the larger aircons, but no. The reason we have it is because it was put in when the building was first commissioned. It's not even ours. It's worth about 200 quid as scrap, only we can't collect BECAUSE IT'S TOO BIG TO GET OUT THE BLOODY DOOR!"

"I don't get the point," the boss confesses.

I check the document to make sure.

"Well, you have signed, a BINDING, AIRTIGHT contract which says that we will pay them 2,000 quid a month, every month, for the next 20 years, to look after a minicomputer that in about five years' time won't even put up a good show against a pocket calculator. And you didn't ask to see their license beforehand?!"

"Which license?"

"THEIR BLOODY LICENCE TO PRINT MONEY! YOU'VE GIVEN THEM EVERYTHING! THE ONLY THING YOU MISSED OUT WAS AN ACCIDENT INDEMNITY CLAUSE!" I shout in a frenzy.

An ice cold thought hits me. "You didn't give them complete indemnity against damage, did you?"

"What do you mean?" our skilled arbitration professional asks.

"Complete indemnity against damage. You know, they trip on a floor tile and drop their screwdriver down a ventilation hole and short the power supply to the backplane and blow a machine to bits. Their responsibility ends with 'SORRY'."

"Uhhhhmmmmmm... No. No, in fact I'm sure I didn't because once an engineer snapped the lead in my propelling pencil and we made him pay!"

"Yes, well at 2,000 quid a month, I'm sure the cost of a pencil lead will have them insuring themselves to the hilt."

Two weeks later the engineer from Rob-us-Blind-for-20-years arrives.

To make us feel like he's earning his dosh he unscrews the cover, gives the diagnostic lights a look, writes down a couple of numbers, then smiling smugly, puts the cover back on.

In fact he's so smug he doesn't even notice the PFY snaffling one of his screwdrivers and wandering off.

Nor does he notice the floor tile which is sitting a little higher than the others. Until he trips on it, tool-kit bursting on impact (as planned) followed by an extremely loud 'BANG' as our priceless, museum piece, very first company card punch machine explodes with his screwdriver between the power supply and the wiring loom.

Being an old machine it catches fire as well. Or that could be the petrol-soaked rag the PFY and I stuffed it with beforehand.

The boss and one of our lawyers gaze soundlessly from behind the viewing screen, the lawyer contemplating damages, the boss contemplating the humungous favor he'll owe me at contract renegotiation time...

As the BOFH explains, dummies don't grow on trees, it takes years of training ...

"Hello. Is that Network Support?" the user asks over hands-free.

I remove our topological LAN Viewing equipment (VR Glasses) and disconnect from our powerful network analysis server (VR Tank-Combat Games Machine) and direct my attention to the caller.

Caller-Id indicates a user at beancounter central is on the line.

"Yes, this is network support," I reply.

"Oh. I have a problem with FTP-ing from an Internet ftp server in Brussels. It keeps dropping my connection just after I've downloaded a megabyte."

The PFY looks over to me with a cheesy grin and scribbles out a hasty message: "TODAY'S LIMIT 1024K" and points at his packet filter software.

He's getting good.

"Ah yes," I say, flicking over the page on my excuse calendar, "We're getting a lot of this at the moment. We believe it's due to...Network Destabilization from Low Voltage Fluorescent Lamp Spikes."

"Come again?"

"Well, when a fluorescent lamp starts, it sends a spike back down the power cable which in turn induces an interference current in network cabling nearby. In low voltage circuits this effect is magnified."

>DUMMY MODE ON<

[From the bastard Glossary: DUMMY MODE, n. The mode in which a user, overcome by technical terms, will believe, and/or do, anything he or she is told.]

"DUH-HUH. So what do I do?"

[Told you so.]

"Well, today nothing, as there's obviously something generating spikes. How big was the file you wanted?"

"About 1.6 Megs"

I scribble: "TOMORROW'S LIMIT 1.59 MEGS" and pass it to the PFY.

"Well," I respond, "are there any low-voltage fluorescent tubes on your floor?"

"I don't know."

"Well, they'll be smallish, bar-like lights - usually inside signs or displays."

"THE FIRE EXIT SIGNS!!" my caller shouts from the end of the garden path he's been led down.

"Of course!" I cry, sharing his enthusiasm. "They're right above doorways, which is where our cable is fed. Well, there's probably nothing you can do about it now, as we can't refeed our network cabling, I'm sorry,"

"What about if we moved the exit signs?"

"Oh, I'm afraid WE couldn't do that, even if we had the time."

"Oh?"

"No, we simply do not have the time to remove the cable duct covers, slide the exit signs along the duct for a couple of yards to get them away from the data cables, then replace the covers in the newly vacated space for every exit sign on your floor."

"Oh" he replies, mind ticking over almost audibly. "Never mind then. I'll just try bringing the file across in pieces then."

I hang up then cross out the 1024K on the PFY's bit of paper and put 50K in its place, nodding to him to action it.

"He won't do it you know..." the PFY says, so little faith in one so young.

"10 Quid?" I ask.

"You're on," he says, thinking naive "easy money" thoughts.

The next morning comes and I stash a crisp new 10 pound note in my wallet with a smug grin. The PFY notes with disgust the repositioning of the Exit signs halfway along the walls, well clear of the "network cabling" in the doorways.

"Never underestimate the desperation of a user," I mention, furthering his education once more.

To take his mind off it, I get him to install the new 'Infra Red Wireless LAN Transceivers' (infrared cameras), in the floors mentioned and drop some cable boxes around the place so it looks like we're going to do something.

Later that afternoon, Network Control is crammed to capacity with a dozen or so fellow network engineers from other companies.

"You all know the rules" I state, "20 quid a player, except for the PFY and I, who, as host, get first pick of a free player"

Nods all round as the PFY takes the bets and we switch on the gaming screens. Once the choosing of players is complete, we're ready to go.

"Let the game commence!" I shout, flicking the switch to cut the lights to Beancounter central and its stairwells. I then activate the fire alarms.

"The person whose player is the first to the safety of a stairwell, takes the pool!"

Through the infrared monitor we watch the pandemonium break out, as in the darkness, everyone runs for apparent safety.

The toll of the newly shifted exit signs is fairly high and will probably leave an impression on the wall that only a thick coat of plaster will put right.

Next on the obstacle list (for the smarter contestants) are the boxes of cable the PFY left randomly in the cubicle "corridors" earlier on.

"It's like a multi-ball game of pinball down there!" the PFY cries watching in disbelief.

Ten minutes later I'm counting my winnings - of course I did back the mover of the signs in the first place....

And they say there's no money in networking any more.

The Bastard's writing regresses to childlike scrawls as he attempts some artistic expenses ...

It's a balmy day at Network Central when I roll along to a meeting with the bean counter types about the expense claims that I've put in over the last two months.

It seems the brand, spanking new, state-of-the-art, bells-and-whistles character recognition software (to recognize expenses claims and whack them straight into a spreadsheet to perform mystical analyses of who's spending all the expenses money) has a slight hiccup when it comes to my claims and receipts. Perhaps, and I'm only guessing here, it's because I don't WANT anyone recognizing what the hell my expenses really are.

If I wanted the boss to read 'beer and spirits' on my meal allowance form, I could have printed, in bold capitals, 'BEER AND SPIRITS', and not scrawled 'Breek and Sprorts' in a dyslexic manner.

It's a network contractor's prerogative to fork out their own money for a couple of packets of salt and vinegar crisps, then clock up a humungous bar-tab and get it paid for by the firm! In fact, it's a God-given right!

I mentally prepare for the interview with a couple of glasses of lager and a plate of chips at the local. Ten minutes later I'm in legume-reckoning central, talking to one of its many representatives.

"OK, meal allowances...what on earth does that say?" the beancounter challenges. "Breek and Sprorts. What the hell's Breek and Sprorts?"

"Let me see..." I answer, feigning contemplation. "Oh! That's beef! I must have had the steak!"

"And Sprorts?"

"Sprorts. Hmm...Brussels Sprouts!"

"You ate £150 worth of beef and Brussels sprouts??"

"I might have. They were out of season.. Quite yummy if you serve them right. Expensive out of season too. And it was a rather large steak..."

Half an hour of creative food visualization later...

"What's this one?" asks the accountant. "Breek and escrot?"

"Well, the first one's obviously beef again and the second one...hmmmmm... almost looks like ESCORT doesn't it?! HA HA HA! Imagine that - work paying for an escort! No, I don't know what it could be - some form of delicacy that they serve at the Amsterdam Convention Centre?"

I saw it coming of course. That new handwriting analysis software could have taken my 'breek and sprorts', my 'ligord and amno' and come up with 'beer and spirits', 'liquor and ammo', spill the beans on where I bought them, how much it was a shot, and what her name was!

I don't think I need to tell you that this is a bad thing.

Luckily I am a firm believer in the ideal that as technology advances, people should regress as a form of self-defense. So I started varying my choice of writing implement and size, filling my forms out half in crayon, half in finger paint (all perfectly acceptable under the current expense claim directives which dictate that claims must be filled out in the claimant's handwriting).

Perhaps it's the writing in letters that varies between 16 point and 1600 point that's throwing the software off...

I'm drawn back to consciousness by the arrival of a new bean counter to replace my one, who by this time has worn out...

"Simon, just a couple more hiccups," my new bean counter starts.

"Mmmm?" I respond, only wanting to help.

"This one. It's a vertical line, in crayon I think?"

"Yes. That would be correct. I believe that was the first line of the V in the word veal."

"Huh?"

"Had a hand cramp, couldn't write any smaller. I could hardly hold the crayon in fact. And I didn't want to forget. Surely I'm not going to be penalized for a personal disability?" The words 'personal disability' have him almost wetting his pants with fear. The new huggy-feely fringe in upper management is so politically sound they echo, and even a sniff of insensitivity would be treated with lightening quick dismissal.

"Ah. OK. But 100 quid worth of veal?" he asks nervously.

"There was a side-salad too. Had grapes in it."

"I see. And this? It looks like a paint slur?"

"Finger paint." I reply. "Steak Sandwich. Extremely rare. See, you can see where the tail of the Y was."

"It's a smudge!"

"No, it really says that. I had to squish it up to fit it on the form due to the resolution of my finger."

"Why didn't you use a pen?"

"What? And risk RSI?"

Ten minutes later, another broken beancounter can be added to the tally as he gives in completely and adds up the totals.

"Oh!" I say, suddenly remembering "I've got one more."

"What's that?" he asks. "Breek and clops from today?"

"That would be...beef and chops."

"You had two meat dishes."

"Of course, got to keep my protein up!"

It's a dog's life really...

The Bastard puts a price tag on user access after a particularly annoying request ...

It's training time and today I'm showing the PFY through the computer room when the phone rings. What the hey, no-one's around, so I pick it up.

"Hello."

"Is that the Computer Room?"

"Yes..."

"Is that the Systems Operator?"

I look around quickly - apart from the PFY there's no witnesses.

"..Yes..."

"I think you've got a dead hard disk on the database server."

"Really? What makes you think that?"

"Well, my database updates are very slow."

"What updates?"

"I'm capitalizing the middle initial of all staff and contractors since 1991."

"How ... useful. And you expect that to rocket through in a couple of seconds do you?"

"So it's not a disk problem?"

"No, we'd know ahead of time if our disks were faulty - they have predictive failure."

"Really?"

"Yes, and I predict that they will fail in three seconds"

"Why's that?"

"Because I'm going to switch the power off."

I hear a flurry of keystrokes, but it's far too late to have any effect ...

Some wire jiggling and a loud click later and an impromptu transaction rollback is scheduled for disk restart time. The PFY, taking his education seriously, notes everything.

"No witnesses," I mention as we move on to the next piece of kit, just in time to catch sight of the boss bounding past the observation window on his way in. Another >CLICK< and the evidence disappears.

"What happened?" the boss blurts, rushing up.

"When?" I ask, innocent and confused.

"Just then - my database session has hung!"

The PFY and I play dumb while the boss examines the system console screen for signs of bastardisation. None are evident, so after a few seconds he wanders off. When I'm sure he's not coming back I plug the console cable back in and watch the disk repair messages roll by.

The Computer Room phone rings again and the PFY reaches for it. I shake my head, mouthing the word "Set-up". The boss is so predictable he belongs in the drive cabinet. I pick up the phone.

"Help, my spreadsheet's gone funny!" the user cries.

"In what way?" I ask

"Well, the bit where it gets the info from the database has just stopped!"

"Hmm. This sounds like you have an pre-revision embedded SQL statement."

>DUMMY MODE ON<

"Huh?"

"Okay, go back to your spreadsheet. There's an option in the menu somewhere to Examine Sql."

"Uuuuum... Oh, yes, there it is!"

"Okay, click on it. A window pops up saying something like SELECT something FROM something else WHERE some other stuff."

"Yeah, it does."

"Cut out everything except the stuff between the FROM and the WHERE."

"Okay, it's just HR_IDX, a comma, HR_SAL_SCALE a comma and HR_NAME."

"Right, those are the erroneous SQLs that you want to get rid of. So before each word type 'DROP', then add a semi-colon instead of the comma. One drop command per line. Then check the 'auto-commit' box. Lastly, use your boss's username and password so that it fixes the bad SQL."

"But I don't know his passw ..."

"Yes, you do. It's his wife's name isn't it?"

"Her middle name. But he said not to use it because it's got rights to ..."

"To repair SQL like you need to..."

"Oh... >clickety-click< ... That's funny. My spreadsheet has gone blank now!"

"That's right, because the repairs are taking place. Now when your boss gets him, tell him about the 'repairs' that you made."

"Okay. Thanks!"

"That's okay. It's my pleasure. Really."

I haven't even lifted my hand from the receiver when it rings again.

"Computer Room ..." I sigh.

"Hi, we're having a problem with the Human Resource Database. It's almost as if half the tables have disappeared!"

"Yes," I mutter, "We've been doing a lot of work on that recently."

"Oh. Well, is it working now?"

"Of course it is. And you'll be able to use it shortly ..."

"Great!"

"... when you get access. And the access charge today is five quid."

"What?!"

"Each!"

"You're joking!"

"Per minute."

"You can't do that!"

"You're right. I can't - it's my lunchtime, perhaps my assistant can help you."

I direct them to the PFY and head up to the staff cafeteria to check out today's contractor perk.

"Ten quid," I hear the PFY chant.

"What"

"Each. Per minute."

Fifteen minutes later he joins me in the cafeteria to outline the band of blood-seeking users lurking outside the computer room in wait for the return of the systems operators.

You can't pay for satisfaction like that. Unless you're a user of course.

The Bastard puts in a day on the helpdesk ...

"Well I feel it would be good for intra-departmental understanding if we were all to work in other positions for a while", the boss says, defending his master plan of having 'job share' once every six months "The CEO was very impressed with my initiative!"

"But surely you must realize that we'll be leaving network operations completely open with no staff?"

"Which is why I've put you in the helpdesk area" the boss replies smugly. "You'll be the first to know of any problems that arise..."

All my arguments are defeated by the boss in double-quick time, which means that a day in the helldesk is inevitable.

The PFY, bless him, smells a rat.

"So what's going on?", he asks suspiciously. "The boss couldn't answer an operational question if he'd been up all night studying, yet today he had solutions for everything! And you didn't even put up a fight. It's almost as if you wanted to work on the helldesk! What's up!?!?"

Sadly it is necessary to let someone else in on my master plan, if only to prove that I am still in possession of a full quota of marbles.

"Cast your eyes around the department", I say. "Look at the equipment therein! Where does the newest of that equipment reside?"

"Well, the helpdesk - they need the latest and best to test out all the caller's software on their own machines. What's your point?"

"How much RAM has your PC got?" I ask

"16 Meg"

"WINDOW DRESSING!", I cry "Why, every single helpdesk machine has at least 32, and a couple have 64!"

"YOU'RE GOING TO STEAL THEIR HARDWARE!", the PFY cries, shocked. "Errrrmmm ... we're going halves in it though, aren't we?"

"Ja, mein Freund!" I cry, stuffing my 'lunchbox' with tools.

The next day I turn up before start time(!) to assume my new post. The phone rings at 5 minutes to opening, and I'm in such a good mood I answer it.

"Hello, is this the helpdesk?" a nervous voice asks.

"It most certainly is", I gush, all enthusiasm.

"I'm running short of space on the display machine and someone said that I should 'compact' all the unused stuff with a compaction program on the system? Which one would that be?"

"You're on a Macintosh, right?" I ask.

"Yes, the department graphics server" he answers.

"Right. Well, you'll want to use the default compactor that's stored on the desktop. 'Trash', I believe it's called".

"Isn't that how you remove files?"

"No, that's what the ERASE key does. And you don't have one on your computer, so you're completely safe. You just drag the file into the Trash 'folder', and then select 'Empty Trash' to invoke the file into the compactor."

"Really?"

"Yes, it's very efficient too, you'd be surprised how much you can fit on your hard disk if you run it through the compactor."

I leave the poor plebe 'compacting' his entire department's work and get back to removing all the coprocessors and extraneous memory from the machines after replacing their ROM diags to report the missing hardware as present. Child's play, really. To delay discovery I switch virtual memory on wherever possible.

The PFY, meantime, is busy erasing our numbers from the helpdesk phone lists and shorting the batteries to their phone memories, to the inevitable but somehow satisfying detriment of all those saved numbers.

The phone rings and as the PFY's machine still has its internals hanging out, I answer.

"Hello, Helpdesk?" the caller asks.

"Yes, what can we do for you?", I ask, still pleased with the rapidly growing pile of saleable hardware in my 'lunchbox'.

"I upgraded my software and now my CD-ROM won't play music discs anymore" the user bleats.

"Well, it's probably just some dust deposited on the CD-ROM lens" I respond, knowing full well that this is a bug documented on the first page of the manual. But who reads manuals?

"So what do I do?"

"Well, have you got a vendor-supplied, drive-specific, CD-ROM cleaning caddy?", I ask.

"Uh ... no", my user replies

>DUMMY MODE ON<

"OK, not to worry, you can improvise with a lightly abrasive disk."

"Great!" the user gushes "How?"

"Well, pop down to the Buildings Maintenance desk tomorrow and borrow a 80-grit orbital sanding disk from them. Slip it in your drive and let it run"

"How will I know when it's complete?"

"Well, you'll hear it spinning, then gradually slow down until it stops. When it's stopped your drive is done."

"Hey, thanks", my user gushes, then rings off.

...

They PFY and I are almost sad to leave at the end of the day - the helldesk has plenty of potential. I allow a faint smile cross my face while I push a matchstick into the keyway as the helpdesk door locks shut. Late start for them tomorrow, then ...

The Bastard and his pimply sidekick spread their network of misery across the land ...

The PFY and I are in celebratory mode. The bosses have finally seen reason and agreed to become a Corporate Internet Service Provider in the cities that we have offices in, as an attempt to defray operating expenses.

A long-term attempt of course. In the short term however, it will mean long hours of overtime in foreign cities for the PFY and I as we struggle to make our systems foolproof.

It was a done deal from the time the CEO saw the interesting video conferencing tools available on the Internet. The bit about recovering our Internet operating expenses passed him by as he finally saw his very own project achieve fruition after its many stops and starts over the past year. His eyes watered as he thought of his image addressing all our offices simultaneously. I didn't think it politically sound to inform him of the MUTE control that accompanied almost every conferencing client ...

Once I had his signature, I set the wheels in motion immediately by cancelling the contract with our current ISP. A company that still didn't know which side of the information superhighway you were supposed to drive on, and thought that World Wide Web had something to do with driftnets and dolphins. Not that it didn't charge completely through the nasal cavity for its knowledge. When we got stung with a consultancy fee for ringing to say its router was down AGAIN, we knew the end was nigh.

The PFY puts a brave face on it as he heads off to one of our Scottish offices for a week, forced to stay in a luxury hotel as the company's courtesy apartment had apparently been leased to a Mr. Babbage - the same person who hadn't shown up to the Welsh courtesy apartment last week. I too, was forced to stay at a hotel - not that I had much time to see my room with all the work I had to do. The hours of which incidentally coincided with the hours that the house bar opened.

Pure coincidence, as I explained to the boss, two days later when he queried me about the astronomical bar-tab. In fact, I could quite honestly say that I had ABSOLUTELY no recollection of ever being there.

Anyway, to placate the boss about all the spending that's been going on, I show him the extra-special bonus advantage we obtained when a company across the road (and only a short trip down some municipal piping away) asked to connect to us. We were only too pleased to connect them to our LAN.

The boss notes carefully the heavy three-phase power cable going into their tiny router, and the four thick-wire-like segments and one UTP segment that emerged. Back at our offices he noticed even more carefully the termination of the 'thick-wire' segments on the input of one of our UPS units. Even he can see that three 2.4KW supplies is an investment in the power bill of the future. That the company is also paying us for the service has him almost smiling. A frightening thought.

He is, however, not the only one to notice. "This Internet thing uses a ton of power," our client's network expert ('ex' being a has-been, 'spurt' being a little drip under pressure) complains. "Our comms room power bill has rocketed skywards!"

"Well it would," I reply. "I mean, after all, you have to push that data all around the world, not just to the next office. Just imagine what your power bill would be like if you weren't connected through us!"

"Oh!" he mumbles. "I hadn't thought of it that way."

"No, and consider the traffic speed difference. What speed do you get from home provider?"

"Oh," he mumbles. "14.4 or 28.8. Much slower than work. Although work does pause from time to time."

"Well we could speed you up of course," I say. "But then that would involve another set of cables and more power consumption. Then if you wanted, we could run a redundant server over in our offices as well, on our UPS, but you'd have to pay for the power bills for that too."

"Well, the bosses do want redundancy once we start putting up our own home pages..."

I hate me, I really do. It's just like shooting a fish in a barrel. With an elephant gun.

To celebrate my recent successes, I ring through to our other Scottish office to sort out my arrangements for next week's installation.

"Hello? I'd like to reserve the courtesy apartment please...Babbage. London Office. I've already booked? Excellent."

That PFY is damn good.

Trains, planes and the dreaded laptop spotter - the BOFH brings the anoraks back to earth. ...

It's trade show time again, and this time it's off to the east coast of the US for a week of seeing what's new in the land of wire wiggling. Of course, I read clippings from the computer press from time to time but it's far better to see an ATM switch in the flesh than on the page.

Actually, it's even more essential to see the inside of a posh hotel bar than to see an ATM switch in the flesh; one must get one's priorities right, and hey, if I wanted to look at flashing lights I could do it in my own air-con comms room instead of a sweaty exhibition hall.

Life is sweet as we cruise over the Atlantic. The canapés are splendid, though the smoked salmon has perhaps been a little over-chilled. We're talking first class, naturally - my turn-left-at-economy-and-it's-by-the-bog seat was mysteriously exchanged for that of a Mrs. E. Windsor ... well, it's a pretentious name anyway. I think there must be someone important down the back also, as there are lots of men in dark suits arguing with stewardesses over seats and reservations and stuff; I must complain to the airline about the lousy soundproofing on the first class section - it's very noisy.

"Excuse me, what processor does that have?"

My five-star-brandied-induced trance of peaceful smugness is broken.

"I'm sorry?"

"What processor does your laptop run? Mine's a 133 meg Pentium."

Great. Even worse than the nutter on the bus, I get the computer bore on the plane. At least on the number 2 Routemaster you can push them off the open platform on the Edgeware Road.

"It's a 437 meg SPARC Ultra." Only a slight exaggeration - I like to start gently.

"Really? I didn't know Windows ran on a SPARC."

"It doesn't."

"So what are you running?"

"Solaris 2.7."

"Hey, wow! You must be a serious user."

"Yeah. Something like that." Which makes you a serious loser. "You running Windows 95?"

"Yes."

"Hey, wow. You must be a serious sad bastard."

He smiles uncertainly, trying to convince himself that I'm jesting. Time to sort that misapprehension out for him.

"Did you know that you can speed up that model with a simple hardware mod?"

"Hey, no! Really? How do you do it?"

"Well, I shouldn't really say, as there's a slight risk involved - it will invalidate your warranty."

"That's OK, I'm happy to try it as long as it's pretty certain to work. What do you do?"

"Right. Have you got a paper clip? Actually, any smallish bit of metal wire will do."

"Yes, here you are. What do I do with it?"

"You're going to crank up the speed of the SCSI bus by increasing the power a little. Turn the machine round so the back's facing you, and connect that pin there in the SCSI connector to the earphone plug."

He fiddles about, and manages to lodge the paper-clip appropriately. No blue smoke ...yet.

"Okay, now what?"

"Now you have a machine that you can selectively make faster when you need to. You don't want to just crank it up permanently as that'll eat battery life, so it's best to just speed things up when you really need to."

"So how do I speed it up when I need to?"

"Just play a music disc on the CD. That will cause the voltage in the earphone socket to go up, and so the bus will be energized. Don't play it too loud, though, or you could damage something; something like Dark Side of the Moon should be OK, but watch out for the alarm clocks."

"Hmmm...I don't have any audio CDs here. Can I use the microphone instead?"

"Sure - just set it to 'play through' mode and shout in the mike when you need the speed. Careful not to shout too loud, though."

Fifteen minutes goes by, and I'm beginning to regret what I've done. My friend has discovered that whistling into the mike is the easiest way to make a loudish noise, and it would seem that his particular make of laptop is far more resilient than those I've come across before. Fortunately, help is at hand in the shape of a flustered gentleman who advances rather angrily.

"WILL YOU PACK THAT BLOODY WHISTLING IN!" he screams. At that moment the paper clip does its worst.

Interestingly, Boeing's air conditioning is particularly well-attuned to the smell of smoke - a fire alarm goes off in the distance.

"I think that's a 1,000 quid fine," I smile sweetly as the stewardesses move to break up the fight breaking out between my geeky companion and the flustered gentleman. Soon, the parties involved are rapidly strapped to their seats with a burly looking steward in attendance. Once again all is calm.

"Sorry for the disturbance, sir. Can I get you another brandy?"

Fear of a compulsory team-building weekend spurs the BOFH into his own style of teamwork ...

I'm experimenting with some infra-red remote reboot hardware when the pimply-faced-youth wanders in.

"Who's that?" he asks, pointing at some besuited individual in the next office.

The face seems vaguely familiar, then the ball drops ...

"Something to do with personnel," I reply. "One of those huggy-feely types into team-building and customer expectation, if I remember rightly."

"Our customers already know what to expect!"

"Yes. That could be the problem ..."

"The boss is being a bit brown-nosey," the PFY observes, as the boss welcomes Mr. Huggy.

"Yes, and judging by the crawl-factor, I'd say he's been got at from above ..."

Two hours later the PFY sprints in.

"There's something you should know," he says.

"What? You've not been eavesdropping on the boss have you?"

"No, just checking the connectivity of his spare UTP lines. True, the test device has good aural response."

"Almost microphone-like?"

"Ummm ..."

"All right, what is it?" I interrupt.

"They're setting up a divisional retreat!" he blurts.

"A Bloody what!?" I shout, losing composure for a second.

"A divisional retreat. It's not that bad really, is it?" he asks.

"You're joking aren't you? A weekend locked away in team-building hell with people who think that a benchmark comes from not using a doily under your coffee mug?"

"Uuuuhh ..."

"They have client representatives there to annoy you night and day with lame questions like, 'How do you justify your fault resolution policy?'"

"How do we justify it?"

"We don't. Accidental equipment combustion is a proven and documented phenomenon."

"So what are we going to do?"

"Not go. Unless, of course, you look forward to 'Trust' exercises, where you fall backwards into the arms of a group of people who have trouble catching a cold without written instructions."

"Apparently, it's compulsory - or at least the contracting bonus is dependent on attendance."

"The sneaky bastards!"

"So what do we do?" the PFY asks.

"First things first - when is it?"

"Three weeks from Saturday."

We put our heads together and formulate a battle plan so sneaky it would make Rommel weep. The next day we're the first to inform the boss that we'd be delighted to attend. He breaks open a new roll of antacid tablets.

The PFY handles the fax-interception, reducing the 45 single-room accommodation bookings to 10, changes the food budget to alcohol and swaps the light jazz-band evening entertainment to a popular Soho Cabaret act ...

I borrow Mr. Huggy's credit card - carelessly locked in the visiting staff office - rewrite the personal info track with "Stolen card - Detain", then crank the rumor mill into action by leaving empty, alcohol-based cough syrup bottles in his rubbish bin at nights. I then swap his laptop power adaptor for a dud.

The next day, the offensive begins ...

"There seems to be something wrong with my adaptor," Mr. Huggy says in a surly manner. Apparently, being detained at a garage for an hour by a burly mechanic until his credit card could be verified didn't improve his sense of humor.

The PFY gets him a heavier duty replacement and a loud >CRACK!< later, Mr. Huggy walks back in, smelling of smoke.

"Oh dear!" I cry. "The PFY didn't give you a step-UP transformer by accident, did he? I'll tell you what, we'll sort you out with the emergency 386 until your machine is repaired. Four meg should be OK for Windows 95, shouldn't it?"

"Oh, the one with the new infra-red mouse you mean?" the PFY asks.

The next day, the boss gets involved after he receives the query from the bean counters about Mr. Huggy's proposed alcohol bill. The rubbish rumors have filtered through by this stage and once he finds out about the cabaret team, the boss calls the PFY and me into his office.

"Have you had anything to do with this?" he asks.

The PFY and I shake our heads.

"Personally," I add, "I've heard the rumors and I think perhaps he's a little too unstable to be doing team management activities."

The seeds of doubt planted, I wait for the PFY to do a bit of fertilization and watering ...

"Is it just me, or is it hot in the office?" the PFY asks, right on cue.

"Yes, I'm a little hot myself," I reply.

The boss leaps to his latest favorite toy, the air conditioning remote, and adjusts the temperature for us, thus rebooting Mr. Huggy's machine for about the third time this morning. We all watch in silence as Mr. Huggy pushes his replacement machine off the desk in a fit of madness, then starts taking his office apart.

Ten minutes later, security has carted him away and retreat plans are in the bin where they belong.

And they say that life isn't fair.

Point scoring over network equipment blunders sees the PFY battling it out with the BOFH ...

"I believe that's another 500 quid down the toilet and another two points for me," the pimply-faced-youth gloats, adding another tick to the lengthening line in his favor.

True, a competition to see who can destroy the most equipment in a week was a little childish, but it's been slow recently and experimentation is good on-the-job training. We play for the usual stakes, a pint at the pub across town.

"What was it?" I asked, effecting a slight interest.

"I told a user that his problem was power leakage in getting electricity to the sixth floor. The excuse calendar gave me the idea and I worked back from there. Told him the voltage was much lower when it got to his room, so he should ..."

"Switch his PC to 115 Volts," I finish tiredly.

"Was there something wrong with that?" he asks.

"Not per se. But remember our job isn't really to destroy equipment or frighten the daylights out of our users. That's an added bonus in our selflessly devoted lives as technical support persons. Our job is to ensure the smooth running of our networking subsystem."

"By eliminating users on it."

"Show me an Ethernet collision and I'll show you a network that could do with one user fewer," I reply.

"But you're always going to have collisions!"

"And I'm always going to be devoted to network performance enhancement."

"Whilst making a truckload of dosh on the side," the PFY chips in.

"Not necessarily. The truckload of dosh is also an incidental bonus. I encourage 'daily bonuses' because a happy worker is a safe worker, and a safe worker is a good worker."

"For instance, last week when I mailed the video tape of what occurred in the lift at 11:17pm the previous Friday to one of the parties concerned. Upon receipt of a large envelope of unmarked bills from that person, I, as a happy worker, then configured a router in record time. If I'd had things on my mind that displeased me, I may not have completed the job quite so well ..."

"So why did you play the tape on the lunch room share price monitor the next day?"

"Strictly for the good of the company. You saw how much people enjoyed it. They were cheerful and happy, and therefore more productive later that day."

"And the three people concerned?"

"They, being not so cheery, resigned shortly thereafter, proving once again that this is a workplace for happy and productive persons."

"Well, you're still miles behind," he gloats again, flashing the score sheet.

"So what's the score then?"

He counts feverishly and comes back with "40 to nine - to me".

"So, I'm chasing a 26 point lead."

"No, 31!" he corrects.

"Ah, no, 26," I repeat, pushing the boss's laptop off the desk onto the floor and jumping on it.

"That's hardly fair!" he cries.

"Life's not fair," I reply. "But the root password helps."

All this does not disguise the fact that I'm waay behind, which concerns me. In fact, there's only 32 minutes between me and having to say the words "Lager shandy", which the PFY doesn't normally drink, but would, just this once, to make me look bad in front of the bar staff and regulars.

With all this at stake, I crash a router and answer the next call.

"Hello?" the voice on the phone asks nervously.

"What seems to be the problem?" I ask.

"It's our machines, they've all hung."

"Yes, it'll be Power Leakage from Heat Displaced Breaker Elements."

>DUMMY MODE ON<

"Ah-huh ... What do I do?"

"Well, you'll have to call the service electrician to replace the service circuit breaker for the power points along your side of the office."

"But we've got urgent work on!"

"Well, I shouldn't really tell you this ..." I whisper.

"What?" the user asks, hooked.

"Well, you can manually reset the displaced elements."

"How?" he gushes, envisaging fame, fortune and promotion opportunities.

"Just go to the power box by the stairwell and flick the switch with the same number as your floor box on and off about 20 times, as quick as you can."

The PFY looks on loathingly. Sure enough, 10 minutes later the full ramifications of my advice have been revealed; I'm only 2 points behind ... which is where I remain until 5pm when the PFY accompanies me to the tube station.

"Some people just haven't got it," he chirps smugly.

His good humor is unbearable, but luckily only lasts until our tube train whistles in and I nudge his laptop bag onto the rails.

"Whoopsy!", I say, as I reveal the real time and my part in the clock tampering: "One minute too ... I guess that's a beer you owe me ..."

"You BASTARD!" he says, as the sweet smell of victory fades.

"Chalk it up to the cost of education," I say. "And I hope you'll enjoy that lager shandy ..."

Battle vibes pulsate as beancounter central takes vehement action against the network lads ...

I am shocked. Mortified ... In an out-of-the-blue attack from beancounter central - a veritable leguminous dawn-raid - our espresso machine was written off and disposed of overnight.

"I ... I ..." the PFY mutters in disorientation.

Having worked in computing for some time now, I know the importance of back-ups, and bring out my emergency plunger and freeze-dried grounds.

"THAT'S below the belt," the pimply-faced-youth sniffs, as life returns to normal. "I just can't believe they'd do it!"

"Why not?" I reply. "After all, we've been pretty much engaged in an inter-departmental war here, despite what the boss says about us all working towards a common good."

"But the espresso machine!" he cries. "That really hurts. What're we going to do? We have to do something!! NiCad 'RAM' upgrades all round? Another game of blackout fire alarm beancounter pinball?"

I shake my head.

"No, that's just what they'll be expecting. And no dropping out network connections either - they'll be logging it all as an excuse for external service contracts."

"Well, what are we going to do?"

"For now, nothing."

"But ..."

"... but at a later date, we hit them where it really hurts."

Two weeks later the machine is still gone and the PFY is manifesting symptoms of plunger RSI. It's time for action.

"Right. The accounts database!" I cry.

"We can't. I tried yesterday and they've changed the password!" The PFY replies.

Mentally assessing the originality of our beancounters, I try a series of possibilities, hitting pay dirt at 'PROFIT'. The database reveals a pristine payments system so well designed that a child could understand it. Which means it's aimed at its correct target audience.

I make a few minor retroactive changes and disconnect. The PFY kills time by leaving an anonymous tip with the company auditors.

The next day dawns and the PFY and I are in bright and early to witness a couple of stony-faced business professionals riding the escalators.

A double click of the escalator PLU control window later, and the escalator performs an impromptu emergency stop, scattering auditors and paraphernalia in all directions. The bleeding nose is sure to add to the impartiality of the impending investigation. Yet another double-click three-seconds later ensures this as recent events are replayed.

Fearing another bank of escalators, the auditors make their second mistake of the day and head for the lifts. Sadly for them, my new lift-control joystick is up and running and they're taken on a G-force adventure, of the sort normally associated with a roller coaster.

The remains of a hearty breakfast down the front of one of the auditor's jackets leaves absolutely no doubt as to the effectiveness of my latest gaming addition. Their mood appears to the casual CCTV viewer as 'aggressive'.

An hour later, the PFY and I wander up to beancounter central to 'fix some networking problems'.

"That's the bastard!" a beancounter shouts, pointing me out to the auditors.

"I'm sorry?" I ask, innocently and humbly.

"Who tampered with the lifts and escalators!"

"I'm sorry?! No-one has touched the lifts or escalators since this department froze the buildings maintenance budget six months ago!"

"We most certainly did not!" the head beancounter cries, emerging from the relative safety of his office.

"Ahhh ... someone did," Auditor one mentions, looking up from the payments database. "The money is now being paid to a ... Clinton Ash."

"C. ASH," I mutter quietly. "Hmmm. Oh, that Panamanian Company! You were just over in Panama six weeks ago weren't you?" I ask the head beancounter.

"Did you post the check or deliver it personally?"

Head beancounter is not stupid (surprisingly) and recognizes an extremely dodgy situation when he's in it. He dares not discover what else I have up my voluminous electronic sleeves ...

"Ah, Ash and Associates," he ad-libs hurriedly. "Service and Maintenance Contractors."

"Of course!" I gush. "And fitters of espresso machines too, aren't they?"

"...Yes," head beancounter agrees, realizing the direction this dialogue is heading.

"Isn't one of their subsidiary companies due to do an installation in our Lunch Room today sometime?"

"...Yyyyess, I'd forgotten about that. I'll check on it this afternoon."

"Why wait?" I ask, passing my cellphone over. "Call now. Hell, they might have even forgotten about the whole thing."

That afternoon the PFY and I are relaxing over a strong brew, contemplating the turn of good fortune that upgraded our old single head espresso machine to the new triple head, auto-grind model.

"I still have a lot to learn," the PFY admits thoughtfully.

"Try to think of it not as learning," I say, "but just as doing your job to the best of your ability..."

As the boss gets in a twist about Cat 5 cables, the BOFH bides his time to unravel the mess ...

I'm trying to make a deal with Raoul, a local cabling contractor, about supplying us with some Cat 5 cable, only he's playing hard to get because he knows he's the only one who has any in stock ... which is all according to plan, as I've mentioned the secret code, 'the boss wants', which instantly means I'll go halves in any excess profit.

The boss has suspected something like this for some time but has never had hard proof, despite his request that all telephone transactions be done on 'Hands Free' so he can listen in. Deciding to plan the cabling of a set of refurbished offices single handedly was his second foolish move.

"Well, it's a bit of a tricky one," says my supplier down the phone.

"You see, I have the cable you want - in fact, I have about twice what you'll need - but it's already been purchased and is going to be delivered today. Have you tried another supplier?"

Smooth as greased silk ...

"Yeah, but unfortunately they're all out of Cat 5 too," I reply.

"You're joking!" he gasps, convincingly.

"Yep, it's as if someone has ordered up the entire cable market in one gulp - everyone's sold out for the next couple of days. Are you sure there's nothing you can do?"

"No, not really - about all I've got left is a stack of that untested stuff that we got dirt cheap. It looks like Cat 5, but it's got some foreign military spec on it which doesn't equate to any known rating."

"We'll take it! Get it here by lunchtime!" the boss shouts.

"Hang on a minute there," I say, sneakily flipping on the voice recorder. "Wouldn't it be better to find out what the spec is - it could be field-phone cable for all we know."

"We haven't got time, I've committed to having the new offices up and running in three days!" the boss cries, then dashes off to confirm the attendance of our cabling contractors.

I switch the voice recorder off.

"So, what are we getting?" I ask.

"Not really sure. It was salvaged from a sunken Romanian container - I only bought it for the copper value."

"And will it carry signal?"

"Oh yes"

"Really?"

"Well, maybe - unshielded, untwisted - I'd think twice about using it for Christmas tree lights myself, but there you go."

"So why did you say it looked like Cat 5?" I ask.

"Well, the sheathing is similar, and it comes on a drum," he replies.

"And all ours comes on easy-flow cartons?"

"I didn't say it looked exactly like Cat 5!"

"Excellent!" I chuckle. "Talk to you later."

Later that afternoon, I'm interrupted by the boss in an agitated mood.

"That bloody cable is crap!" he cries.

"Well, I did warn you not to purchase it," I mention, indicating the voice-recording lamp on my phone. "Which reminds me, I must get that bulb fixed."

The boss is now trapped; he has no cable, a deadline, and four or five cabling contractors kicking around in the lobby at a reasonably hefty hourly rate. And he's just paid good money for crap cable.

Being a benevolent sort, I decide to help the boss out. I call Raoul.

"Raoul, what would we be paying for some Cat 5 cable?" I ask.

"I've already told you that we don't have any c..."

"Sorry, let me re-phrase that, what would we be paying for someone else's Cat 5 cable?"

The boss's eyes light up as a solution presents itself. Raoul mentions some disgusting figure which the boss nods at rapidly.

"But our delivery van has been stolen," Raoul adds, according to plan. "You could pick it up from here though."

"No can do," I reply, "my car's a two seater."

"TAKE MINE!" the boss cries, mental clock ticking.

Half an hour later, the pimply-faced-youth and I are loading cartons of cable into the back of the boss's palace on wheels. I decide to drive back now that the PFY has admitted he's actually only had two driving lessons.

Still, I'm sure all the dents (except for the ones left by the three parking meters) will hammer out eventually.

I bid Raoul goodbye and ask him to cancel the mass of Cat 5 orders I placed that caused the artificial shortage of the last two days.

Back at the office, the boss is so pleased he doesn't even mention the remains of his radiator left by the PFY's parking meter interlude. He sends the cabling contractors over.

"Right ...," I say, "... your cable's on the drum over there."

"That stuff?" one of them asks. "Isn't that Romanian writing?" Ten minutes later Raoul is making me an offer on some excess Cat 5 that I just cannot refuse...

Rule one of setting up a network: don't let the boss use his 'initiative' and set one up himself ...

Things aren't well in boss-land. Sadly, the managers have found out about his poorly planned foray into network design and installation. They are NOT pleased. How they got wind of it is anybody's guess, but I did notice that the pimply-faced-youth has completely finished the 'to do' list I left him last night. His attention to detail is commendable.

Fitting substandard cable wouldn't have gone so badly for the boss but for his choice of installation technique. Although it may have been adversely affected by a friendly discussion with the PFY and myself over a couple of lagers.

Boss: "So I'm looking at multi-pair plug looms running along the bottom of raised floor offices, and terminated at the three outlet points I've allocated per room ..."

Me: "Plug looms? Not like the ones we used in the offices downstairs a couple of years ago? One nudge and the connectors went open circuit."

Boss: "But then I thought that single runs of Cat 5 direct from the comms cupboard would be a better option."

PFY: "Along the floor? So when someone spills their coffee it'll trickle through onto the cable, shorting out th..."

Boss (quickly): "Did I say along the floor? I meant inside the wall cavities ..."

Me: "Where it will sag onto the electrical cabling causing major interference."

Boss: "Not when it's cable tied at six inch intervals."

I'm sure you can imagine the rest - like shooting a fish in a barrel.

Still, the three useless wall outlets make interesting conversation pieces. But I could even have forgiven the boss for that, had he not tried for a save by installing some expensive wireless LAN equipment in the outer offices, in the mistaken belief that infra-red was some form of short distance radio transmission medium. (I have absolutely no idea where he got that idea from, although the PFY's nose does look a little longer in recent days). From this, the boss has discovered the negative career potential of installing networking that only works when your office door is open ...

"We've really got a problem here," he chirps in a hunted manner as he paces my office.

"What's that?" I ask helpfully.

"The bloody network, it's a shambles!"

"Well I don't mean to rub salt into your wounds, but you probably should've let us do the planning. After all, that's what we're paid for."

"And what would you have done that was so different?" he demands offensively.

"Hmm..." the PFY cuts in, "I would have run some multi-pair plug looms of real Cat 5 (and not some cheap imitation) under the raised floors, and terminated them at the three outlet points that I'd have allocated per room."

"But that's what I proposed!" he blurts, realization hitting him.

"Well actions do speak louder than words," I sigh. "Speaking of which, I believe there's a legal one heading your way real soon."

"What am I going to do," he wails in a voice very reminiscent of a user at disk defragmentation time.

"Well you could have the cabling replaced," I reply.

"Yes, you're right, I'll do that."

"Only its cable-tied every six inches inside a wall, and that means they'll have to partially demolish it to ..."

"That's no good!"

"Well then there's only plan B left."

"What is it?"

"You pay a one-time subscription to 'Bastard-Net Inc' and agree to large overtime bills. The problem will be gone by tomorrow and just a memory by next Wednesday."

"What's the subscription and where do I pay?" he blurts.

"Two hundred quid; the PFY and me."

Seeing the rock and hard place at close proximity once more, the boss reaches for his wallet.

The next day, security are combing the building for the eight office doors mysteriously stolen during the night. Strangely, the CCTV noted nothing but a rerun of The Beverley Hillbillies.

Network stability in the new offices is at an all-time high, except for when the head of PR (a heavily built gentleman who looks like he was poured into his clothes and forgot to say when) passes by. His popularity around those offices appears to be waning fast.

One week later, the sub-floor recable is completed and the PFY and I present our overtime sheets for approval.

"Hang on," the boss shouts. "168 hours? That's 24 hours a day for seven days!"

"We did work extremely hard," the PFY chips in.

"You can't seriously expect me to sign this," the boss says, ever so slightly annoyed.

"Of course not," I reply. "We'll just put the network back the way it was then. Oh, and I wonder ..."

"Wonder what?!" the boss snarls.

"Whose fingerprints were on that pile of stolen doors that security found ..."

"When?!"

"Tomorrow morning ..."

One autograph later, the PFY and I take the rest of the day off to recuperate from our stressful overtime.

Infiltration of the e-mail system provokes the BOFH to adulterate the Yellow Pages ...

I'm fine tuning the satellite WAN antenna and encryption system when my e-mail client signals a message. I turn from the calibration screen (and US Military movie channel that it has unfortunately become irrevocably locked on to), and check the message.

To receive a message is strange as my normal e-mail address simply discards messages once it's forwarded the sender's e-mail address on to several bulk e-mail marketing lists.

Examining the message, I find it appears to have come from inside the company. Strange, as my e-mail address is known to no-one but the pimply-faced-youth. I know it's not from the PFY as he's organizing the distribution of the recently delivered phone directories.

Curiouser and curiouser ...

Further examination reveals that the e-mail has in fact come from the new helpdesk (alias helldesk) software which has trolled the password file of the mail server to build its recipient list. The message itself is anathema to me - a helldesk request.

I hate helldesk software, always have. The thought of some piece of software not accepting the resolution date of 'When I get around to it, if I get around to it' annoys me intensely. Intensely.

So intensely, I log in to the helldesk server.

Twenty minutes later, one of its users calls me.

"Hi, it's the helpdesk here. We were wondering if you knew what's up with our server?"

"No idea," I reply. "Why?"

"Well it's got very slow on updating entries."

"Really? Perhaps it's just poorly designed software with limited scalability," I reply, whipping a couple of convenient buzzwords out of the bag.

"Check to see if it changes over time - it could just be running some internal journaling procedure."

"Oh, of course! Okay, thanks."

She rings off and I crank up the disk-exerciser software from 80 per cent activity to 95 per cent and wind the seek distance from 'Minimal' to 'Potentially Destructive'.

Luckily, I have a patched version of the exerciser which doesn't enforce the standard 15-minute time limit on destructive testing. Well - lucky for some, in any case.

"Five quid says it won't last the night," I call to the PFY.

"No deal," the PFY replies, after checking out my 'testing' parameters, remembering all too well the extremely high failure rate of the disks we 'tested' for the beancounters prior to installation. Eighty-seven per cent within the first month if I remember correctly. And the real tragedy was that they installed an incompatible version of their desktop back-up software too.

Still, a lot of them probably needed the late night typing practice.

Sure enough, the next day there's a very unfortunate head crash on the helldesk server, and everything grinds to a halt. The boss takes a personal interest in the events, but can find no evidence of foul play. I notice that he is personally looking after the helldesk software tape and not trusting the tape library. Hmmm.

I give the PFY the boss's new Yellow Pages to deliver. We share a knowing glance ...

The helldesk server is reinstalled and configured and its entries are re-keyed. A repeat of yesterday's e-mail message arrives in my e-mail queue, just as I notice one of my cron jobs on the server getting stuck in an infinite loop and setting the clock back by five minutes. Every five minutes. But I'm sure the helldesk resolution alarms won't be affected ...

Dedicated to the cause, I call in on the boss.

"I thought I'd just take the helpdesk software tape to the tape library," I offer helpfully.

He hands it over and I accidentally drop it on the floor. In my enthusiasm to pick it up it gets crushed by a chair leg. Four times.

I look up to see the boss's smiling visage. In his hand is a tape indelibly marked 'Helpdesk Software Backup'.

"Wasn't born yesterday," he smirks, placing the tape down on the only cleanish area of his desk - on top of a recently delivered Yellow Pages.

A brief 'hmm' later, I exit the office.

Getting back to my office, I refire up the disk exerciser at 97 per cent and 'Definitely Destructive'.

The next day, horror of horrors, the helldesk server encounters another head crash. I go straight to the boss's office.

"I just thought I'd take the helpdesk software tape to the technicians so that they can reinstall it," I say.

The boss smiles and shakes his head sadly.

"Oh," I respond. "Well, in that case, I'll just get back to work. You haven't seen the portable bulk eraser have you? I'm concerned because it's really sensitive to shocks and things. That's why I made it a protective case out of one of our left over Yellow Pages ..."

The boss's face takes on a slightly pasty look as he glances at the phone book on his desk.

"Ah ... that must be it," I say, and wander out of his office, having found my missing hardware.

Play with fire, get burnt ...

Money is exchanged as the Bastard engages in some very underhand practices ...

It's a calm afternoon in the office when my personal phone rings. I answer it, listen, then hang up.

"Stress Relief Session," I tell the PFY and we break to the local pub.

I notice that my caller's in place, so I have the PFY get the drinks in.

"Afternoon George," I open, as the PFY and I join him.

"Afternoon," George replies, with a distinctly furtive look.

"You haven't met my assistant have you?" I continue. "PFY, George; George, PFY."

The PFY is giving me a reassuring look that's usually reserved for the mentally unstable (which he'll pay for later if the slamming of his top drawer has anything to do with it).

"George is one of our janitors," I mention, waiting for the gears to turn in the PFY's head.

As his expression remains unchanged I realize I am going to have to remove the spanner from his mental works and kick-start his thought processes.

"George empties the bins of the rich and powerful..." I hint.

The flame of enlightenment splutters in the PFY's eyes as he realizes an excellent source of potentially damaging information.

"Hello," he says, holding out his hand.

George doesn't move. I sigh.

"That's not the way you greet George," I explain. "THIS is the way you greet George."

We shake hands and George slips a crisp new 20 quid note into his pocket.

"The videoconferencing project is back," George mentions quietly.

"EXCELLENT!" I cry. "Should be good for a lot of new equipment."

"Not if the carbon of a certain hand-typed order is to be believed..." George mumbles.

"HANDSHAKING PRACTICE!" I say to the PFY.

He ferrets around in his pockets then shakes George's hand. Another 20 quid note disappears and a piece of litter flutters to the floor. Being a tidy type of person, I pocket the litter to dispose of later.

"Well, can't hang round all day I suppose," I quip. "Work to do, etc."

Scant minutes later the PFY and I are poring over an invoice carbon with a lot of zeros in the bottom right hand corner. A lot. An invoice that would've rung a lot of bells on the 'network monitor' had it been processed in an orthodox manner.

"Smell that?" I ask the PFY.

"What?"

"A rat." I reply. "A big rat, with a flat tail from being stomped on in the recent past."

The PFY looks out to the Boss's doorway.

"A rat with a penchant for mismatched clothing?" he surmises.

"Bingo!"

Further examination of the form identifies the kit being ordered as the latest version of the kit destroyed some months back in an incident which cost my boss's predecessor his job, sadly.

His successor obviously believes (correctly, as it happens) that the person who installs this equipment will have a life-long pal in the CEO.

Losing no time, I phone the supplier in a boss-like voice and ask to change the delivery address. As I ring off, I recall that the words 'as discussed' were on the top of the order.

I dive to the telephone exchange console and swap the boss's line with mine. And not a moment too soon. The supplier's voice again assails my ears.

"YES!" I growl, boss-mode on.

"Hello, I was just ringing to verify a change of delivery addre..."

"WHAT?! I JUST BLOODY RANG YOU!!"

"Yes, but you expressly said..."

"Yes, yes, you're right," I admit. "I'm just anxious to get this kit up and running."

"Well how about we send you our demo model, for a couple of days' head start," he offers graciously.

A day later the PFY and I take delivery of some state-of-the-art videoconferencing equipment then cruise the Internet to find the software we require. While we're at it, we download some useful images.

A day after that we observe the boss via the CCTV as he sneaks his 'newly delivered' equipment to an office near the CEO's.

Within a week the CEO performs his first live company-wide broadcast, timed to reach all our overseas offices at once.

The PFY and I discuss it afterwards.

"I feel that the impact of the address was perhaps heightened by the transposing of the CEO's head onto that naked, gyrating, female body," the PFY offers.

"True," I agree modestly. "However, your morphing of the CEO's head into that of a large pork-producing animal was truly a work of art."

The boss will not be drawn into conversation. Probably because he's so busy packing his desk before security can arrive to 'assist' him down the stairwell.

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times - it's a funny old game.

Ever tempted to play computer games at work? The BOFH sets out to spoil all the fun ...

"Hello. Have I got through to the network guys?" the user simpers.

"You sure have. How can I help?" I gush, doing my best for PR.

"All the files on my network disk are gone!"

"Gone?"

"Yes. Gone. I had some back-ups of some work stuff on the network disk."

"What was your user name?" I ask.

He tells me, pointlessly, because our caller-id now lists name, room, user name and position in the organizational hierarchy.

In this case: name: Ronald Williams; room: 2.23; user name: prsrw; and position: 'cannon-fodder'.

"Oh yes," I reply, "and your work revolves around executing the various versions of Leisure Suit Larry, Doom, and miscellaneous other games then, does it?"

There's a quick gasp of horror down the line as he realizes his fatal mistake of being caught.

"They were there as an evaluation of ..."

"Don't," I sigh. "It's unlikely you could come up with even a mildly convincing excuse that would prevent you being prosecuted for software piracy."

"Prosecuted?"

"Unless, of course, you have the original disks, which would seem unlikely as the files were multi-part archive ..."

"Hang on, how do you know? They were encrypted!"

"With your initials as the key. Honestly, if you're not even going to try..."

"I can't believe you'd do ..."

"Did it. Done it before. And will do it again. Bye now," I sigh, easing the receiver back down onto the cradle.

The PFY looks confused.

"It's not like you to give a toss about piracy," he says.

"I don't. I just want some space to upload my games on to, and I can't be bothered cheating the boss out of another disk."

The phone rings. I gaze over at the caller ID. It's 'cannon-fodder' again.

The PFY answers it.

"All the files on my hard disk have also gone!" he bleats excitedly.

"Just being thorough," I whisper, leaving the PFY to adlib.

"Yes, that's right," the PFY replies. "That'll be the ..."

>flip< >flip< He takes a quick look for the Excuse Of The Day.

"... Dynamic Transient Magnetic Re-allocation Policy of your hard disk. You should back up your hard disk regularly."

"But I do!" the caller blurts. "It's all backed up, even my files on the server! Can you restore them for me please?"

"Hang on," the PFY replies. "I'll just put you through to Systems Operations to sort the problem out. Extension 8002, in case you get cut off."

He diverts him and hangs up.

"Two minutes, two calls," the PFY says, placing a five-quid note on the table.

"Six minutes, 10 calls," I counter, placing my five quid on top of the PFY's.

We watch cannon-fodder's extension from the Exchange Console and, after five minutes, see him hang up after not getting an answer from Systems Operations, which isn't surprising considering the phone he's connecting to is locked behind a panel in the basement. Seven retries later I pocket 10 quid.

The PFY isn't pleased, expecting more intelligence from the user. His naivety is a constant source of surprise (and income) for me.

We watch on as he calls the real Systems Operations' number.

"Well, there goes your disk space," the PFY says.

"Ten quid it doesn't," I offer.

"You're on," the PFY replies, hoping for the double or nothing approach.

I grab the scummiest tape cartridge from the floor at my feet and we wander into the computer room and wait for one of the systems people. Sure enough, one arrives shortly thereafter with

some back-up tapes. Upon seeing me, he clutches the tapes to himself more carefully for some reason ...

"Don't mind me," I say, holding up my tape cartridge, which obliges my true purpose by dropping a bit of its case.

"You read that cartridge on our drive?" the systems guy asks.

"Of course I did!" I reply. "And it worked fine - only a couple of read errors; not bad for a tape this old."

The systems guy rolls his eyes in despair and grabs the cleaning tape from the top of the tape unit. The PFY looks on confused, not knowing what's going on.

His confusion disappears immediately after the cleaning tape is inserted.

"Ah ..." he says, listening carefully to the noise it makes. "Sandpaper and ... is it grinding paste?"

He is good.

"Okay - and - for the 10 quid you owe me ..." I ask, nodding in the direction of the systems guy struggling in vain with the drives' eject lever.

"Ummm ... it's not QUICK-SET EXPOXY RESIN, is it?"

"Today's winner is ... THE PFY!" I cry.

We wander off back to the control room.

"When did you ..." the PFY begins.

"'Enhance' the cleaning tape? About six weeks ago - they never use it normally, so I knew it was the perfect remote destruction utility. You could call in from anywhere saying you have read errors ..."

"But you're just buying yourself time."

"Not exactly," I say, removing the labels from some recently abandoned tapes I found in the computer room into the "Scratch Tapes" bin.

"You bastard!" he cries respectfully.

"In the flesh, on the job, and ready for a game of Network Doom."

"You're on!"

As encryption is forced on the Bastard, he plots to give the Boss more of a shock than ever ...

So the Pimply-Faced Youth and I are heading through the corridors of computing central when our progress is impeded by the departmental Dead Wood Discussion Group.

It is a matter of concern to me and the PFY that the group appears to be growing in size. Once a group of two or three old salts whose technical skills consisted of the ability to fix eight-inch floppy drives, it's now the final resting place of brown nosers and work dodgers alike.

To disguise their true purpose (work and responsibility avoidance) they indulge in long conversations about what's new in computing, where it's heading and why, what we should be looking at and who's up with the play.

This in itself wouldn't be so bad except (a) they either congregate in corridors or someone else's office and (b) they sometimes infect the boss with the forward-thinking-stupidity virus.

Today is one of those days. Encrypted TCP/IP and how it should be implemented is the topic of the four-hours.

We pause briefly...

"What does that guy do?" the PFY asks quietly, indicating one of the key speakers who's obviously attracted to the conversation by the possibility of slipping one of his strategically polished boat shoes one rung further up the corporate ladder with a display of superior knowledge.

"Besides providing a load for the deodorizer in the air conditioning?" I ask.

"I'm not sure, they all look alike to me."

The boss meantime is enthralled, envisaging a workplace coup in pushing back the frontiers of networking security.

This is not a good thing.

Sure enough, two hours later, the boss is wandering around the office with some hastily prepared notes in his hand.

"Tell me," he asks. "Why aren't we using encrypted TCP/IP?"

"Network overhead," I throw out to test the waters of his preparation.

"But isn't the overhead minimal when combined with private key encryption software or better, single-stage encryption?" he asks, so far out of his depth that the appearance of a shark's fin wouldn't be out of place in our conversation.

"Hey, I never thought of that!" I cry in an enlightened manner.

"Well, get right onto it," he responds, gushing enthusiasm.

"Sure thing."

The PFY is looking at me with the same thinly disguised contempt that was present on his features in the corridor scant hours ago.

"You're not going soft are you?" he enquires.

"This will speak for me," I say, indicating a recently installed PC in screen-save mode.

True to form, the PFY hits the return key...and the wall behind him microseconds later.

"It's good isn't it?" I say as he recovers his wits. "The word 'return' is in fact a carbon track, which, when the key is depressed, is connected to a high, but mostly harmless, earth return voltage. Now what was that about being soft?"

Doubting no more, the PFY helps me implement the Boss's request to the letter.

The boss receives this news with a smug expression and spends the next day composing a memo about the frontiers of networking, new era of security, blah, blah, blah. He words the memo so as to give the impression that he single-handedly soldered bits together with a cigarette lighter to make this possible.

To increase the effect, he selects the following Monday as the switchover date.

The day arrives, and the boss bowls in with The Head of IT in tow. With baited breath he waits for 9am to so that he can press the key to start encryption.

With a click from the clock, a clack from the keyboard, and a thud as the boss's stunned body hits the cast iron frame of an old tape rack with lots of nasty protruding edges that the PFY and I had only removed from the computer room that morning, encryption begins.

Then the calls start. Hands-free allows the head of IT to eavesdrop.

"Hello, networks," I say.

"Hi, this is the help desk. We're getting lots of calls from people who say that their machine is throwing up TCP/IP errors."

"Yes, that would be the one-step encryption."

"Well how do they decrypt?"

"You can't. I thought you knew that. If you could, it would be two steps wouldn't it?"

"ARE YOU SAYING THAT WE'VE JUST INSTALLED A SYSTEM THAT CAN'T TALK TO ANYTHING?" the head of IT blurts anxiously.

"Not we," I say holding up a recent memo.

"I see," the head says, recognizing the buttered side of bread when shown it.

Sadly the boss's attempts to switch the system off resulted in a lot of unnecessary damage to the tape rack, but luckily the head was keen to let all the members of the DDG have a crack at it and eventually things got back to normal.

Status Quo reinstated - all systems go.

Where do you find a new pimply-faced-youth when you want one? It's a challenge, but .>

It's a sad day in network operations. The pimply-faced-youth has decided to move on. Apparently, there are greener pastures out there that have a greater attraction for the young and foolish. He's accepted a position as a networks engineer for an oil company where the workmates are reasonable and the pay compromisingly attractive.

With a small amount of sentimentality, he takes his leave after two weeks' notice, during which time the boss gains the not unfamiliar "permanently hunted" expression...

Apparently, a 'misprint' in the on-line phone directory has seen his 'wrong number' count rise dramatically. Changing phone numbers didn't seem to help either for some reason. Finding out that he'd put in for, and been granted, a transfer to Wales led to some quite involved and desperate legal wrangles that kept him busy for a couple of days.

The interview process for a PFY replacement begins and it seems obvious that the caliber of applicants is not even up to prospective PFY potential.

Me: "A user complains about network speed. Would you investigate the problem or disconnect the network port altogether?"

They: "Investiga..."

Me: "Thank you, we'll let you know. Next!"

Me: "It's 4.54pm on a Friday and a user calls with a TCP/IP query. What do you do?"

They: "Answer their query?"

Me: "Trick question. You never answer the phone after 3pm on Friday! Even IF you're still at work! ...NEXT!"

Me: "You discover that the router firmware is several revisions out of date. Which do you do first: fill out a change-control form, arrange for storage of the old eproms, or order the upgrade?"

They: "Order the upgrade?"

Me: "No, crash the router every three hours until the boss begs you to upgrade as soon as possible, which will be four hours overtime at double rate. NEXT!"

After two days of interviewing, the boss decides that he'll pick the applicant. Sure enough, he picks Ronald, one of the worst people imaginable, one with blatant depth perception problems. And the users love him which is always a warning sign. I make the most of a bad thing until I can figure out a plan.

"OK Ron, I'll just show you ar..."

"No, Ronald, not Ron."

"I see." I make a mental note to leave a few floor tiles balanced precariously for his benefit.

I prepare him for his career in network support by getting him to dust out all the cabling ducts.

Two days and one ducting accident later, Gerald starts as our latest PFY. A puerile addition to the workforce, but at least he's rude to the users. Still, he lacks the killer instinct which distinguishes a true networking professional from the amateurs. And the technical intelligence not to wear the raincoat with the large metal fasteners when he's directed to the roof to 'calibrate the satellite antenna' during a thunderstorm. Whoopsy. Still, surface burns apparently heal fairly quickly.

Gerald follows Ronald's example in taking extended sick leave, and I'm left to hold the fort by myself. Things are very hectic as there's a limit to the number of phone calls you can listen to whilst still leaving time to play network Doom against the old PFY over the Internet.

Also, it seems to be getting extremely difficult to get applicants for the PFY's position. In fact, nigh-on impossible. Apparently, word has got out to the agencies that there is safer work juggling chainsaws full tilt on a unicycle down Battersea Rise, and they're staying away in droves.

Because I'm so short-staffed, I don't get round to fixing a lot of the network errors that plague the place. Like the boss's UTP port, which suddenly appears to have gone open circuit. Luckily, I'm able to restore interim connectivity to him by giving him a spare 2400 modem so he can dial the internal extension of our modem banks. At 2400 baud, his file server really hums. Not to mention the power supply of the modem which draws so much power that the lights dim when he switches it on.

The boss is at his wit's end when I offer him a possibility. If he offered a finder's fee and a reasonable rate, I might be able to replace the PFY.

The boss jumps at the outstretched straw and mentions two very acceptable numbers. I give the PFY a call and make him an offer he could refuse but won't.

He doesn't.

A day later the PFY is back in business having returned from his holiday to a pay rise. What the boss doesn't know can't hurt him. Except for that carpet tack I drove into the base of his chair.

A high pitched scream filters through to the control room as I shake the PFY's hand.

I LOVE this business.

BOFH 1997 Part 1 The Bastard Operator from Hell 1997 Limited Release, Part One

Hello Reader,

In this, the limited release of the first part of the 1997 Bastard Operator from Hell, you'll notice the point/counterpoint that only an artiste (albeit a piss-artiste) like Travaglia can provide. Notice the hint of blood-crimson at the side of the characters which could almost be mistaken for a badly aligned red-gun in your monitor. But we know better, don't we? Of course we do, we're much better than that. We're experienced (In a Jean Paul Satre way, and not a Linda Lovelace manner). We know what the artist is trying to say - the hint of personal reflection bundled in a pint sized bag of joy!

Mean much to you?

Me neither.

Onward!

Just how do you get round that tricky visit from the auditors? The BOFH has a few ideas ...

Things aren't good. The board of directors is after blood. Nothing's been said yet, but everyone in the building knows what a visit from the auditors means...

They didn't go up to the executive offices first, which means they're primed with all the information they need. Someone's upset the top brass big time, and that someone, judging by the troop of 'yes-persons' laughingly referred to as my 'co-workers', can only be me. Or possibly the pimply-faced-youth...

I remember electronically signing up the entire board of directors to the mailing list of a seedy video parlor, but I hardly think that would qualify for all this attention.

The auditors are a 'good cop, bad cop' team who'd make a VAT inspector look like Mother Teresa.

I've got about a minute before they pay us a visit. So I dial up head office's router and start a packet sniff operation, and then configure some extra phone lines onto the voice recorder.

I've just finished when they arrive.

"This is a secure area," I call out, playing the dedicated worker to the full.

"Company auditors," bad cop sneers.

"You have some ID?" I ask, buying time until I can clear my screen.

Their pictures look rough enough, but I make a point of checking their ID photos under the magnifying lamp.

"They seem OK. Now, what can I help you with?" I ask.

"We're here to audit and inventory your equipment. You're to make yourself available until we've finished the audit."

"How long will that take?" I reply.

"As long as it takes," bad cop says.

Excellent. I write them up in the visitors' book, then swipe them through the door on my ID.

They potter around a bit calling out inventory numbers and making rude noises to themselves. I pass the time by listening to my latest voice recording on the headset. It only takes a few minutes of secretarial gossip to find out that someone noticed that one of our microwave dishes points at the middle of beancounter central instead of the sky. Mind you, it's not as if we're actually

transmitting through it... Still, with the psychosomatic headaches and general illness it'll cause, I guess it's worth the hassle.

"OK," bad cop says wandering back in.

"According to our records, over the past year you have written-off as unserviceable; three televisions..."

"Ah, satellite reception monitors," I quickly interrupt, "very poor quality, yes."

"Two stereo video recorders..."

"CCTV recorders with dual audio channels, again, poor quality"

"A microwave cooker..."

"Short range microwave transmission test device."

"And 112 videos."

"CCTV recording media, yes."

"Bought from the Megastore?"

"At a good price."

"Blank media at 15 quid a piece?"

"Quality costs money..."

"Then why are the titles listed?"

"Invoicing error. Call them, I'm sure the Megastore's records say blank media. Now..."

"And you wrote them off?"

"Corporate secrecy requires us to destroy confidential media after three months..."

"Well, what about these multi-color indicator lamps?"

"We use them all over the place..."

"Yes, well they could be anything... Hell, Christmas tree lights fit that bill."

Perceptive bastard really...

"I'm sure everything's in order," good cop says, in a manner designed to engender trust. No doubt the same form of trust that preceded the statement: "Watch my back Brutus." It can only mean one thing.

"Just one thing," bad cop asks, switching to pleasant mode. "You DO have the asset disposal forms, signed by your head of department and co-signed by the head of purchasing?"

Whoops. Things have turned a little grim for the home team.

"Because if you don't, you WOULD be liable for the loss of the assets concerned. With a current book value of about £5,000..." he says, savoring every syllable.

"Of course I do," I smile, indicating a huge pile of miscellaneous papers kept expressly for occasions like this. "In there somewhere. Sorry it's a bit of a mess."

While they wade through the pile, I look up the vehicle associated with the identification cards of our two friends, then e-mail the PFY his mission.

An hour later the auditors call it a day and wander off. The PFY and I follow suit, in time to witness another 'random' security check at the car park exit. We are both shocked and stunned to see a boot-sale-worth of 'written-off' equipment in our erstwhile auditors' vehicle, along with 30 or so 'asset disposal forms', blank but for an incriminating signature and co-signature.

"So that's where all our kit has been going!" I blurt in passing in case security has lost the plot, even after the anonymous tip-off.

Status quo returned, I offer to buy the PFY a beer to ease the cramp in his signing hand.

It's a tough life at the top - don't let people tell you otherwise...

The BOFH's in the mood for a little light fraud, but how to get rid of the boss? Easy-peasy ...

The boss is, as they say, rabid. I haven't seen him this mad since the PFY and I convinced the beancounters that Windows 95 was two years obsolete and that they needed to upgrade to this year's version - OS/2.

"What the hell's happened at public relations?" he snaps. "I've had their head of department yelling at me. He says you told one of his secretaries to erase the install media and virally infect their machines!"

"You're kidding," I reply, oozing disbelief. "Hang on, I haven't spoken to anyone. Did they ring me?"

"No, they rang the helpdesk, but you picked up the call."

"I don't think so - I was working on the network all day," I reply, bearing in mind our automated network attendant makes a convenient alibi.

"What about THIS then?" he cries, brandishing my virus disk.

"It's a disk with a copy of a virus on it," I say.

"Then why did you label it 'VIRUS SCAN'?"

"It was a note to myself to check it. I found it was indeed infected, then put it in the bin, but someone has obviously and foolishly tried to recycle the disk."

"Well their whole server is infected now and they need to stop users from accessing it and reinfesting their machines until it's been sorted out."

"Of course," I say. "The PFY and I will get right onto it."

The PFY is surprised at my eagerness to aid the PR plebs, but it's just the chance I need to get into their machines and make those little changes to the end-of-year report. Very few people noticed the fangs and horns on the Head of IT in the management photo last year, so it would appear that I'll have to have a less subtle printing overlay for the final version this time.

Security has, however, been tightened after some nit-picker noticed the company figures didn't quite add up - not the sort of thing you want the shareholders to see. On the other hand, the bonus from the printing company for the extra batch of reports did put the bastard operator's benevolent fund back in the black.

"Good," the boss chirps, interrupting my reverie. "I'll oversee the operation myself - good for internal morale and all that."

Sadly, the boss is unlikely to top the morale boost he gave the department a few days ago when he slipped on a grease spot in the cafeteria and face-planted the vegetarian lasagna, however this thought is only second in my mind. My creative juices are unlikely to flow with the boss peering over my shoulder the whole time.

Some diversion strategy is called for...

"Good Lord!" I shout, kicking the power plug from the PFY's machine. "Those earth spikes are getting ridiculous."

"What earth spikes?" the boss blurts.

"You know, the spikes from the earthing strip at the side of the building. We've been waiting six weeks for a contractor to go out and look at the connector just up from the window."

"But we've got several earthing conductors," the boss replies, having no idea of the resale value of copper at the moment (or, to be more precise, six weeks ago when the PFY and I were short of cash).

"No, just one - economic downsizing by your predecessor," I ad-lib glibly.

"Oh? Well, let's have a look then."

I lead him to the window and point up at the earthing strip.

"Why do you need a contractor? You could shin up there and fix it in no time."

"I'm only responsible for the INSIDE of the..." I say.

"Oh for Pete's sake - open the bloody window!" the boss cries, obviously switched into idiot mode.

Five minutes later he's at the offending junction giving it the old once-over.

"I've never noticed how high up we were..." the PFY mentions, dreamily.

"Yeah. If you fell from this height they'd need a shovel to get you into the ambulance," I reply.

True to form the boss looks down. The gleaming whiteness of his knuckles indicates he is now locked into place and going nowhere.

After two hours in the PR department, 'fixing' the virus, the company reports look perfect. That is if you like to see a PR chief with a set of Lennon glasses and buck teeth and two of the more right-wing directors holding hands.

Of course, the company accounts don't quite add up either - for the second year running.

I pause briefly to watch the boss being led out of the building in his new and rather attractive strap-round jacket. Security must have found 'his' note about stress and so forth on the window ledge.

Looks like a morale peak on the horizon... not to mention a nice little bonus from the printers.

The chief bean counter has a half-baked plan to oust the Bastard and his sidekick. What a very foolish thing to attempt ...

It's not often that we're 'honored' by a visit from the chief bean counter.

In fact, the last time he disturbed the peace of the BOFH sanctuary was when he discovered that the 'satellite-based data reception technology' seemed to be pointed at the local bookie's and was carrying mainly racing results.

I can sense that this time he's got something to tell me. He's looking decidedly pleased with himself. His well-fed face bears an uncanny resemblance to a wolf spying a solitary sheep. Pulling himself up to his full five-foot-four, he speaks firmly but with a noticeable hint of nervousness.

"In view of the fact that your idea of technical support is idiosyncratic to say the least, we've decided to install our own server and employ our own network manager."

He pauses as the implication of what he's saying slowly sinks in.

"Can I take it that you're not happy with the support that my assistant and I offer you?" I reply, gesturing at the PFY.

"Him?" gurgled the bean counter. "He's nothing but a psychopath."

The PFY beams at the compliment. The suit from upstairs continues.

"We're going to employ a proper networking person so we don't have to let you two maniacs anywhere near our network again. ANYONE we find is bound to be an improvement on you two."

Foolish words, but hey, I was bored anyway.

A week or so later, the memo is delivered from on-high by the Bean Counter Central office-boy (obviously our previous confrontation used up all his boss's courage). As of 9am today, Operations is no longer responsible for technical support in the financial division.

I pass the note to the PFY, and I detect menace in his eyes. "Since we're not supporting them anymore, I guess that means they have their own routers," I point out, pulling a few plugs. Interestingly, the remote probe I built into their coffee machine tells me that they're still getting packets off the Internet ... hmmm ... not daft, this lot.

I bash out a quick message and drop it on the 'pager' icon. Some seconds later my really-terribly-private cellphone blasts into action. The PFY is impressed and worried; only important, powerful people know the number to that phone, and the fact that it's ringing usually means that we're in

serious trouble and are calling in some big favors. He has never heard it ring before, and looks decidedly worried.

"Hello? Yes, that's right ... yes, I thought so ... no, we're not allowed to touch anything, it's entirely down to the new network manager up there. Oh, you are, are you? That's nice ... yes, okay, the Victoria in fifteen minutes."

The PFY looks puzzled, and is startled to hear the fire alarm. I point out that the fire alarm might be something to do with the smoke emanating from Bean Counter Central, and he rushes outside to see. The penny drops and he dashes back in and demands to know how I knew that something was amiss upstairs, given that you can't see the smoke or the alarm panel from where I'm sitting.

"Well, okay. You remember Martin?"

"What, that guy you introduced me to once?"

"I've introduced you to so many people..."

"Okay, the one with the pony tail and the alcohol fixation whose temperament and attitude to users makes both of us look like St Francis of Assisi?"

"Yes, that's him."

"The one who you told me last week was out of a job?"

"Hmmm ... more like the one whose name by some chance found its way to the top of the Bean Counter recruitment list," I point out.

It suddenly dawns on him. Now he knows why I spent so much time on the personnel database last week - and why I was so keen in calling in a few favors to that friendly recruitment consultant.

A thought struck me. "Heh, heh ... wait until you see the router they've got upstairs. It's one of these cobbled-together things that you don't see very often. I predict they're going to have a lot of trouble with that in the future.

"In fact there are only two people in the world with the code, and they're the guys who wrote it. And you're looking at one of them."

"And the other?"

"... knows the number of my private cellphone and is now on his way round the corner to the pub. Come on, my expense account has some beer to buy."

Someone's found out where the 'liberated' phones go. Better dial 'B' for Bastard ...

We have a problem. The boss is to spend large amounts of otherwise useful money on standardizing the corporate telephone.

"Why's he doing it?" the PFY asks.

"Because he rests under the mistaken belief that it will have some bearing on the number of phones that are 'liberated' each year and end up in the homes of our employees."

"You mean they TAKE the phones?!" the PFY asks, naively believing that larceny stops just outside our door.

"Of course," I cry. "Good grief, it's an office perk, always has been. In return for our shiny new phone we get their lifelong guilt and another crusty old monster from the year 200 BT, which in turn justifies all the room we have allocated in the basement ..."

"And this goes on a lot?"

"Ahem. Dial a number, any number, any number at all!"

The PFY types a number on hands free.

"Hello, drawing office."

"Hello, networks here. We seem to have an inventory anomaly regarding your desktop phone, serial number 138728."

My monologue is interrupted by the slamming of the receiver.

"What happened?" the PFY asks.

"I dare say they are at this very moment rushing down the stairwell to retrieve the item from their home. Remember to make up a serial number so that they don't just steal one from somewhere else. Great for getting people out of the office..."

The PFY and I watch as an employee bursts from the main entrance and hurtles across the road to the tube station. I then ring the number again...

"Hello," a gruff drawing-office-boss-like voice answers.

"Pete," I gush. "Glad I caught you before you sneaked out. Say hi to Sheryl from me when you see her, you smooth bastard."

"WHO IS THIS?"

I hang up quickly.

"Well, I'm sure HIS absence won't be noted ... now, let's get upstairs and steal his desk phone. He'll be too scared to take his work one back home tonight and will be incommunicado till payday."

"You really are a bastard," the PFY admits grudgingly.

"Of course. Now, let's get to the boss's office ..."

"... And how do you think this will prevent theft?" I ask the boss, after hearing his phone proposal argument.

"Because they're a special model - slimline with a digital display that are ONLY going to be made for THIS company with the company logo on the front."

"Well, you're way off," the PFY quite rightly points out. "If you want a phone no-one will steal, just make it weigh 20 pounds and sound like crap."

Good lad.

The boss is a little flustered at this because he knows that for such a move he's got to present the proposal to the board for approval. And he doesn't want the PFY and I making his master plan sound similar to what comes out of an unstealable phone ...

I decide to let him temporarily off the hook.

"Well, can't hang around here all day, networks to fix and all that."

We wander off to his relief.

"I don't think the board will go for it," the PFY surmises as we wander back to our room.

"Don't you believe it," I reply. "Whack a company logo on something original and you'll have them drooling - especially if the competition hasn't done it before ..."

I leave the PFY to worry while I duck up to the boardroom to 'tune-up' the boss's presentation. At the appointed time, the PFY and I are hanging out at network central when the boss calls.

"What's wrong with the test line in the boardroom?" he growls, according to plan.

"Don't know," I say, "We'll be up in a second to check it."

"There's no nee..."

Quick as a flash the PFY and I are in the boardroom.

"Wow," the PFY cries, delivering his lines perfectly. "New phones, exactly like the ones the opposition's just got."

All heads turn as the boss reluctantly takes delivery of 'The Shaft' - he knows the board would never copy the idea of a rival ...

"There's your problem," I say, looking up from my test-set. "It's just the RAL of this phone. I'll make a note."

I pull out a personal disorganizer that I liberated from a user early last year with a company logo recently glued to the cover.

"What's that?" one of the board asks.

"Oh, just a personal organizer. I just put the company logo on it to stop people stealing it at conferences."

"I could use one of those," he says. A few murmurs of assent follow.

The boss then realizes that as far as 'The Shaft' is concerned this is a two-for-one sale.

As planned, two hours later the PFY and I are downing a couple of pints on our recently transferred 'research fund' while we discuss the new 'Corporate Personal Organizer'. It'd be a challenge if it weren't so easy.

The boss cooks his goose with a dodgy microwave dish ... so the Bastard simply out-maneuvers him yet again ...

The boss is on the warpath! Never one to take a good moral kicking lying down, he's decided to retaliate for the demise of his corporate telephone plan by making our lives a general misery.

He's enforcing every single safety standard known to humankind. As well as this, he's checking our arrival and departure times and even pulling us up on the creative book keeping that produces most of our timesheets.

It's not good.

Still, you know what they say, the best defense is a good offence.

Sure enough, it's not long before the PFY and I are called into the boss's office for failing to put up warning signs after opening the cabling duct in the basement. My suspicions are confirmed when I notice the head of personnel sitting in on the meeting. He's never been a big fan of mine or the PFY's - well, not since he got a crossed line with the DP pool while talking to his doctor about a personal and very private problem. He probably would've believed it if we hadn't thanked him for not doing anything 'rash' ...

The boss winds up for the delivery. "Much as I deplore these things, I'm afraid I'm going to have to give you both a final written warning after the exposure of general staff to that dangerous drop," he says.

"The dangerous drop of three or four inches to the cable duct floor."

"A dangerous drop nonetheless," he replies, egged on by the head of personnel.

"Could I just have a word with you in private?" I ask, a picture of piety.

"I don't think that would be necessary," the boss replies.

"Uh, I wasn't actually meaning you, I meant the representative from personnel. Just as we're talking safety issues I thought the PFY and I could have a word about that cheap microwave dish."

As if by magic, the tone of conversation changes. Could it be that the boss has remembered WHO recommended and ordered (against the advice of the networking technicians) the said dish?

"Perhaps I can spare you a minute," said the tight-lipped boss.

"Well, it's mainly a safety concern you understand," I say, once we're in private. "As this is my final warning I can expect my contract not to be renewed for another year, and I'd just like to

organize someone to pop up onto the roof every two or three weeks to tighten up the bolts on the cheap microwave dish you recommended we buy last year.

"Apparently it slowly tilts over till it's pointing directly at the roof. We wouldn't have found out except that one of the auditors in the office underneath rang to complain about the coffee in his mug boiling every time transmissions passed 20 per cent bandwidth..."

The boss is, as we in the trade say, up the creek without a paddle user's guide. He tries unsuccessfully to disguise his utter horror at the possible legal action that could result from this. And even more importantly, who would be taking the precipitous fall for it...

"Who was that auditor again?" he said, feigning mild interest.

"Oh you know!" I reply. "Wilson, Wilkins - something like that. You know, the guy who's always off sick with headaches and stuff."

He's now out of the stream and heading out to sea - he KNOWS we'll have kept an autographed copy of the memo (complete with our response) safely stashed in some fireproof location that he'll get access to shortly after Satan starts ordering antifreeze and winter woollens.

52 seconds later we're back in his office...

"Well I see no point in taking this any further," the boss says, to the personnel head's disgust. "It appears the signs WERE there after all, in fact I saw them myself! Now, hadn't you better pop up and do that maintenance ..."

"Running all the way," I agree. "OH! And look, there's those timesheets that you were querying before. Ah! I see why you were querying it! The PFY and I didn't put in those 10 hours work - we did, uh ... network tuning on two Sunday nights. I'll just fill that in now so you can sign it."

The head of personnel leaves with a burst of language I'm sure isn't approved by company policy while the boss signs away an amount of overtime probably equal to the GNP of a small communist state.

Victory and overtime hours, I foster goodwill in the boss by sending a back-up tape from our off-site storage contractors.

"What was that about?" the PFY asks.

"Oh just returning the boss's memo about that microwave dish he recommended."

"Are you sure that was such a good idea? He'll just destroy it."

"It's probably for the best," I respond. "After all, it's the only remaining documentation about it. And without documentation..."

"I'll get the scrap dealer on the line."

Hungover, roped in to cover the Helldesk - if he wasn't the Bastard, this could be a bad day ...

It's a slow day in Mission Control and I have a hangover that would have even the toughest superhero whimpering.

I'm not exactly sure how I got home, but I think it had something to do with a very long taxi ride and someone else's credit card...

It was inevitable after spending most of yesterday 'supplier baiting' at a computing exhibition on the other side of town, then trundling off with some slavering salespeople to all night drinkies. The first one to collapse loses - the sale, the initiative and his corporate credit card when he's not looking.

Because of my health, I'd temporarily forgotten that we'd told the boss that the PFY and I would sit in for the Helldesk while they attended a health and safety course on how to type a whole word without dying of RSI or whatever they call it these days. The boss, of course, did not come down in the last shower and is well aware I'm up to something, but lacks the mental capacity to work out what it is. No surprises there then.

Sadly, he shall be wondering about it at the RSI course along with the other mortals as the company's health and safety policy makes it mandatory for all computing staff to attend. His protestations of already having attended amount to nothing in the light of the fact that there's no record of it in the Human Resources Database (whoops), nor does he appear to possess the 'get-out-of-jail-free' RSI course completion certificate.

The PFY and I, on the other hand, have several of these certificates and corresponding database entries, yet still have no idea what the instructor looks like nor what exactly the course is about.

Knowing he's beaten, the boss goes quietly.

Meanwhile, in the Helldesk area, I'm reconnecting the smoke detectors after the freak fire that destroyed an RSI Course Completion Certificate with the boss's name on it. I blame the heating system - it's been working overtime recently.

"Hello? Is this the helpdesk?"

"Yes it is," I answer, all sweet, fluffy loveliness.

"Can you tell me the number for the modem pool?"

"I sure can!" I gush, then give the number for a fax machine on the fourth floor, which should keep them confused for a couple of weeks.

I hang up and have barely dropped off to sleep when the phone rings again.

"My laptop seems to be running quite slowly. Can you help?"

"Of course I can. Now don't tell me, you're still using the power filter unit aren't you?"

DUMMY MODE ON

"The power filter unit?"

"Yes, the one that filters the power coming into your machine. It should be a black box about three inches by two inches square."

"Oh... yes, I see it."

"Okay, you want to remove that and put the non-filtered cable onto it."

"The non-filtered cable?"

"Yes, it would have come in the box with the machine. It's probably still there."

"But I threw the box out!"

"Hmm. Well, I can order you one, but in the meantime do you have a spare power cable?"

"Uuuummmmm..."

"Well, just borrow one from someone else's machine - then it's their problem."

"Yeah, hee hee..."

What a plonker.

"OK, switch the filter off, then chop the cable off halfway between the filter and your machine. Then strip back the wires and poke them into the two holes in the sides of the socket of the new power cable ..."

"OK, done that."

"And plug her in."

"OK, thanks."

He hangs up and I wait for lift-off. About 10 seconds later the fire alarm goes off, which I take to be an encouraging sign ...

At the end of the day the boss wanders in. He's not impressed. Apparently he'd heard about the PFY's advice to a user to change the screen saver passwords on their department machines to completely random text in the interests of safety. News of the post-lunch lockout made it across the building in minutes ...

In the face of the PFY's completely innocent and apparently naive grasp of security issues, he comes into the office and raves for a couple of minutes about time lost, production down, company money wasted, disgruntled colleagues, blah, blah, blah ...

We concur dutifully with his arguments and promise to do much better on future occasions, should they arise.

"By the way," he continues, with a worried little frown, "has anyone seen my RSI Course Completion Certificate? I'm sure I left it on that table over there ..."

He wanders off in search of it while I disconnect the smoke alarms and the PFY makes an update on the Human Resources Database ...

Looks like tomorrow's just going to be work, work, work.

The BOFH comes face to face with the ultimate in office bureaucracy. And he just won't wear it ...

Something smells fishy. Very fishy indeed. Positively tuna casserole.

The boss is in a good mood. Almost radiant, in fact. It can only bode bad tidings, especially as his phone log notes that he's been talking to one of the company lawyers.

Sadly, the text of the conversation was lost due to an oversight on the part of the PFY, who forgot to change the tapes on the voice recorder. A mistake he won't be making twice if the power stapler has anything to do with it ...

It's obvious something's up - he's scheduled a meeting with us at 10.30am, a time normally quite unknown to us.

The smug expression on his face leaves me in no doubt that he feels his position is unassailable.

"Gentlemen," he says, with an uncharacteristic show of camaraderie, "Why don't you take an hour's unpaid leave to go and get changed?"

The PFY is in like a shot.

"And why don't you take an hour's paid leave to go and get f..."

"I'M SORRY?!" I interrupt, saving the PFY from the quagmire of disciplinary action, "As you're well aware, we're permitted to wear attire applicable to the nature of our position."

"Unless", the boss says, holding up a heavily highlighted copy of a contract not unlike the ones signed when we joined the company, "your position involves interaction with ..."

He pauses for a moment, giving us time to fill in the blank whilst simultaneously savoring every millisecond ...

"... begins with C ...", he adds, "... ends with S ..."

Neither the PFY nor I are forthcoming, so the boss finishes.

"CLIENTS."

"Oh," says the PFY. "That wasn't the C word I was thinking of. But I think we're talking about the same people though ..."

I cut through the PFY's bolshiness and come straight to the point.

"We don't deal with clients," I explain, as if I'm talking to a simple-minded child.

"AHEM," the Boss replies, priming the bombshell he has hidden. "As of the initiation of our ISO and Advanced Helpdesk Initiatives, the helpdesk and support staff are now officially your clients." His smug expression says it all. He's been doing his homework on this one.

"And you suggest?" I ask

"Standard client representative dress. Suit..."

The PFY gasps.

"...business shirt, tie..."

I suppress the gag reflex in my throat.

"...and of course hard-soled shoes, preferably leather."

"Well," I rally, "it's not often we agree on things, but I'd have to admit you do have a point. I'll be ready by the morning."

The PFY's widened eyes lead me to believe he doubts my sanity. But the boss is not a complete idiot. Well, actually he is, but I cut him some slack for the moment, as he can smell the rat but just can't figure where it is. We leave him to ponder...

The next day heads turn as the PFY and I stroll into work in the required apparel, and present the receipt for our new attire to the boss, who promptly has some dramatic form of seizure.

An hour later he's revived by the company nurse, but not before the PFY and I have a couple of cracks at the task with a impromptu defibrillator made from pieces of his desktop machine.

"Where am I?" the boss asks.

"In your office," I reply. "You had some sort of fit!"

"That's right. What the BLOODY HELL IS THAT?!" he asks, pointing at the receipt.

"It's the invoice for our clothes. Remember in our contract it specifically states that any specially-made safety apparel is to be provided by the company. Do you know how hard it is to get Italian-made steel-cap shoes with that professional look with only six hours notice? They had to fly them in specially!"

"You won't get away with it!" he snarls, noticing again the large collection of figures at the bottom of the page.

"Now don't you worry," I respond soothingly. "You've had a nasty turn, but we've taken care of everything. One of the nice accountants with a predilection for viewing Internet strip-shows was only too happy to supply the blank check to us yesterday afternoon ..."

"Then I'll have it STOPPED!" the boss says smugly, victory in sight.

So much in sight in fact, it obscures the still live remains of his PC from his vision...

I give him a good 10 minutes of heart boosting electricity before I call the nurse back again, during which time the PFY calls our clothing supplier to advise a quick clearance time ...

And they say a blue pinstripe is dressing for success ...

The BOFH is in trouble for not turning up to his training course ...

Things are bad. The forces of evil (i.e. the huggy-feely brigade) are causing problems. The PFY and I have been targeted as 'politically unsound' for not turning up to some meeting on "harassment in the workplace".

The boss has apparently dipped his oar into troubled waters for a quick stir by indicating that we NEVER attend these compulsory meetings; I put his attitude down to some recent electrical first aid.

Sure enough, a meeting is organized with the Head of Personnel and Head of Staff Counseling (i.e. the Huggy-Feely Dept).

"Ah, yes," the Head of Personnel begins, "apparently you saw fit not to attend your course on harassment in the workplace."

"Yes", I reply, "the truth of the matter is that in our position we are simply too busy to (a) harass people; or (b) attend a course on how not to do it."

"Well, you might think that, but I can assure you that attendance at this course is mandatory for staff and contractors alike. I don't think I need remind you that your contract requires you to attend all relevant training courses", she replies, the steel in her voice reaching the thickness of armor plating.

"I don't think so."

"I beg your pardon?!"

"I'm sure you do", I respond, "but let us suppose, merely for the sake of conjecture of course, that the PFY or I did in fact wish to harass someone. Say someone like yourself for instance. Would I, as a networking and communications engineer, go all the way to your office to make some lewd and obnoxious remark to or about you, insinuating some theme or activity you (and quite possibly I) would find distasteful, OR, would I instead find and publish some image of you in an indefensible position - say in the office of a superior, in less clothing than is normally workplace practice?"

A chill fills the room. The Head of Personnel has taken on the look of someone who would rather be elsewhere and has completely forgotten the axe he has to grind.

"I don't know what you're insinuating, bu...", Ms. Huggy begins.

"Oh nothing, I assure you! I'm sure it was just an air conditioning problem that was recorded on the securi.."

"AH! I don't really think there's any need to pursue this matter", the Head of Personnel stutters, "at least not if the original proof of this could be ..."

In other words he wants the tapes.

"Well, as I said, it was an example", I reply, "and not based in fact. Speaking of fact, is it one that there's a contract rate-round coming up soon?"

He recognizes the prompt. "Ah, there has been talk of a ..."

"Excellent. The PFY and I were hoping this was the case."

Negotiations complete, the PFY and I retire to our offices to plan the extra spend. Two days later the written confirmation of the rate-rise is in our hands and we're happy workers once more. The boss, on the other hand, isn't so pleased. Thwarted again, he's embarked on a one-man rampage through the department in search of the lowest morale possible.

The phone rings. It's the helpdesk.

"Hello?" I answer.

"Is that networks?"

"You know it is"

"We have a ... problem we'd like solved."

"Hardware or Software?"

"Errmmmm ... Bossware"

"Could be expensive ..."

"A night of free drinks and dinner for four at the Dorchester?"

"Deal. Do you require a call number?"

"Oh! Ok."

"One."

I love service calls. I fill the PFY in on the deal. Later that afternoon the boss storms in looking for the person who took down the mail server.

"That would be me", I point out. "You told us to move it into the Computer Room. But the electricians haven't checked the power-points yet".

"RIGHT!", he shouts. "I'll be back to deal with YOU when I'VE fired it up".

How apt. The PFY and I watch as the server's power-supply emits a burst of smoke as the power point delivers the 400 volts of badly wired 3-phase power instead of the expected 240. It's a

credit to our safety systems that the doors lock immediately to prevent anyone accidentally walking into the Halon-filling room whilst the boss grabs for the oxygen mask.

"Well, he must have just cracked! He ran in laughing like a madman and destroying equipment!", I inform security later.

The boss is still appears to be crying (he obviously finds something funny) as they cart him out ...

The BOFH and PFY go on some site visits ...

The boss, for the first time in his career, has actually done something right! Amazing as it seems, but thanks to odd goings on at the masons, he's managed to arrange a co-operative site visit scheme with a few local companies to foster a frank exchange of networking information and expertise.

Like hell.

We know it's a ploy to get us out of the building so he can search high and low for the three blank, yet countersigned, order forms we extorted out of him under threat of showing the CEO what the boardroom table and a member secretarial staff have been up to in his presence lately. Who'd have thought that adding a low-light camera to the conference recording system would pay off so quickly?

As for the site visits, a skilled bastard recognizes IMMEDIATELY a chance to upgrade equipment when it presents itself. The PFY and I set to work slipping the sadly unused false bottoms back into our briefcases, then load them up with outmoded networking kit.

According to plan, by the time the Network Manager on our first site has finished showing me the full beauty of their patching racks the PFY has hot-swapped half a dozen 10/100 5 port Ethernet cards for our old straight 10s. Like taking candy from a baby. And leaving it the wrapper ...

The second site is much more secure and proves to be a slight challenge, right up until lunchtime when we roll on down to the local for seven or eight pints of the hard stuff, with Tequila slammers to follow. A pittance to pay for the latest revision router EPROMS that our support company wanted a small fortune for whilst their erstwhile network manager snores his way through the afternoon.

Being a kind-hearted sod, I'll make sure to drop them back in the mail as a "bug-fix upgrade" after only making a slight change to the switching logic.

I feel sure that the competitive advantage will lean in our favor once the "Use Heaviest Loaded Segment" code cuts in ...

We're only interrupted once when their PFY (so green he needs mowing) wanders in to see what we're doing. A quick flash of my tube pass and he thinks he's witnessing a vendor-initiated hardware service check in operation. It truly breaks my heart to see trust like that go unpunished.

The effects of the lunch are a little too filling for my PFY's limited experience in the alcoholic arts so he enquires the location of the nearest Gents from his counterpart whilst I snaffle the Computer Room cardkey so carelessly left laying around in his pocket ...

Seconds later the power goes out, which can only mean the PFY's rest stop included a visit to the cabling cupboard. Darkness, the true friend of bastards everywhere is interrupted only by a couple of EXIT signs which flicker briefly, then go out. Now that's what I call a good trainee.

Quicker than you can say "High Capacity Storage Downgrade" I'm performing an impromptu one in the Computer Room whilst adding a significant weight to my briefcase at the same time. I get out in time to see/hear their PFY trip over a cabling drum I'd accidentally nudged out into the centre of the room on my way into the Computer Room.

The lights come on in time to see the PFY helping their PFY into a chair. The poor bloke seems a little woozy so I try to help out by taking a few of the phone calls that are inundating the room.

"THE BLOODY NETWORK IS DOWN!" A user screams at me in a manner that would have personnel immediately calculating sick-pay entitlement at our site, but seems par for the course here.

"Yes, it's due to the power cut from the surge-current overloading." I ad-lib "You should switch your machines to low-power mode to prevent it"

"How do I do that?" The user asks, bringing back my thoughts of trust and punishment.

"Switch all the machines in your office off, switch them to low power with the switch at the back, then turn them all on at the same time."

"Is 115 the low-power setting?" the user asks.

"You betcha!"

"Thanks"

"Don't mention it!" I cry as the PFY and I make a break for the door.

Our exit is heralded by a storm of sharp crack! noises from the ground-floor offices, which brings a small song of joy to my heart ...

The last site on our visit is a surprise. We're apparently visiting the offices of our chief opposition, those who tried to take us over.

Looks like tuna casserole on the menu ...

My suspicions are confirmed when I notice the presence of several sub-miniature camera holes lining the corridors of the entrance, all but invisible to the layperson, raising the stakes somewhat ...

Then again, I love a challenge ...

The BOFH and PFY help sort out a rival's PSIC problems ...

It's time for the last site visit on the site tour agenda, and this one is the tough nut ..

The control room is straight out of Science-Fiction Land - a veritable security command centre and treasure trove of sophisticated equipment.

My fingers start itching almost immediately, but caution is the watchword The PFY also notices the security overkill and follows suit.

A phone rings next to me and I answer helpfully, planning to use the old FDISK problem solving utility but the telltale beep of the voice-recorder tells me that anything I say can and will be used as evidence against me. I choke out some useless but unhelpful advice, then hang up in time to see my counterpart watching me with the smug expression of one who knows exactly how bullet-proof his set-up is.

The bastard!

A tour of the comms room reveals state of the art equipment that I'd sell the boss for glue to obtain - which just adds to my general misery.

"Quite something isn't it?" My opposition comments. "I suppose you'll get this sort of equipment ... one day ..."

Double bastard!

By lunchtime I've almost given up hope - It seems that the tide's completely against me. Even in the cafeteria I note the telltale black dots of a micro camera lens. Except ...

The PFY interprets my snatched glance and moves into blocking position for the fraction of a second that it requires to flick the old standby - a couple of laxative chocolates - into my counterpart's dessert. True, it's hardly sportsmanlike, but like they say, all's fair in love and networking.

According to plan, a couple of hours later my counterpart receives a priority one call from nature and the PFY and I get to work. He accidentally trips over a cable and face-plants the CCTV recording console, sacrificing a couple of bruises to the cause. With the security cameras in Alzheimer's mode, I turn on SNMP reporting on every single piece of hardware that will allow me to do so remotely.

In seconds a guy I can only assume to be the counterpart's boss bursts in ranting about horrific network response. But it can't be that bad, or those 400 odd PCs around the building wouldn't be delivering SNMP trap info every second ...

"Looks exactly like that PSIC problem we had with that new kit a couple of months ago." I comment.

"PSIC?" their boss enquires

"Yeah, Pseudo-Standard-Interface-Conflicts" I reply "A lot of the new state-of-the-art kit doesn't actually adhere to any standard, which is fine so long as it doesn't get plugged into a network with anything else. If it does, sooner or later there'll be problems ..."

"... when it gets into protocol loops with standard kit" the PFY finishes, knowing where I'm heading.

"What can we do?" asks the boss-type. "My Network Engineer tells me nothing!"

"You're joking!" I counter in horror "You mean he doesn't fill out daily reports of what he spends his time on?"

"Of course! Good lord, next you'll be telling me he doesn't have any network procedures documentation!"

"He doesn't!"

"But that's a workplace priority! No wonder you're having problems with all this new kit!! Look, I don't like to speak out of turn, but I think he's been leading you on with technical mumbo jumbo ...

"Tell you what I'll do - because you know my boss and all, I'll loan you some of our kit and we'll take yours to iron out the protocol problems in your stuff."

"Would you?!?!" he gushes, networking salvation on the horizon.

"Sure! Well, that is unless you think you'll be talked out of it with more mumbo-jumbo, buzzwords and geek-talk?"

"NO, I'm quite capable of making technical decisions. Tell me what we need to replace and you can take it with you when you go ..."

"Well, that Gigabit Ethernet switch did look little dodgy" I reply.

"Don't forget that handheld LAN analyzer and tracker" the PFY adds.

... five minutes later ...

"And lastly, that Dual Audio Channel Enhanced Video Display"

"You mean the CEO's new 29 inch Stereo Color TV?!?!?" he bleats.

"I bet that's half the problem all by itself" I reply

Within half an hour all their comms room is missing is a couple of tumble-weeds. I organize a shipment of networking kit so old you can watch the bytes travelling, then make plans for the negotiation round that's soon to follow.

I can't wait to see what the "vetting fee" will be for each piece of kit we "pass" as being of suitable standard ...

This experience stuff really is worth it ...

The BOFH wins an award from his peer group ...

It's a calm Monday morning when the Boss strolls into the office with the air of the cat with the proverbial cream.

"How did that router sale go off then?" he asks, unable to disguise his smugness at managing to sell off a piece of kit that was so crap that it wouldn't even pass the self-tests needed to become a boat anchor.

"They came and got it" I reply, referring to the poor bastards who bought the kit from us and who are no doubt now in the process of trying to extinguish the fire, "but I still think it was a little on the nose selling it to them".

"Sounds to me like a case of Caveat Emptor" the boss chuckles smugly.

"Really?" I respond, "I thought it was a router! Mind you, I don't trust those foreign wines - After Chernobyl you never know if they're going to be radioactive ..."

The boss looks at me as if I've been mentally demoted to the using classes, but the PFY knows the big plan and keeps quiet.

"How DID you manage to convince them?" I ask appealing to the boss' s need to gloat.

"Oh, just told them that it was one of the original units and still as good at the day we bought it," he sniggers, mentally convincing himself that he's the brains of the outfit ...

And that's one thought that I'm not going to challenge because today is April 1st - Bastard Boss Day - and I have my eyes on a certain prize that has eluded me for many years.

This year I've decided to sell the boss on using the network as a storage medium. I casually drop a couple of remarks until the boss decides to channel his massive intelligence away from tying his shoelaces and onto the matter at hand.

"It's simplicity itself!" I cry "We've got these Gigabit Ethernet switches all around the place that we just aren't using! Instead of letting them go to waste we could be sending data continuously around them until it's needed which would actually cut down on the amount of physical disk storage we would need! And just think of the time we would save with read and write latency when the data's already on the net!"

"It would never work," the PFY counters, all according to plan. "Our networks are too short - the data would be back before it had finished leaving the machine."

"Not," I add, "if we were to make the network longer to add a short delay. Why, 10 drums of Cat-5 wired together would be sufficient".

"Hey!" the PFY smiles. "That's right - I never thought of that."

Our interplay has been enough to sell the Boss. Had I put forward the idea and the PFY agreed, the Boss would have trodden with caution, fearing the worst. With the PFY "on his side" he now knows that the idea is a sure thing.

Like lambs to the slaughter ...

"Excellent, I'm sure that the head of department will approve!"

"Would you be sure to mention that I thought of it?" I ask, placing the last two nails in the Boss's coffin. Now he's sure that it's the real thing and there is no way on earth he's going to let me take credit for it.

He toddles off to the Head of Dept while the PFY and I try to stroll nonchalantly back to the office. I fire up the CCTV recorder on the micro camera in the Big Boss's office.

This little recording is sure to earn me the Trophy I have desired for so long - the coveted "IT Idiot" Award for Least Intelligent Supervisor - at the Bastard Boss Competitions at a Central London pub later on tonight ...

We get the recorder going just in time ...

"Anyway... " the boss burbles in simulated intelligence mode, "I was just wandering through the department today and a thought struck me. What with the rising cost of disk it might be an interesting plan to use our networks as a storage medium ..."

He goes on to paraphrase the food-waste-product that we fed him, while commenting that he's fired off an order for 20 drums of Cat-5.

The explosion is inevitable. The head of department, whilst in practical terms about as useful as loopback plug for an electric type-writer, did spend about six years teaching networking fundamentals to first year university students.

The PFY and I capture everything in case there's some question of 'doping' ...

Later that night as I guzzle a pint or two from my latest acquisition, I can't help but feel a twinge of remorse. Maybe I should have convinced him to use lift cables as emergency UPS power distribution wiring instead.

Ah well, there's always next year ...

It really hits the fan as the tables turn inside the walls of Computer Central ...

Things are getting worse and worse in Computer Central. It looks as if a career change could be in the wind. I get summoned into the boss's office to answer a complaint about my 'attitude'...

To make things 'fair' the Boss arranges for the head of personnel (his friend and my mortal opponent), to attend as a witness. Although I have, on occasion, had the odd difference of opinion with him, I depend on his professionalism. I'm sure he really just wants to bury the hatchet, which is why I'll make a point of not turning my back...

"Simon," the Boss begins, "we have a formal complaint about you from one of the new system programmers. He claims that you are being unnecessarily offensive to him."

"I'm afraid I haven't the faintest idea what you're talking about."

"He claims that you told him to do something with your feces."

"I beg your pardon?" I reply, shocked. "There must be some mistake. The last time I spoke to him I told him that I had a system crash core that I'd like him to examine. I cannot possibly be held responsible for the strange way in which he interpreted that."

"You were leaving the toilet at the time."

"Purely coincidental. I simply mentioned it when the opportunity arose."

"Mentioned? It was more of a shout wasn't it? I believe I heard it myself from in here."

"I concede that it may have been slightly more than a whisper, but that was only because of the deference that I feel for his wealth of professional knowledge..." (Well, it was worth a shot).

"The words 'sniff my dump' do not engender in MY mind a feeling of professional respect."

"Well of course I'm completely apologetic if this has caused a major department disruption - I'll go and apologize immediately!"

"You know as well as I do that he's resigned."

"Not at all. How did this come about?"

"It appears that he is a little disconcerted with the frequency of explosions of his peripheral equipment."

"Really? Perhaps there's something wrong with his UPS system again. There's been a bit of that going around recently..."

"Yes, I noticed the IT divisional accountant has resigned, sitting workplace stress as a reason."

"Well, I blame the makers of the equipment," I reply. "In the old days things were much more tolerant of slight faults."

"By slight faults you mean the odd 400-volt supply spike that the electricians can find no excuse for?"

"Really? I wouldn't know. Someone has stolen my multimeter."

"You mean the multimeter set to the 10-amp scale and plugged across a mains device in the boardroom so that the circuit breaker for the floor blew every time the overhead projector was switched on?"

"Really? Who would do a thing like that?"

"Any reason why security found your fingerprints all over the machine?"

"I have to check a lot of floppies in my job."

"I see. Well, it's out of my hands now anyway. The CEO wants to speak to you personally."

Personal interviews are rare in the company, and quite often precede a 'resignation'.

The Boss and I get the nod to go in...

"What's this about all these problems downstairs?" the CEO barks.

"Would you like the technical answer or just layman's terms?" I ask, respectfully.

"Layman's terms will do for a start."

"Myself and my trainee are the only people in the company who really do know what we're doing."

The Boss shakes his head, smiling humorlessly.

"Yes, I'd heard that was the case," the CEO replies, having been primed during extended family get-togethers by the PFY. Oh, the beauty of an insider...

"Ah excuse me!" The Boss blurts anxiously. "But I believe you're overlooking something here."

"Of course I am." The CEO smiles benevolently. "We are, of course, sorry to see you go."

"What? I'm not bloody resigning, and there's no way you'll get me to sign it."

"But you already have," the CEO replies, confused, holding up a piece of paper with the Boss's freshly scrawled signature on it. "But who could possibly replace me?" the Boss burbles.

"You're looking at him," the CEO smiles.

"You're going to take over Networks?!" the Boss cries.

"No..."

"Then wh..." Disbelief and horror fight a little war for supremacy on his twitching face. "You can't be serious!"

"Of course he is," I respond quickly. "Now, I hear you're looking for a job and it just so happens that there's a vacancy in our network operations section. You'll be reporting to me, of course..."

You know sometimes life can be a bastard, but when it's good, it's REALLY good.

The Bastard puts his newest protégé through a rather nasty baptism ... and sees him blossom ...

So I'm in the enviable position of being management material. The extra income as a contracted manager is more than enough to brighten my day.

The opportunities for channeling funds from less worthy areas (the helpdesk upgrade) to more deserving ones (the network operations upgrade) abound. And having my former boss as an employee is the icing on the cake...

Still, mustn't bear a grudge. I decide to share my recent good fortune with others. The PFY has always wanted a junket to New Orleans. I browse the Web and find a plausible conference and enroll him in it.

He's overjoyed because he's never been to New Orleans before. The ex-boss expects a similar favor and I can't bear to disappoint him. I show him where the vacuum cleaner is and point out the map of every comms room in the building...

A week later they're both back, the ex-boss looking a little peaky, possibly from spending all that time in the dark. I blame myself for not reminding him that some of the comms cupboards don't have door handles on the inside. Whoops.

Still, at least he had the presence of mind to pull the power cable to the comms rack so someone would come to investigate. Although it probably would have been better if it had occurred to him before the Bank Holiday weekend. But, like they say, it's all a learning experience. It's terrible what dehydration drives you to, though.

Once everyone's back at Network Central, I allocate the jobs. The PFY, because of experience, is placed into my old role of installation, monitoring and maintenance. The ex-boss, because of his greenness in operations, is placed on the phones. I even plug it into the wall socket for him.

It does not disappoint, ringing within the first half hour. As he's in training, the ex-boss is required to answer all calls on hands-free so that he can receive instruction from me or the PFY should it become necessary.

"Hello, Networks," the ex-boss answers.

"Hello, is that Networks?" A quick glance at the caller-ID confirms her familiar voice. The PFY flees the room in fear.

"Yes, how can I help?"

"My network's stopped going again."

"I see. When did it stop working?"

"Just now. I tried to print and it just didn't work."

"OK, I'll just look at our network monitor and see if there's anything wrong with your machine. What room are you in?"

She gives her room and he trawls through the networking database looking for port information. Unsuccessfully. Not wanting to ask for help so early in his new career, he decides to perform the old 'hands-on' approach and go and see her.

Once he's gone, the PFY returns.

"He didn't go to see her did he?"

"Yep."

"The poor bastard!"

"Yep."

Every company has at least one computer-phobic paranoid. The ones who think that computers secretly change their settings as soon as they turn their backs. The ones who always ring to complain that their passwords have been changed by someone. (Every time they leave the shift key down). The ones who haven't changed anything, yet now their networks don't work. (This happens twice a year, when they change the position of their PCs in relation to the sun and pull the network cables out...).

Except in this case it's worse. The 'network' she's talking about is an RS232 cable between her genuine XT PC and its dot matrix printer.

She's never trusted the newer technology (which doesn't work and secretly conspires against her) and prefers to remain disconnected from the real world. Except to call twice a year when she pulls the cable out of her printer.

An hour later the boss is back, a changed man. Having been subjected to an hour of conspiracy theories and general X-file type mindlessness, he now realizes what is lurking out there at the other end of the phone lines.

Gone is the air of helpfulness. Gone the feelings of goodwill to the using-classes. The PFY and I exchange knowing glances - we've seen it before and we'll see it again.

He's been bastardised.

The phone soon rings.

"Networks," he snaps.

"Hello, is that Networks?" the familiar voice asks. The phone makes the slightest of sounds as it's yanked from the socket and thrown into the bin.

"So I suppose I'm fired for ripping that out then?" he asks, resigned to his fate.

"Well, impromptu de-installations are usually something we teach you later on in your training, but it appears that experience is the best teacher after all..."

I wander off and leave the PFY to show him the rest of the ropes...

And the cattle prods...

And the 'video surveillance' consoles...

Who would have thought he'd be such promising material?

Who said management was easy? Still, there's nothing that can't be sorted out with an axe ...

I CAN'T BLOODY HANDLE IT ANY MORE!!! I was doing so well with the managerial position - allocating funds to worthwhile projects (stereo color video monitors hooked into state-of-the-art satellite receivers) when the bomb dropped.

I find out that I'm expected to attend around six 'planning' meetings EVERY week! My former opinion of management dropped even further...

There's only so many times someone can ask what 'those byte things are again' before you find yourself dreaming of the company improvements you could achieve with a simple axe and a heavy duty wood-chipper.

Speaking of wood-chippers, the first priority meeting had the highly important topic of, should we hire our office plants? Given that we already own office plants I felt that the issue was somewhat redundant - but obviously my mind wasn't attuned to management. I'd forgotten that this little group had requested not one, not two, not three, but FOUR department restructures (to reflect the company's hierarchy restructures) in the past 18 months.

So after only two hours of deliberation, it was decided that we'd go with the rented product because then the rental company would be responsible for making sure the plants got watered. (As if the taste of the company tea and coffee didn't ensure that already).

And after that two hours there was another half an hour deciding what to do with the plants that were already in the building and had been since the building opened - the ones in the open areas upstairs that are far too large to move anywhere. Which is where the minor brainstorm of the wood chipper comes in. The plan is to hire a chipping machine, take it up in the freight elevator and perform some on-the-spot organic recycling.

By this time I'm pining for Network Operations. Things were so simple then - a user rang with some problem that they'd caused in the first place, you tortured them for a bit, then solved their problem in the most convenient way possible. Simple. Effective. Quick. I need help, so I go to the one person who might make head or tail of it.

The ex-boss. The ex-boss is a changed man. He now treats users with the thinly disguised contempt of a networking professional who has heard one time too many the ubiquitous question why is the network is down? He's seen what we've seen, he knows what we know.

He IS a bastard! I track him down in a comms room where he's sending 240AC down the phone lines to cremate the phones of certain users. I tell him my problem and he listens sympathetically.

"There's nothing you can do," he replies. "You just have to do it. Just keep your head down or they'll tell you to restructure your department."

A thought occurs to me. "Do you want your old job back?" I ask.

"Nope!" he replies, without pausing. "Go on," I plead (being a manager, so it's not beneath me).

"It'll cost you," he says. THE BASTARD! I knew I shouldn't have hired him.

"How much?" He mentions an extortionate amount of dosh with the air of someone not open for negotiation.

Sadly, I sign a, >sob!< personal check >sniff< for the amount he asks. He whips off to cash it after giving me some very good advice.

The arrival of the wood-chipping machine is apparently a company photo opportunity that none of the meeting group wishes to miss - being yet another new era in company policy.

I, of course attend, and stand through a set of "okay, one with you pointing to the chip catcher. Another with all of you looking into the feed funnel" requests.

When all of the photos are finished, I sidle up to the chairperson and mention what a coup it might be if he were to appear in the photos with an actual piece of wood being processed. I tap on a plastic bag I'm carrying which gives a chopping-board-like clonk.

He smiles. We wait till everyone has gone then get the photographer to set up for the shot because once the machine starts the other managers are going to sprint for the chance to be in-shot, so he has to be quick.

He sets up and I start the machine, emptying my bag into the chipper.

To be fair, he takes the grinding to sawdust of his yachting trophy quite well, only dismissing me from my position on the spot.

A day later I get a call at home from the once-ex-now-current-boss offering me a job as a network operator with a very reasonable salary.

I accept of course. The new position is GREAT. The boss, with his experience, makes everything worthwhile. Life cannot get any better.

"YOU'D BETTER COME QUICK!" the PFY yells as he bursts into the room.

"It's the boss! He's locked himself in the management meeting! Apparently he asked the secretary to bring his axe up and now they've heard the wood-chipper starting!" Bugger.

I knew it was too good to be true...

Not quite the smell of Napalm in the morning, but a burnt server gets things off to a good start ...

I wander into work after a hard night on the pop. My senses, however, are not so dulled that I fail to notice the smell of burning coming from the computer room. This and the PFY's jacket slung across the back of his chair can only mean one thing. He wants another promotion.

True, it is more than overdue, given that the last time he got a rise was over six weeks ago, but personnel has recently decided to put its foot down.

The PFY emerges from the computer room with a fire extinguisher and what appears to be a major part of the cooling system from one of the Human Resources servers. As per training, he seems to be putting his best foot forward - straight into the groin of anyone in the way of his plans.

"Good lad," I think, my chest swelling with pride.

I prepare myself for the inevitable call. Moments later the phone rings and caller ID identifies my 'client' as none other than the deputy head of personnel, a person with whom I've had more than one previous 'joust'.

"What the hell's up with our server?"

"Well, I'm not sure yet, but I believe that it has suffered from thermal runaway..."

"You set our bloody machine on fire?" he shouts.

"No, of course not. It's a common fault - as machines get older the collection of dust internally can combust, caus..."

"The bloody thing's only three weeks old!"

"Hmm, it happens sometimes. You can't expect the PFY to babysit the thing given the pittance he earns," I continue.

"That's it! We're running our own system from now on," he cries before slamming the phone down.

A couple of days later my fears are realized when a new server appears in HR, complete with customized operating system and no operator access. The boss fails to grasp the enormity of the potential problem - if departments purchase their own machines there's a good chance they'll find out that there is a slight disparity in what they paid us for servers in the past and what they really cost. A slight disparity of around 200 per cent.

I leave history to run its course - after a little God-like meddling from the PFY and me. Sure enough, a day later the deputy head of personnel calls, deep in grease-mode.

"Hello," he smarms.

"Hi."

"We're having a little trouble with our server and wonder if you'd give us some advice."

"What's the problem?"

"Well, we need to be able to list all the files in a directory, including their creation dates," he replies.

So, he's started with a trick question, has he? He's obviously testing me to see whether I'm going to give good or bad advice, using his extremely limited knowledge as a benchmark.

"Sure," I say. "Just 'ls -l' the directory concerned. You might want to pipe the output to something."

"Oh yes," he continues, expecting the ubiquitous 'rm' response.

"Yes, the 'more' command."

"Oh." He's obviously disappointed because he didn't catch me giving duff advice. Stupidly, he decides to trust me... "There was one other thing. We've got some problem with our system having very slow response."

No surprise there, considering that the PFY cranked up the ping-polling on their server to about 30 per cent of the network bandwidth.

"I was wondering if you could recommend something to speed it up?"

"Not really, the newer machines are usually fairly well tuned. Oh! Hang on a moment - I bet you haven't applied the Memory Expansion Patch to the kernel have you?"

"Ahhh... no, no, I don't think we have," he mumbles, attempting to feign advanced knowledge.

"Ah well, you'd best do that then, hadn't you?"

"Good idea. Refresh my memory - how do we do that again?"

"You know," I respond casually. "Echo 'MEMORY-EXPANSION' > /dev/kmem - it's usually the first entry in your /etc/inittab file."

"Oh, of course it is. I think I removed it for tuning," he replies, lying through his teeth.

A quarter of an hour later and he's back on the phone, a little more excitable this time...

"The bloody server keeps crashing!" he cries, panic-stricken. "It won't even bloody start."

"Well I guess we could take a look. What's your root password?"

There's a moment of indecision before he blurts out the word "morepay". Quick as a flash the PFY and I start trolling all their other machines to see if this password is used elsewhere. Hit rate: high.

A day later the new HR server is back under our control, the deputy head of personnel is firmly back in his place and the PFY back into the well-worn saddle of 'recently promoted contractor'.

In fact he's in such a good mood he wanted to tell personnel what we've been putting in their water cooler. I persuade him to save that for another day...

It's show time, folks, and the Bastard goes along to do some, err ... research on the latest kit ...

"I think it's time we looked at some of the newer technologies."

I can't believe my ears. The Boss buys new kit about as regularly as Thatcher votes Labor. It was his idea to forget this Pentium nonsense and get a job lot of XTs that he could acquire very cheaply. Fortunately I'd got wind of it and managed to 'accidentally' let slip to the CEO that the vendor was in fact the Boss's second cousin and the plan was abandoned. Quite right too - I can't believe he didn't include my mark-up in the equation.

However, since his spell on the hell-desk the Boss is a new man. His mind is permanently alive to the possibility of a scam.

"There's a research lab having an open day," he said. "I think you should go along and see what's new."

Actually, he may have said "steal what's new" - it's hard to tell since his recent bastardisation.

A few days later, the PFY and I find ourselves on a train at an unearthly hour of the morning chugging through the countryside with the trusty false-bottomed suitcase at my feet.

We finally make it to the concrete research-park jungle and into the show. As luck would have it, we're given a reconnaissance mission - sorry, guided tour - before being let loose to find our own way around. The tour is boring but at least the guide is too thick to see what we're up to. Eventually we're left to our own devices (and some of theirs that haven't been bolted down).

It's interesting to see the mass of toys scattered round, but my attention is drawn to the myriad security staff lurking around the areas where the smallest and most expensive gadgets live.

The first section seems to be about teleworking, something I relate to since the Boss paid for SMDS to my living room.

"So, tell me about teleworking," I say enthusiastically to the young suit on the ISDN gizmo stand.

"Well this unit enables you to connect invisibly to the office from home. All the network protocols go down the line, looking just like you're connected to the LAN," he gushes.

"Looks like an ISDN router to me."

"Er...yes it is. But it does have a nice blue box and extra flashing lights."

I look at the box disdainfully - not even worth nicking.

"Anything else you'd like to try to convince me is new?"

"Well, we have a router on a PCMCIA card."

"Why?"

"So you can connect your laptop to the office network via a router rather than a dial-in server."

"Why?"

"So that you don't have to install a dial-in server beside your routers."

"Of course. Using an expensive router instead of a cheap dial-in server. How economical."

My musings are interrupted by a nudge from the PFY. "They've got an iris-reading authentication system like ours."

"Not quite - ours doesn't do semi-permanent damage to eye tissue and isn't linked to the sprinkler system like theirs is."

There's still so much for him to learn.

The lunch is much better than expected, mainly because we skipped the canteen and slipped into the VIP seating area instead. The card reader takes mere moments to fine-tune so that it will accept our business cards. Watching real VIPs attempt to gain access afterwards makes interesting lunchtime entertainment, while ensuring that seconds are available.

Suitably fortified by the chateaubriand and the rather decent claret we are ready to tackle the rest of the exhibition. The false bottom of the suitcase is only heavier by a bottle of excellent Cognac carelessly left locked in a liquor cabinet.

Our progress is impeded by one of the security droids. While he's telling me why we have to wait for access to the good stuff, the PFY slopes off through the shadows.

Section six suddenly opens way ahead of schedule, allowing us to see this power-free optical cell device.

"...so as you can see, there is no power cable to the base station," drones the techno-bore on the stand, obviously trying to figure the intense interest in the video stream that's going down this seemingly power-free network gizmo. "As you can see, we've put a gap here in the fiber, so if I put this piece of card in the gap it'll cut the stream off to prove that we're not cheating." He places the card in the gap and turns to the screen for the first time to smugly point at the frozen image. His expression turns into that of a man who has just encountered a water buffalo in his Jacuzzi.

"Debbie Does Dallas. Nice touch," I congratulate the PFY.

Time to make ourselves scarce...

Halfway to the corner pub, all hell breaks loose. Klaxons, fire engines, people running from buildings, the whole caboodle.

The PFY's puzzlement is directly proportional to my smugness as I adopt a leaning position at the bar.

"Five quid says the chairman of the US parent company has just been required to iris-authenticate himself," I comment, noticing the water pouring out of their office doorways...

"No bet," the PFY replies. "Pint?"

Funny business, this new technology...

The Bastard Operator From Hell is off to the movies, thanks to the marvelous advances in everyday technology...

The people upstairs want to play with some new toys again. Just because the CEO has seen an article about video mail, he feels that the company is not complete without it.

Naturally, I'm delighted as the opportunities for mark-up are immense. The finance director was concerned however, but then he wouldn't pass an expense form unless it was signed in blood. Of course, it was the FD who tried to block the part I play in the purchasing process; it seems he got suspicious when I junked the wreck I drove in favor of a brand new BMW.

With the boss's instructions ringing in my ears I dial our network suppliers.

"Hello, Network Express."

"My name is Farquarson. May I speak to Jon, please?"

"Please hold."

>Click "Good morning, Mr. errrrrrrrrr... Farquarson. Is the line secure?"

"Yes, it is. Morning Jon. I need a couple of servers."

"No problem. What kind of load are they likely to get?"

"Pretty heavy. We're going in for video mail. You know, you have a graphics tablet and a camera and it stores all your words as phonemes and stuff."

"Neat. Twin Pentium Pro 200 then?"

"Errr... it's not my cost centre."

"OK. In that case do you want eight, 10 or 12 processors?"

"12 should do it. Plenty of disk too."

"40GB each?"

"Pardon?"

"Sorry, dropped a zero there."

"OK. Half a gig of RAM should do, too, nothing too extravagant. What's the damage?"

"Hmmm... list price is £62,995 each."

"And after our bean-counter discount?"

"L124,999 before VAT per unit. I take it you want the commission to the usual account?"

Two boxes duly arrive. The PFY has them rapidly installed and whirring away, and connected up to the couple of dozen videomail tablets we scattered among the senior executives last week.

We go back down to Ops and the PFY fires up the videomail console next to his Quake session. A quick e-mail to the admin assistant at our other office brings up the remote execs on our console and we start to see words flying around the WAN. I sit back smugly and concentrate for the moment on psychopathic murder, albeit unfortunately in a virtual world.

"They seem to have the hang of it - I think they're competing to see who can send the longest mail with the most difficult words in," comments the PFY, neatly dodging behind a wall.

"Well", I reply, "they are kiddies with new toys. Hopefully we'll have enough material soon," I muse.

"Material?"

"Oh, don't worry about it."

>BAMBAMBAMBAMBAM "Ha! Die, sucker."

On returning after a brief hour's lunch, I inspect the videomail system. I'm rather surprised that they've managed to fill 40 per cent of the disks on the servers in such a short space of time, but it's all for the good. I run up my trusty copy of Premiere and start picking at the file store.

"What are you up to," inquires my pimply colleague.

"Making a movie, what's it look like?"

"A movie of what?"

"Our CEO. Loyal, huh?"

"Very. That's what worries me."

It takes a while to remember my way around the controls in the new version, but soon the phrases are coming together nicely. The PFY is wearing his look of utmost puzzlement and goes off to nuke someone's server in the hope that it will ease his mind. An hour or so later he's just sweeping the last few bits into a bin-bag and I sit back, satisfied.

The PFY sees my contented smile and wanders over. He spots my notepad beside the PC and notices the phrases scrawled there.

"Annual bonfire night supper... financial director... rumor has it... security department... audio interference... had goat's cheese as a starter... what's this all about?" he asks.

"Just wait; the phone should ring about... NOW."

He jumps as the telephone springs to life.

"Hello, operations. You want whose account removed immediately? But isn't he the FD? OK, OK, I'm not arguing, I'm just surprised. I thought he was unsackably married to the CEO's sister. Who gave the authority? What, himself? Oh, by videomail... how apt."

The PFY bids farewell to our remote-site admin assistant, who needless to say is on a percentage and is therefore totally tame, and looks suspiciously at me.

"Care to give me a private viewing of your new movie?"

"Sure."

I hit 'play' and the PFY is presented with an extremely convincing image of the CEO telling the rest of the execs that some of the FD's extra-curricular habits just aren't in line with the company's requirements of directorial behavior and that he's going to have to let him go. A couple of variants contain the instructions to the admin types and security to implement the logistical side of the person-disposal and police-calling. Of course simple voicemail would never have sufficed, but with videomail you can actually see the CEO himself saying the words. And we all know that you can't forge videomail - don't we?

The PFY is hardly the life and soul. Would you be if you had to endure a visit from slime central?

I could be over-reading the signs slightly, but the PFY seems to have all the symptoms of an advanced case of the blues. Questioning him on the matter is fruitless.

His work is suffering because of it - yesterday I caught him refilling the paper tray in one of the fax machines in response to a user's request. Also, password-change logs note that he's helping out users who forget their passwords by changing them to words like 'temporary' and 'changeme', instead of the usual 'goshiamaplonker' or "'imaginebeingsostupid'.

The final straw comes when he does a complete recovery of a hard disk after a user accidentally erased it.

A serious talk is required, so I corner him and the truth comes out.

It appears that the PFY's favorite piece of firmware in the DP Pool has chunked him in favor of a newly contracted Internet Policy Consultant who's so smooth he's ready for varnishing. I'd seen the signs of course, but thought the PFY was more than up to the challenge. Looks like there are still some jobs you have to leave to the experts.

It's a sad state of affairs for the PFY, made worse by the fact that we've been directed from above to aid Mr. Slimey's 'Internet Political Correctness' investigation - a thinly disguised attempt by the boss to justify the persecution of those who invest hours in company time perusing the screeds of Internet porn sites.

I try to divert the PFY's depression with a little light-heartedness...

"Perhaps you could do with a trip to Dr Bastard's Lab?" I call, unveiling my latest gadget.

"It's a mouse," the PFY responds.

"Not just any mouse," I say. "A remote controlled mouse, see?"

I twiddle with the arrow keys on my infra-red enabled personnel disorganizer. The mouse moves accordingly.

"Neat," the PFY comments, unimpressed.

"And what about that?" I ask, pointing at a recently modified office item.

"A briefcase?"

"Yes, yes - but with a customized addition," I reply. "Bring it over."

He grabs it, straining under the unexpected weight, and starts to my desk.

With the press of the key on the disorganizer the latches burst open, freeing a couple of bricks which fall onto the PFY's feet. Sometimes you really do have to be cruel to be kind.

"What the hell did you do that for?" the PFY cries.

"Education," I respond. "You're suffering under the misapprehension that life is fair. It is not. Which is why empowered individuals like you and I make it so."

"I don't understand."

Wearily I explain. "Picture if you will an Internet Policy Consultant-like individual, tired out after a hard day's work of warming his office chair."

As he boards his tube train, his briefcase - full of homework on how to annoy Network Operations - suddenly springs open, emptying its contents onto the line."

"Ah, so he's taking the tube home today then?" the PFY responds.

"I don't know. I'm merely outlining options here. And speaking of options, I believe we don't have one about attending his Internet policy report this very afternoon."

The PFY, at one stage, lapses back into pseudo-depression.

Time for a reserve plan that I was hoping to save for another occasion.

A little tinker in SNMP-land later and the fire alarms go off in response to an undetermined smoke detection.

Later that afternoon we show up at the boardroom for Internet Policy suggestions from the slime monster. The presence of the PFY's erstwhile companion does nothing to improve his spirits.

Slimey starts off on the offensive, playing the 'sensitive new age guy' role to the hilt, while simultaneously down-playing the 'caring unbiased networking type' that has been the cornerstone of my many years of service. Within minutes, he has the audience eating out of his hand as he outlines his plan for an isolated network, his laptop pumping out one intranet proposal after another.

The boss looks on smugly as things look to be going his way.

"I think you know what to do," I whisper to the PFY.

He looks blankly as I pass my disorganizer to him.

"Something on his hard disk perhaps?" I prompt.

Deep in the recesses of the PFY's psyche, megalomania awakes from its deep sleep.

Half an hour later I'm sipping a pint with the PFY as he forgives and forgets with his DP attachment.

The shock and outrage that followed the display of a few still life's from the ladies' powder room didn't enhance the credibility of our so-PC consultant very much and his exit from the building was rather rocket-like. Still, it was probably for the best.

"Another?" the PFY asks.

"Well I can't really. I'm just off to teach the boss the dangers of stashing his house keys in the brand new briefcase that was anonymously sent to him."

Experience, as they say, is the best teacher...

Members of the new stripy shirt brigade are full of beans and raring to go...

One thing that has been bugging me for some time is the continued existence of the separate bean counter network.

The stripy shirt brigade took exception some time ago to the level of support they were getting from us, and no matter how hard we try to make them see the light, there's always some rebel faction which strives to maintain at least some separate systems.

I can't understand it myself. We've put ourselves out for them over the months, stress-testing their notebooks and all that. The anvil business was a pure accident. And we still haven't figured how transactions with the local bookie managed to get a paragraph all of their own in the annual report, but I'm certain it wasn't Ops-induced.

Yet despite these tremendous efforts, the beancounters still insist that they need their own technical department. What's worse is that they seem to be making a decent fist of it. The guy they hired to run the network does seem to have a strange attitude to users, though - he genuinely believes that is duty to help them.

What's worse is his presence means that the accountants know the real value of the all the kit we've been buying over the past few years. It took some fancy footwork to ensure that the CEO didn't receive the information that the multi-directional, electro-magnetic, mobile communications devices that we'd billed at L1,200 were in fact cordless phones that the PFY's mate was flogging off at knockdown prices down the local market.

It's imperative that we bring the bean counters back into our domain for good. Not only are we missing our 'bonuses' that comes as part of Cap. Ex., but there are also rumblings around the building that other departments are getting bright ideas about our support efforts.

Fortunately, our boss has a vicious streak in him since his brief spell on the hell desk, so he's right behind us on this one. He's had it in for the accounts department since his own expenses claim for the 'wherever you want' hostess service was rejected as a genuine business expense.

It doesn't help that the beancounters' network manager is one of those irritating individuals who walks around with a smug smile on his face all the time. He looks like one of those alligators that you see when you're cruising in the everglades, except with a slightly worse complexion.

He guards his territory jealously, which presents something of a challenge.

"I see your network's down again," he muses in passing.

The network accidentally crashed during an upgrade that we carrying out, just before the big race was about to start. "It's amazing that people are prevented from working on the network every time there's a race meeting or big football match, isn't it?" He smiles knowingly.

"Yes, we're having a lot of trouble with bottlenecks," I find myself saying, before politely slamming the door in his face and pouring another Espresso.

A few days later I find myself 'broken down' in front of Smiley's car on my way to my parking space. He leans on the horn, but my vehicle's illness is looking terminal - or at least it is after I pocket one of the spark plugs.

"I can't see what's wrong with it," I shout from under the bonnet.

"I'll go off and get help."

I know that the car park attendant is not likely to spring into action; partly because he's about 90 and partly because I left him the tapes I happened to have of the head of personnel talking to the deputy sales manager about some new high performance techniques they wanted to try out - in the hotel down the road.

"Quick," I shouted to the PFY. "We've only got a few minutes."

We know that the board meeting is about to start soon. A few minor adjustments to the server and they're ready to roll.

Back in my own office, I switch on the audio-monitoring device - OK, bug.

We hear the CEO's dulcet tones. "Now, I'd like to give you a demonstration of our latest product. I'd like to thank the technical whizz-kid in the financial department, Anthony, for his help in this demo. I believe we have a live feed to our R&D labs."

Live feed, yes. R&D Labs, no. The 3.30 at Newbury, definitely. Gasps from the board cause Smiley to be quickly summoned. His protests of innocence are to no avail as security, having emerged happy (and in my debt) from the car park attendant's hut, 'discover' the receipts for the local racing service in his desk.

The CEO is soon announcing the disbanding of the finance network, completely and for good. "I think I'd better bring network support back under one roof - at least departments can't pursue their own activities that way."

Networking - there are winners and there are losers. And I always seem to get such good odds ...

Local culinary delights with the Bastard lead to the rapid disappearance of the latest recruit...

"You bloody nobbled him, didn't you?" the boss snaps at me and the PFY in a fashion that betrays his pent-up frustration at losing yet another 'client services liaison manager' candidate. Four in one week - at this rate we'll never get to improve customer relations, sadly.

"I beg your pardon?" the PFY responds, pausing only briefly to display an innocent expression.

"He's not going to show is he?" the boss asks.

"Au contraire," I reply. "I saw him just this morning. In fact the PFY was with me. He was looking a little seedy however - apparently he went late-night drinking with a couple of his soon-to-be workmates."

"You took him out drinking?"

"Well, I might have had a couple of lagers last night, purely in the interests of better understanding," I admit grudgingly.

"So where is he now?"

"Well, that's the funny thing. The last I saw of him was when he was in the lift with me and the PFY when we were trying out those tasty new one quid cigars they sell at that stand down the street. He really did look ill. Next thing I knew he was rushing out of the lift and away."

"Why?"

"No idea. I think it was just after the PFY offered him those bacon fat sandwiches."

"Ah no," the PFY counters. "I think it was after you showed him that jar of pickled livers."

"Really? Oh well, I'll take your word for it."

"I suspected this might happen," the boss replies smugly whilst fingering the intercom to reception. "Send in the next applicant will you please?"

Ah... the old double-up-on-the-applicants trick.

Sure enough, the new applicant ("Call me Dave") takes his place at the desk and the boss gives him the standard glossy-brochure, entirely fictional account of what we do here, then asks what Dave's relevant experience is...

"Well," he blurts. "I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you."

My hand involuntarily tightens on the seat armrest as I consider the horror of working with somebody this geeky.

"When can you start?" the boss asks, anxious to fill the position before the head of IT has another downsizing-binge.

"Well, right away - I like to think I'm dynamically configurable."

The PFY's armrest creaks dangerously in tune with mine - great minds think alike.

Later that morning our new 'representative' is ensconced in the comms room to 'get a feel of our operation'. The PFY and I enhance the tactile experience by lowering the temperature and starting up all the noisy kit that we save for special occasions.

By lunchtime he's starting to get the blue-lipped, sleepy demeanor that only exposure can give, so we slip an empty vodka bottle into the comms room rubbish bin and mention the 'sly-grogging' to the boss.

He breaks the habit of a lifetime by not being fooled. The next day our co-worker has recovered and is back on the job, getting a rough introduction to the network hardware area when the cabling tray he was crawling along had some form of unexplained earthing problem resulting in a 'potential difference anomaly' between his torso and feet. Shocking!

I'm disturbed in my work a short time later when the boss comes wandering by.

"Have you seen Dave?" he asks.

"Not for a bit," I reply. "Why?"

"Oh, someone tripped after one of the removable floor tiles was left unsecured."

"Yes," the PFY mentions. "He left one open in the comms room too - could've been a nasty accident - still, all screwed down securely now."

The boss smiles uneasily at the proof of our safety point while trying to slip a piece of paper onto the desktop unnoticed.

"Oh," I cry, snatching it up. "An official safety memo designed to alleviate employers' responsibility for workplace accidents - in the area of... oh, securing floor tiles left open? Dated yesterday? I don't remember receiving this yesterday - do you?"

"Nope," the PFY says. "Not part of the official safety policy as of this morning."

The boss puts on his 'we're all playing on the same side' face and appeals to our better nature to prevent his looking bad at the next occupational safety review.

"That'll be 20 quid each," I reply, cutting him off. A deal is struck and the boss goes off with the knowledge that the buck is not stopping with him.

"Notice," the PFY mentions. "That nowhere on this memo does it say that you should check that there is no-one underneath the said floor at the time that you secure it."

"You didn't," I cry.

"Well you didn't think that banging was the air conditioning playing up again did you?"

"But that's terrible; I can't believe you'd do such a thing!"

You can never be too careful when it comes to networking.

The Bastard Operator From Hell and the Paintball session...

I love the smell of burning components in the morning. Smells like victory.

I skip victory and concentrate on the voices entering the radio mike in the desktop calculator on the Boss's desk. (First rule of bugs, pick something in plain sight that isn't going to get used)

"I think it's a FANTASTIC idea!!" the CEO burbles excitedly.

"It's BRILLIANT!" the Boss sucks up, "A game of bloody paintball war! It's sheer genius!"

I tune out. The fruition of months of subtle hints, endless misdirected web pages, countless spammed email messages. The gauntlet has been taken up...

..Sigh...

"PAINTBALL WAR!" the PFY cries queasily "They wouldn't dare!"

"Oh yes they would" I respond "Us versus the Beancounters! It would appear that the CEO, *YOUR* flesh and blood however indirectly, has been got at by some slime ball in accounts and decided that it would be a wise and proper thing to end the apparent inter-divisional war between us and accounts on the paintball field of honor - no hiding behind technology or purchase approval rubber stamps!"

"You sound like you're looking forward to it!" he cries, still not at all happy about the idea.

"Well, given that it is fairly much inevitable now, 'looking forward' is perhaps a little strong, but yes, I admit I do relish the opportunity of meeting our opposition fair and square on the field of honor, harboring no grudges (like them docking my petrol allowance simply because I sold my car and hadn't been called out to work for the past three months) in a free-for-all"

"But they'll cream us!" he bleats "They've got weekend soldiers on their side!" he snuffles, coming to the point at long last.

"And we have subcontractors! I'm sure I can rustle up one or two who know how to point a gun! Besides, it's all booked from above. The best we can hope for is to do our best, take our medicine like men, and charge double time for weekend work... Oh, and take some of them with us."

The PFY is unconvinced...

"Oh, did I mention that in the interests of morale, the boss - you know, the one who gave out your cellphone number to the helpdesk - is going to find out on the day that he's a member of the team?"

"Really?" the PFY says; doubt now a thing of the past...

A week later the fateful day arrives and we exit the bus to the smug countenances of the opposition - they having had both extensive education and practice in the past few days...

My own education in the arts is sadly lacking, having only read a couple of posts to a Usenet newsgroup on the topic. Sigh.

The paintball guy issues the rounds and weapons to the troops and the game commences. Our recently ordered library book tracking system is getting a bit of testing "in the field" with detectors sewn into the lining of the opposition's combat suits... Looks like a worthwhile investment...

A buttock presents itself to my hiding place so I fire point blank with my reserve weapon - one that has just a tad more pressure than the standard issue and happens to be loaded with frozen pellets...

The resultant scream does two things to bring a smile to my face: (a) Confirms newsgroup accuracy, and (b) alerts the rest of the team to a sitting duck...

Half an hour later we've surrounded the beancounters in their makeshift fort.

"We surrender!" they cry, coming out with weapons raised.

"Now you see" I say to the PFY "In a real war-time situation, we would now be taking prisoners. Sadly, however, the Geneva convention does not extend itself to the paintball sports..."

The resulting massacre is needlessly quick.

"Quick!" the PFY cries "They're heading back to the bus!!!"

"You mean the one currently parked at a quiet country pub 4 miles away..."

The CEO pops in to see how things are going and if grievances have been solved.

In the absence of the enemy, the boss has taken on a definite hunted expression with the team seeming to be made up exclusively of people he's annoyed in the past few weeks.

"Friendly Fire" I comment to the CEO over his protests "A documented wartime phenomenon. Purely Accidental..."

...

The following Monday we're back at work and, true to the CEO's expectations, interdivisional bickering is at an all-time low.

True, with most of Accounts apparently suffering from some form of "Post Traumatic Stress Disorder" - the aftermath of the ambush in the snug of the 'quiet country pub' apparently - there isn't really anyone to bicker with.

Accounts aren't the only one to suffer from this. We're snowed under writing proposals for equipment purchases for the boss to sign - apparently he's heard there's a rematch on in a couple of weeks and wants to curry favor with the masses.

Looks like time to order that Stereo 29inch Video monitor for my telecommuting from home....

BOFH 1997 Part 2 The Bastard Operator from Hell 1997 Limited Release, Part Two

Hello Reader,

In this, the even more limited release of the second part of the 1997 Bastard Operator from Hell, we have to ask the question, who taught this guy to use VI? Not his mother obviously, that's a dead giveaway. Perhaps we'll never know...

The PFY scores top marks in the all important 'how to be a Bastard Operator From Hell' test...

"I don't think you realize who I am."

The PFY pauses for a minute. "Hmm...Carter accounts. Room 402, extension 6473, date of birth June 22, 1963. Married, one child - not yours. A cider drinker. Drive a red Volvo with a faulty rear light and collect beer coasters. Your password is...ahhhhmmm."

"Something to do with fish," I hint.

"Driftnet," the PFY cries.

"Excellent," I respond, turning to our latest visitor. "Can I have a sports question please?"

"But...I..."

"No, sports," I reply firmly.

While our user wanders off, I fill out the practical section of the PFY's final exam sheet.

"Let's see. Yes, you achieved the correct amount of disorientation and demoralization. You also get a couple of bonus points by planting the seeds of doubt with the 'not yours' comment. Now, onto the theoretical section. The hard disk on your personal machine fails out of warranty period. What would you do?"

"Swap it with the boss's so he gets it replaced immediately, then, when the new disk arrives, format the boss's old one and reinstall it in his machine."

"Yeeesss. But remember that you're being marked for proactivity too..."

"Oh of course!" the PFY blurts guiltily. "Then swap it into one of the consultants' machines so that you always have a standby disk for the future."

"Excellent. Now, you're helping users out in your spare time, when..."

The PFY laughs out loud.

"Correct. Next question: the boss has bought a piece of kit that is so old that even the engineers understand how it works. How would you get rid of it?"

"Drop it down several flights of stairs?"

"Too suspicious."

"Flick the mains switch to 115 volts for a little while?"

"He'll replace the power supply."

"Umm... I know, direct a heat gun into its cooling vents."

"Correct. Complete this statement: all power corrupts absolute power..."

"...is even more fun!"

"Correct. Your boss and a client are plummeting towards the footpath after cornering you for two hours with their thoughts on the future of computing. Who would hit the ground first?"

"Who cares?"

"Correct. Judging solely by his attitude, how does the boss believe our network is managed?"

"By FM management."

"Be more specific."

"F***ing magic."

"Correct. How long would it take an engineer to change a flat?"

"It depends on how many replacement flats he brought with him."

"Correct. Still on that topic, an engineer happens to mention the words 'that's interesting'. What has happened?"

"Uh, he's either broken your computer, lost his screwdriver inside it somewhere, put it back together with lots of parts left over or encountered some error that he's never seen before."

"So?"

"Oh, he just says it to pass the time because he's not allowed to say 'bollocks' in the presence of a customer."

"Precisely. One of your users brings his home computer for you to fix. You..."

"Solder the circuit breaker shut, crank the voltage adjustments to full power, swap out any good memory chips for crap and install a virus on their hard disk."

"And?"

"Whoopsy - charge them mates' rates of 20 quid for your time."

"Yep. Complete this: the meek shall inherit..."

"...what they're bloody well given. And be thankful for it."

"Correct. You have scored a total of 10 out of 10 in the theoretical section, passing on none. As your final task you must generate, then deal with, 50 user complaints in two minutes. Your time starts now!"

An hour later we're observing the smoking remains of the beancounters' comms cupboard.

"Freak wiring mishap?" the PFY asks the fire investigating officer.

"Looks that way," he replies, much to the annoyance of the head beancounter, who is not as stupid as he looks. "It seems that someone had replaced the five amp plug fuse on a portable lamp with a piece of nail resulting in a small fire when the cord insulation became pierced when it got trapped in the door. Just an accident waiting to happen."

"Yes, and how particularly tragic that accounts were storing all the historic purchasing records for the IT department in this very cupboard, even though we warned them of the fire risk," I add.

"Very tragic," the PFY concurs.

Later at a pub in the heart of Soho I congratulate the PFY on his promotion to the position of 'master bastard' by buying him a lager for a change.

"So that's it then?" the PFY comments.

"IT?" I cry. "This is just the beginning. Starting tomorrow it's time for graduate studies." Even at this level, the poor guy still has so much to learn. Like how easy it is to slip a laxative into a lager for a start.

The BOFH is given lessons in how to be a shiny happy IT manager. And he can't wait to start...

It's mid-afternoon and we're in the middle of our annual 'improve the perception of IT' fortnight. Things are going just great.

The boss has a bee in his bonnet about my liberal interpretation of the promotional slogan 'delivering what the client needs'. Apparently, my helpdesk instruction sheets on how to deliver 'a damn good kicking' weren't within the intended scope of the motto...

He was in an even worse mood after the hand-proximity sensor on the line printer failed to operate while he was attempting to stop said instruction sheets from printing. The fast moving paper gave him a large and deep paper cut that he won't be forgetting in a hurry. And the PFY and I certainly don't know how that heavily salted water got into the first aid antiseptic bottle.

But his irritation began after spotting a publicity photo of one of the members of the company's football team (sponsored by the IT division) walking around with his football jersey untucked. Beautifully crafted, and costing enough to make a beancounter weep, the jerseys have a lovely little IT crest (a couple of crossed keyboards on a burning PC background, emblazoned on the left breast). The words 'IT - giving you more' are in large letters on the back. When untucked however, the words 'of a shafting' become visible. The boss was not impressed.

The PFY and I make no attempts to escape his wrath knowing full well that he has to pass the head of IT's room to get to us. He's not so keen on doing that since some complete bastard uploaded a new ring sound to the head's cellphone - a sound not dissimilar to that made by a lentil casserole after its trip through the digestive tract.

Accordingly, the IT department managers' meeting he attended this morning was a swift affair, and certainly not one that really should have been 'aired' as a live video conference and PR opportunity. Even the cafeteria staff saw it and wouldn't serve him the onion bhajis at lunchtime.

Not that I feel sorry for the boss. The whole 'improve the perception of IT' initiative was all his fault in the first place for mentioning that it 'must be about that time of the year' to the head of IT.

No-one likes these PR weeks because the bosses like to answer all those stupid user questions such as: 'Can I send 1,000 copies of my CV to the printer? Can I talk to one of your network guys for an hour or two?' and 'Do you know who set my car on fire?' with 'yes', 'yes', and 'no' instead of the far more appropriate 'not if you want to see another birthday, not if you want to see another birthday', and, 'us, we thought it was your birthday.'

But the thing that really puts the boss under the gun is that he's invoked a 'response time' clause in our contracts that was meant for call-out duties which says we have to respond within a reasonable amount of time to a user's problems.

In PR week, 'reasonable' means 10 minutes. Now perhaps the boss can have a good game of MDK in 10 minutes, but a networking professional cannot!

Sure enough, I'm just firing up MDK when the phone goes.

"Hello?"

"Yes?" I ask, expecting the worst.

"I've got a problem with my network."

Here we go...

"Hmmm?" Why waste words on these morons? They're much happier with a bit of grunting and a few soothing clucking noises.

"It's a little difficult to explain over the phone - could someone come up?"

Sigh.

I flip the PFY for it and am stunned when I lose. Then I realize that the little bastard has switched my double headed 50 pence for a double tail model.

It really does me proud to see him turning out so well.

Of course, I still won't be telling him that I removed the safety grille from the whirring blades of the cooling fan at the back of his PC, but there you go.

I get to the user's office and it's the same old thing. They moved the PC and the network stopped.

"But it never used to do that."

"No, but now that we don't use thin wire network cabling it does."

"That doesn't sound like a good move."

I manage to extricate myself an hour later (after the story about how technology was much more reliable in the 1950s) and get back to the office.

The PFY chuckles maliciously.

"He rang back - the lead's fallen out of the computer and he's scared to plug it in."

"A separate call," I cry, "that makes it your turn!"

"Toss you for it?" he asks, not understanding where the line should be drawn.

"I'll go for tails for a change."

"Bastard!" Sensibly, the PFY doesn't admit to anything.

"Oh, by the way, make sure to mention how reliable IT is nowadays, especially when compared to the 1950s..."

The PFY grumbles a bit before slouching over to the door.

"Have you seen my access card?"

"Yeah," I reply, "I needed it to get into the comms room this morning. I think it fell down the back of your PC. On the cooling fan side..."

A little sabotage is in the offing as the BOFH scuppers the systems department and the boss...

It's the final week of the PR fortnight and things have calmed down. People don't call us for the 'guaranteed response' so much. Perhaps it's something to do with the type of response they're guaranteed.

The geeks in the systems department are miles ahead of networks in the popularity stakes after blatantly bribing the users by shoving a terabyte of disk at them and electronically yelling "help yourself." Nothing short of upgrading everyone to 100 Meg Ethernet is going to bring us up to their level. The systems department must be brought down.

The terabyte of disk space is the first to go - about 20 in-depth 'treatments' with the rapid-freeze spray then the heat-gun along the drive electronics is sufficient to introduce the fabled 'random factor' into file safety.

The boss, meantime, is trying to curry favor with the masses by announcing a massive memory upgrade to the applications server to give it some real performance, disregarding completely the bottleneck analysis software pointing to desktop network speed. There's no helping some people.

Sure enough, a few hours later we have an engineer outside our office trying to edge into the computer room.

"What the hell's he doing here?" I ask.

"What do you mean?" The PFY is momentarily confused.

"Shouldn't he be stuck in a lift somewhere?"

"Oh of course! It completely slipped my mind. You'll be wanting the 5th floor." He indicates a lift only ever used by operational staff and very stupid people.

Ten minutes later, the engineer is back.

"There's no bloody server up there," he snaps, a little agitated at the nasty delay caused by the lift problems.

"Server?" the PFY responds, "I thought you'd come to fix the girder up on the 5th floor."

The engineer looks at him unkindly, then enquires about the processor needing the new memory.

The PFY swipes his card through the computer room reader and receives the much feared 'denied' beep. I try my card and a similar thing happens.

"Security must be having a problem again. We'd better wait for a bit until the system comes on-line. Coffee?"

"Sounds like a bloody dodgy system," the engineer says following the PFY out.

As soon as they've gone I break out the scalpel and the roll of tamper-evident packing tape.

Five minutes after that I try my real card on the reader and we all enter the computer room.

"So, two gig into this baby," the engineer says reaching for the apps server off switch.

"Hell no," I cry, panic-stricken. "We don't want that upgraded, we want that one upgraded." I point to a system so old it makes a 286 look state-of-the-art.

"You're joking."

"No. Why?"

"Two gigs for that would take up half this room, if it could address it, which it can't."

"So why did your guys sell it to us?" The PFY elbows in on the act.

"We bloody didn't. I'm here to install memory in this." The engineer is getting agitated now - the little veins are sticking out on his forehead.

"But that doesn't need memory."

"Look, there's obviously been some mix-up here," the engineer says. "I'll need to talk to your systems guy."

"He's off sick." I don't think I need to tell him about the poor guy's skin inflammation, which is completely unrelated to that consignment of tanning machine lamps which was mistakenly delivered to our department a week ago, just after his terabyte of disk battle plans were overheard. The PFY just happened to be monitoring his phone line for clarity. Purely in the name of good service of course.

Suffice to say a few of his brighter staff have taken to wearing sun block and heavy jumpers, even when the central heating accidentally came on for four hours the other day.

"OK," the engineer crumbles in the face of resistance, "I'll get my boss to contact you."

Ten minutes later he's gone, leaving with a couple of MFM hard disk controller cards sealed with tamper-evident tape in his memory upgrade box.

"I think it might be time that Kamakuza Memory Systems 1997 gave the boss a call with an offer he can't refuse, don't you?" I say to the PFY, wielding a couple of spanking new memory cards. "While I'm about it - couldn't the two central routers do with a processor upgrade?"

By the end of the week network's goodwill stock is high, with the surplus memory upgrade dosh going into 100 Meg Ethernet cards for the key players in the PR stakes. Meanwhile, in the pub, the CEO of Kamakuza Memory Systems 1997 meets with the CEO of Kamakuza Router Upgrades 1997.

"Whose round is it anyway?" the PFY asks. "It's yours isn't it?"

"Yes, I believe it is," I sigh as I go to the bar. It's not all fun and games, this CEO business. Bankruptcy looms at every bar corner, if you play your cards right that is...

The BOFH goes on a trade show outing...

"There's that smell again!" I cry to the PFY, happily recognizing that all-too-familiar scent in the air...

"What, onion bhajis?" he asks, his senses dulled by years of soft music and educational films.

"No! *THE* smell".

"Fear?"

"No!"

"Burning Equipment?"

"NO! Can't you feel it, in your bones?"

"Rheumatism" he replies sarcastically.

"No," I respond, "But there could be a fracture in the wind if you don't tune in your senses ..."

"Well I don't feel anyt... oh yes!" he cries, suddenly enlightened.

"TRADE SHOW!" we cry simultaneously.

"Now we're going to need a convincing excuse to go as the boss is a bit against trade shows for some reason".

"Could it be because of the last time you went to one?" the PFY asks.

"Which time was that?" I ask. "I don't remember anything out of the ordinary?"

"You mean the time you spent a couple of weeks prior to the event at the tanning clinic, then turned up at the trade show calling yourself Sheik El Al Hand Kebab and claiming to want to network up every home in your Emirate State, no expense spared?"

"I can't recall such an inci..."

"When you drank two suppliers into receivership, disappeared for three days along with the boss's car, secretary, Visa card and nude holiday snaps - only one of which ever turned up again - you - claiming you'd been in a skiing accident on the M25?"

"Well now you come to mention it, the skiing accident rings a bell. Yes, I remember now, it was on work time and so technically they were responsible for my rehabilitation..."

"At the Betty Ford Clinic?"

"Only the best for the company's contractors, I'll say that for them. Anyway, there was no proof I was linked to the car, Visa, secretary or holiday snaps"

"The ones in your second to top drawer, in the envelope marked MFM Disk Formatting Instructions?"

Hmm. I appear to be slightly outflanked by the PFY's skills at determining the truth no matter how low he has to stoop. Taught him everything he knows, you know...

"Well, anyway, that's all water under the bridge," I cry, attempting to change the subject.

"Along with the boss's car if rumors are to be believed," the PFY interrupts. "Still, at least you obviously didn't pull a complete Ted Kennedy, as you're still getting those postcards from Spain ..."

Things aren't working out quite the way I planned. The PFY seems to be holding the upper hand in the conversation - something I'm not altogether used to, or comfortable with.

"ENOUGH!" I cry. "I admit, mistakes were made, not least of which was getting lagered the week after and possibly divulging more of that which transpired to you than you needed to know."

"I'll say!" the PFY cries. "You could have left the bit about you, the boss's secretary and the train in the Underground Museum right out of the conversation, as far as I'm concerned".

Sadly, I'm all out of verbal conversation modifiers. The use of unnecessary force is mentally approved and I give him a taste of the negative ion generator, dangerously modified to put out a few more amps than is safe in an office situation. And sure enough, the PFY does seem to be a lot calmer afterwards.

"BACK ON TOPIC!" I cry. "We have a trade show to go to, and I don't want any more interruptions!"

The PFY nods obediently.

"Now, we need some foolproof plan to enable us to go".

"I could ring my uncle".

"Yes, yes, but cashing in favors with the CEO isn't the plan. A far better plan is to give the boss absolutely NO power of veto for technical reasons".

"After last time nothing short of an earthquake is going to shift the boss's views..." the PFY chips.

"OF COURSE! AN EARTHQUAKE! GENIUS!"

"You're going to cause an earthquake?!?!?"

"No, no, of course not! Well, not if I don't have to anyway. No, the reason of reasons!

The excuse of excuses!"

"What would that be then?" The PFY asks, unenlightened.

"DISASTER RECOVERY! It's been YEARS since anyone tested our DR kit, and a large percentage of it would probably catch fire if we powered it up anyway! BRILLIANT!"

The PFY calls uncle and starts the ball rolling.

"Ah!" the boss clucks as he enters the office some minutes later. "You know, I was thinking it was about time we tested our disaster recovery systems!"

"Do we have any disaster recovery systems?" I add, paving the way, "as there's an exhibition on that very topic in two weeks that the PFY and I are keen to go to".

"UNLIKELY!" the boss replies harshly. "We already have two DR room's upstairs, ready to be fired up. I think we would do that now".

No sooner said than done. About two hours later, as the fire brigade is leaving, I'm taken aside by the CEO to answer the boss's outrageous claims of sabotage.

"Ridiculous!" I cry. "The fire was caused by dust accumulating in the equipment over a period of three years. We were lucky the whole place didn't go up. It's information like this that you find out at DR Trade Shows like the one coming up in tw..."

Two weeks later the PFY and I enter the trade show for a 3 day tour of duty. It's a harsh job, but someone's got to do it. We're greeted immediately by a charming young woman working for a popular supplier.

"Good Morning and Welcome to our Show, Mr., um ..."

"Sheik Ali Mohammed," I reply "And my son, Ahmed Mohammed. We're here to get some computing for our palace. Only the best will do, naturally ..."

In the aftermath of the trade show the PFY is forced to dip into the favor bank...

"So what the hell happened?" the PFY asks, looking a little worse for wear.

"I take it you don't remember locking yourself in the comms room with your friend from DP Pool for two days with a carton of salt and vinegar crisps, a crate of lime cordial and two flagons of alcohol-based tape head cleaner, claiming you were going to 'clean some heads'?"

"Uhhhh no," the PFY answers confused.

"No and neither do I," I reply. "I woke up nailed into sickbay with that woman from the router company. I had to look at the security tapes to see how we'd made it back."

"Did you e..." he blurts nervously.

"Sure did, every copy. Suffice to say you owe me one."

"Yes, I suppose I do," the PFY admits with a touch of embarrassment and guilt.

"Still," I say, "bloody good trade show."

"I'm not really sure," the PFY replies. "I'm a bit grey in places. I seem to remember a red strobe light."

"That wasn't actually a strobe light. That was a router that you bet me five quid didn't run on three phase."

"And it didn't?"

"No no, it did - just not for very long. You know what they say about 'the candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long'? Exactly the same principle, except a better wording would be the kit that works at thrice the voltage works for about 2.5 seconds. Oh, and you owe me five quid."

"That's hardly fair."

"A bet's a bet; we never said how long it would run continuously for. Hell, if that were the case half the world's software companies would be out of business."

The PFY hands over the dosh while we wait for the boss to storm in. And speak of the devil, Hurricane Halfwit rounds the corner at that precise moment.

"Uh-oh," says the PFY. "He looks worse than he did last time when you took his company car and stuff."

"That might be because you took his company car this time."

"I don't remember that at all."

"That could be because you passed out once you'd got the handbrake off and backed it full-tilt into the basement wall. Which is why you locked yourself in the comms room..."

"Ohhhh yes, I do remember the basement bit now you come to mention it. So I'm in it quite deeply, aren't I?"

"Well," I reply, "to use an analogy, you've ridden the lift of the Tower of Turd to its lowest floor and are still pressing the down arrow."

A crash interrupts our conversation as the boss, fuelled by pure, concentrated anger, bursts into the room.

"Get out!" he shouts, voice breaking slightly under the strain. "Pack up your stuff and bugger off. Now. I want you off the premises immediately, no ifs, buts or maybes."

My attempts at placating him fall on deaf ears, and his tirade is only interrupted by the ring of a phone. The phone, the red phone. I press the hands-free pickup.

"Hello, Gotham City."

As per usual the CEO eats this up with a chuckle. It's the small things that keep them amused.

"I've just been casting an eye over this disaster recovery evaluation you sent me," he says. "It's very interesting, especially the bits about simulating a comms room lockout, and a basement ram-raid as an evaluation of our vulnerability to disenfranchised groups in the community. In fact I've passed it on to the board members and it seems to have been well received all round at this stage."

The boss appears to be having some form of seizure related to dangerously high blood pressure so I rush to his aid.

"Away," he shouts, and then calms down sufficiently to address the CEO. "And may I ask why using my company vehicle was part of this simulation?"

"Well I was told you'd volunteered it to make up for the mess you'd made with the fire in the disaster recovery room last week. Is that not the case?"

"Oh yes, that's right," the boss crawls. "But I think the board might be interested in seeing exactly what occurred, as captured by the security cameras."

The PFY's eyes indicate that he once more has that sinking feeling. Whereas I might get off with a reprimand for the unorthodox nature of my actions, the CCTV wiring the comms room has and the sick bay lacks might not reflect so well on him.

"I think my documentation covers everything," I respond. Sadly however, the CEO is unconvinced, so we all troop to his office for a viewing.

The boss savors the moment as he presses play on the executive video machine.

"What the bloody hell does security do all day?" the CEO snaps, as the opening titles of Emmerdale pop up on the screen.

"Did I say one?" I murmur to the PFY. "I think I meant you owe me two."

"As I was saying in my summation," I say, "with the slack security around here, disenfranchised groups are a very real threat."

"Smell that? That's a DR budget with my name on it."

The disaster recovery budget proves to be a sore point, until the BOFH and PFY stage a little one of their own...

The Pimply Faced Youth and I are poring over computing catalogues when the boss bursts in. His mission today is to reclaim some of the budget that the PFY and I have allocated behind his back to the white elephant of disaster recovery.

We've been especially good about it too, recommending that we install a 'redundant' satellite dish on the rear of the building, selflessly proposing a test angle that saves the company money by using an established 'test-signal' generated by a Dutch TV company.

"What the bloody hell do you think you're doing?" he blurts, waving the chunky wad of disaster recovery proposals recently given to all and sundry by the PFY and my good self.

"What do you mean?"

"Recommending another satellite dish. We don't even use the first one."

"Yes, but with one at either side of the building, we have a redundant path in case the comms risers at either side of the building lose connectivity - as could happen in an earthquake..."

True, this is less likely to occur than the boss buying a round, but planning demands scrupulous attention to tiny, albeit improbable, details.

For a few seconds he struggles to absorb this. "Don't be ridiculous! We don't have a UPS on the rear of the building."

"Yes, I believe I mention that on page two, between redundant espresso machine with battery back-up and emergency response centre with complete living facilities."

"If you think for one moment that the company's going to pay for you two to have a city flat to drag women back to, you've got another think coming," he snarls, "and as for your bloody coffee machine..."

"...go with the three spout model I think," the CEO finishes, entering the room.

"And while you're still at the planning stage, I was just thinking that this would be a good color for the carpeting of your emergency response quarters," he holds up a swatch of Axminster with a street value well in excess of most controlled substances. "It's just the right tone to reduce stress in a tense situation."

And just the right tone, if I'm not mistaken, to reduce the chances of the PFY or I getting a look-in at occupying the room outside the CEO's holidays. Still, sacrifices have to be made for the greater cause.

And this week's greater cause is the pursuit of excellence. True, the city flat would have been nice, along with the 'rooftop coolant storage facility' (complete with diving board), but the PFY and I are going to have to be happy with upgrading equipment.

The boss trundles off - years of experience helping him to recognize defeat when it rings his doorbell - to peruse our proposals further.

"What the bloody hell is this?" he shouts about five minutes later, fingering the proposal to eliminate thin wire cabling. "It'll cost a fortune. And it's not even a disaster."

Strangely enough, seconds later it is. A nasty termination error occurs two floors above us, isolating the human resources server from the rest of the network.

"Ah, we'll be needing someone in for some overtime," the boss says, feigning a casual attitude.

"It'll have to be the PFY. I have a doctor's appointment in half an hour."

"Oh," the PFY replies right on schedule. "I've got a migraine coming on and I don't think I can manage."

"Someone bloody has to - the HR server's gone off the network!"

"But it's happened before," I say, playing innocent.

"But not when the pay checks are due the next day! The last time this happened the staff went on a rampage and wrecked the place. It was a disaster area." The boss shuts up when he hears the distant tingling of that doorbell once again.

As a networking professional it never ceases to amaze me that the combined bandwidth of FDDI, CDDI and ATM is but a snail's-pace when compared to the speed at which bad news can find its way around the company.

The boss gives in. "How much?" Warily, he reaches for his wallet.

"What, for our silence, or for the repair?"

"Both."

"Just pass it over. We'll drop off what's left tomorrow."

One length of thin wire and a loss of memory later, the PFY and I are looking at several 'approved' stamps with accompanying signatures on our proposal. Amongst city flats, Dutch smut and new coffee machines is the dream I've had for years. The end of thin wire is nigh.

"Let's celebrate. Waiter, your finest champagne and when the money in that wallet runs out, start on the credit cards."

The PFY has accumulated a number of complaints in his new role - and it's up to the Bastard to sort him out...

It's a sad day for networking professionals everywhere. I, as the senior networking consultant, have been allocated the task of investigating a few complaints against the PFY and recommending some form of censure for the events concerned.

Apparently the boss has attended one of those 'progressive management' courses and come back with armloads of manuals on how to increase work levels and reduce stress in the workplace. Personally, I'd feel happier if he stuck to the literature of the same genre that mentions the seven dwarves and three bears so as to allow him to get on with the real tasks of management.

Still, it's a slow day on floor two, so I decide to give it a crack. Sure enough, I get a call from one of the human resources people - almost as soon as I get in at 11am. Apparently, all disciplinary actions require a representative from personnel to be present, so we organize a time and agree to meet in one of personnel's wastes of space on the fifth floor. Oh, I mean interview rooms.

"Right," I start, upon my arrival. "I think we all know why we're here." I turn to the PFY. "Apparently there have been three complaints against you in the past month and it is our task to investigate these to their fullest and decide on the appropriate action."

"I understand," the PFY replies.

"Right, first up we have a complaint from someone in accounts who says that he ordered a software upgrade that you'd agreed to handle."

"Yes, I remember that," the PFY responds.

"In your own words, what did he ask for?"

"Well he called the office at 4.50pm and said he wanted WYSIWYG, and he wanted it before I went home."

"What did you do?"

"I downed the lights and power points on his floor."

"And he could see?"

"Nothing."

"And he got?"

"Nothing."

"So you filled his order to his requirements?"

"I thought so."

"Excellent," I cry happily. "I don't th..." the personnel guy starts only to be stopped by a stony stare.

"My show I believe. Now, onto this ATM business. "

"Well, one of the beancounters wanted ATM in his room."

"And what did you do?"

"Well, I got the company architect to move his office to the ground floor next to the cash machine."

"Well you did your best then."

"I think he meant he wanted better networking," Mr. Personnel said struggling in the deep end of technology. "After all, that's what you do."

"Really? Hmm, you could be right. But we'll never know because he's left the company. Apparently the machine's beeping drove him mad within a week. I can't think why he asked for it in the first place. Apparently he never got around to finishing those reduction proposals to IT spending..."

"Worse luck. Oh well, chalk one up for the client not being specific in describing their needs. But you did your best despite the odds stacked against you, well done. Lastly," I continue, before personnel can interrupt, again. "There's something here about problems with someone being locked in the comms corridor."

"Well, that was my fault," the PFY admits.

"One of the database guys demanded to check that his room was patched into the FDDI and must have let himself into the corridor by accident. I couldn't see him in the comms room and thought you must have let him out."

"An easy mistake to make," I reply. "As I have done on occasion myself, which is why we really should deny any access to the room in the first place."

"This is bloody ridiculous," Mr. Personnel snaps in what could be called an annoyed manner. "There's no bloody way that could happen."

"It could," I respond. "Because there are no windows in the secure corridor so you don't know anyone's in there. We've mentioned it to the safety officer more than once and asked for CCTV, but so far no such luck. "

It is a great source of sadness to me that he doesn't trust our word on that.

"Well," I say to the PFY later, "I think there's no grounds for censure here. How about we nip down to the pub for a quick pint?"

"Excellent," the PFY responds. "Should I check the secure corridor?"

"No, I'm sure someone let him out while we were at tea. Just make sure the temperature's low enough in there in case there's an overnight heat wave."

Basic law of networking No.4: Opportunities, like the boss's cigars, are there for the taking...

When the boss tries to out-bastard the Bastard it's time to bring on Plan A, sit back, and enjoy the fireworks...

I'm concerned about the boss. I just can't explain his attitude - at least not since he slipped on that section of thickwire whilst carrying a laboriously prepared OHP presentation last week.

Sadly, his slides on 'contractor versus permanent staff - ways to increase value for money', lost a little in the presentation after being delivered in a random order...

It also didn't slip my attention that he failed to appreciate my comments about the prudence of numbering OHP slides, nor the PFY's suggestion of using presentation software that does it all automatically - and cheaper.

One would almost think that he'd prepared it all off-line and on permanent media to ensure that no-one was aware of the topic of his talk in advance.

In which case using the transparency printer - dormant for 98 per cent of its life - wasn't a good way of diverting attention from yourself.

Strangely enough, one of his disjointed points did lodge in some moth-eaten corner of the head of IT's brain, and since then our lives have been a misery.

In an effort to suck up to the beancounters while justifying yet another yearly bonus, he's agreed to the proposal of the PFY and myself doing chargeable work for outside organizations...

Sure, after the first few network outages and the odd security breach, demand for our services tapered off slightly - to nil. But credit is due to the boss for not letting a minor setback like that deter him from trying to make us pay. We'd barely got back into the office when three large boxes were deposited at our feet.

My eye for hideously expensive equipment twitched slightly as my gaze alighted on the vendor name and product code emblazoned on the side of one of the boxes. Nor was the PFY slow in detecting the presence of equipment that was the networking equivalent of the Holy Grail.

The boss sauntered in casually and addressed us in our stunned silence.

"Yes," he said smugly. "It's what you think it is. Top of the line switching and routing gear from Teranet, fully propagated with a card for everything in use today, from RS232 to ATM to Gigabit Ethernet. You name it, it's on it. And you two are lucky enough to get to test it!"

"Test it?" I ask, looking at enough power to run a small telecoms provider.

"Hell yes. You don't think I'd buy it do you? You're being paid to run it and produce an independent report for a networking rag. Then we'll send it back to the supplier - once they've checked it against the shipping docket of course..."

The bastard.

"The bastard," the PFY whispers as the boss leaves.

The boss, dare I admit it, has done the unthinkable - he's delivered a blow for the managing class. He knows full well that going back to our equipment after using this treasure trove will be like trading a Rolls Royce in on a Robin Reliant. A mental kick in the goolies from anyone's point of view.

A day later, unable to resist the temptation, the PFY and I play with the kit in question. Sadly, it's not as good as it claims to be - its better.

The boss just eats it all up - filing our review and our recommendations for purchase in the same shredder tray before wandering off, chuckling, to lunch.

"It can't be like this," the PFY wails, eyeing the vendor's packing crew who've come to decommission the tested kit.

"It's all right, I'm sure we'll get some kit like that some day."

"When it's so bloody obsolete it'll be a cooling system load."

"OK," I mutter. "Tell you what, how about a couple of lagers at lunch. You like lagers at lunchtime remember?"

"I can't," he blurts. "I told Sharon I'd meet her for lunch and she's only got half an hour."

One pull of a piece of string later, all is revealed to the PFY as hundreds of confetti-like pieces of paper are released into the under floor cooling system. The under floor smoke sensors do their magic and backup Plan A roars into action.

After securing comms central, the PFY, Sharon, and I file out along with the rest of the sheep, while on the other side of the building the freight elevator, true to its fire alarm configuration, returns to ground floor.

The three boxes inside it marked 'Christmas decorations' are sure to be filed away in the appropriate place by stores as soon as the alert's over.

I shouldn't think we'll see them again until long after the boss has accepted responsibility (and organized payment) for some recently lost very expensive on-loan equipment.

"Right," I cry as we step out into daylight. "To the pub. I believe there's a sales rep from Teranet who has several pints with our names on them."

The boss tries to oust the BOFH and the PFY again. Enter George, some lager, a shredder and several PFYs to-be...

I'm feeling a little seedy this morning after I put several hours (and lagers) into finding out just what the hell's going on.

It appears that George from Cleaning and Maintenance has overheard some startling conversations between the head of IT and the boss. They are plotting on winning the CEO's favor with the result of getting shot of the PFY and I.

A small amount of dosh later, George tells us how they intend to accomplish their aim...

So it comes as no surprise when the CEO and IT brown-nose crew (the boss and head of IT) enter the office.

"I'd like to ask you a little favor if I may," the CEO begins benevolently.

"What can I do for you?" I ask, getting a little naso-trouser action in myself.

"Well, it's my grandchild's computer applications class," he says.

"Surely you're too young to have grandchildren?" the head of IT blurts.

The CEO continues: "Well, apparently they'd like to see some of the theory in action and I thought..."

"...that we could show them how a real computer centre works," the PFY finishes.

"Exactly."

"No sooner said than done," I say, taking the lead in the brown-nose hurdles.

"And I'll sort out some souvenirs, lunch and transport," the PFY adds, winning by a length, closely followed by me, and the boss.

Two days later the group of Slightly-Pimpily-Faced-Youths shows up at IT Central. Half the department is on the alert as word's got around there's some form of benefit to be had from this sort of activity.

"Before we start, I'd just like to quickly cover the topic of safety in this building."

The CEO smiles gratefully, knowing I have the best interests of his kin and class at heart.

Five minutes later our attentive students are preparing themselves to enter the Comms room when a loud shriek is heard from outside Mission Control.

"And lastly," I say, removing the cable between the step-up transformer and the door handle, "a sincere thanks to our boss for his practical demonstration of the dangers of electricity." I open the door to reveal the boss, with a more vacant expression than usual, sitting on the floor outside the office with a pile of IT ID-cards scattered about him. "You can never be too careful."

The boss is ferried away to sick bay for a quick once-over (and a change of undergarments if my nose does not deceive me) while the head of IT spots an opportunity to join the class as we take them through to the Comms room. He gazes on in awe as we identify the various bits and pieces therein (half of which he signed for) and ask for questions as we wander into the tape and document safe.

"What are they for?" the CEO's descendant asks pointing at some of our equipment.

"Those are for document destruction. This is a bulk eraser and that's a shredder. Would you like to try?"

A couple of students are keen to try their hand at it so we give them some old tapes and a stack of paper and leave them to it.

"What's that TV set for?" asks one of the students, pointing at a 29in monitor.

"That's not a TV set," the head chuckles. "That's a security camera monitor."

"But it's got a stereo video attached to it."

"A security recorder with dual audio channels isn't it?" the head asks me.

"Well, it looks like a TV and video to me. I still don't know why you ordered it."

"Ordered it?" the PFY pipes up. "He asked me to get stores to deliver it to his home."

"You requested it." The head is losing his calm.

"What on earth for? Anyway, I keep copies of all requests. Until they've been filled, at which time they get shredded..."

The head, in Superman mode, attempts to leap a high tape stack in a single bound, face planting the shredding machine. A nasty sight for the young and impressionable, but not as nasty as what follows when his tie slips into the shredder blades... The PFY switches it off at the wall saving the boss further injury, but also disabling the reverse switch.

"Once again we see the dangers of our workplace," I lecture as the boss thrashes around trying to free himself. "Even a shredder can be dangerous. Even this bulk eraser could cause problems especially if you weren't wearing an anti-magnetic watch like our head here."

BZZZZZZZZZZERT...

"Oh. Or if you were wearing one that said it was anti-magnetic, but wasn't, like the boss here. Thank you very much for demonstrating sir."

The CEO smiles, happy in the knowledge that the class has learned something. Situation restored to normal.

When the PFY shows compassion to a user, the BOFH suspects a Mid-Job Crisis and takes emergency action...

It's a slow afternoon at Mission Control when the phone rings. It's an external call, which is more welcome than the internal variety.

As luck would have it, it's my slave- trader come to take me out for the twice-yearly drink-up, food-stuff and pep-talk to guarantee my custom in the years ahead. True, I could go back to contracting direct as I used to, but this way someone else has to foot the bill for a six-monthly night of excess. The PFY and I arrange to skive off early and meet him in a local drinking establishment. The night promises to be interesting...

Sure enough, the next day, the PFY and I are somewhat slow on the uptake. Whilst the idea of doing the Monopoly-Board Pub Crawl sounded like a good idea under the influence of lager at 10 past 5, at 10 past 10 in the morning, enthusiasm has tapered off somewhat.

So much so in fact that the presence of a user in our office provokes only a minor response.

The PFY reaches half-heartedly for the power stapler, only slightly modified with extra torque on the firing spring, a 'rapid fire' setting, and the removal of the safety guard.

"Hang on!" I cry, not wanting to endure several hundred CLACKs and miscellaneous screams in my current condition. "Can I help you?" I ask the user.

"I'm after a UTP cable for my computer," the user asks, displaying an education in networking that's generally prohibited at user level. (For their own good of course.)

"How long would you like it?" I ask tiredly.

"Well, I'd like to keep it if it's all right with you," he adds, chuckling away at a joke that's so old Noah used it buying wood for the Ark.

"Sure, just grab one from the brown cardboard box in the corner."

The user contentedly wanders off with a cable and the PFY corners me.

"Are you all right?" the PFY asks in a strangely caring voice. "You helped a user?"

"By giving him one of the dud cables that we sell for copper scrap? I was just buying time till my hangover goes. Mark my words, he'll be back."

"Oh," the PFY responds, realizing that even on a bad day the old CPU's still ticking over. He pauses for a moment - something plainly on his mind.

"Don't you ever worry that we lie to users too much?"

A Mid-Job Crisis. I should have seen it coming. All the symptoms were there - the care for others, the slow-draw of the stapler.

"Don't be ridiculous!" I cry, wanting to nip the surge of conscience in the bud. "Users expect to be lied to, like Insurance companies and the Inland Revenue. It's your right - no your duty - to misinform in the interests of technological advancement."

"Well, I've been thinking - I don't know if I'm really cut out for this job."

It's worse than I thought. Before the PFY can go on, I ring the helpdesk and give them his number for 'problem calls'. Surprisingly enough, they start putting users through almost immediately.

"Hello?"

Two hours later the damage is done and the PFY's back to normal. The user who wanted to know why the 'follow-me' service wasn't working on her phone was probably the straw that broke the camel's back. It took a while for the PFY to realize she was carrying her desk phone around the building with her, but as a veteran hand at these things I expected no less.

He's back on form by the time my amateur networker returns to the office.

"That cable you gave me is broken!" he cries in a distressed manner.

"I don't think so," the PFY says calmly. "We ran a cable check on all of them."

"That's true," I respond. "Except of course we didn't do the humidity differential test because our multimeter's broken."

"Of course," the PFY gasps.

"That'll be it," our user cries, feigning knowledge.

"Tell you what," I say to our ardent amateur. "You grab one end of the cable and go into the comms corridor and just hold the plug in your mouth. You'll feel a slight tingle if the humidity differential's OK and nothing if the cable's broken."

Seconds later the silence of the comms corridor is punctuated by a scream and a series of thuds.

"Whoops," the PFY blurts. "Plugged it into the 90V AC Phone-Bell test transformer by mistake."

The thuds next door stop, which can only mean our users managed to bite through the cable to disconnect himself.

"Good to have you back," I say as the PFY unplugs the evidence. I mean cable.

"Good to be back."

Isn't it funny how things work out for the best?

It looks as though the Bastard has overreached himself, but the PFY comes to the rescue with a cunning plan...

If I hear the words virtual boardroom one more time, I'm going to hurt someone.

The bloody boss, stepping out of character, has rekindled the CEO's interest in videoconferencing. Normally this would have me smiling at the thought of spending more company dosh, but we don't have the bandwidth to support the system company-wide.

"Why?" the PFY asks, smelling a rodent-like creature.

"Ah. Well, I'd been meaning to tell you about that..."

"You've sold our bandwidth to a third party haven't you?"

"Not exactly, no."

"You've cranked up the company's ISP service?"

"No, I sold that off ages ago."

"You sold it off!"

"Yup, cashed in the client base and ISP domain name to another supplier. Very lucrative."

"And didn't pay me off?"

"Nope. I didn't even pay me off."

"So what did you do with the dosh?"

"What did I do with the 'venture capital' you mean?"

"Come again?"

"Suffice to say that we are the sole partners in InterTelecom International, supplier of cheap telephone calls to the world..."

"Uh?"

"And our latest client is a company with offices all over the world. One of which you are standing in."

"You're selling our bandwidth back to the company? Why the hell did they buy it?"

"Well, if you remember the time of the big falling out of beancounters and networks..."

"Which one?"

"The one where the head of accounts said that our overheads for providing international calls were too high and that we'd be better off going through a public supplier."

"Ah yes, but I thought you'd engineered that because you had some master plan..."

"So I did. And you'll be pleased to know that InterTelecom International outbid all the other companies by virtue of its low operating overheads."

"Meaning we're stealing bandwidth from the company!"

"Stealing's such an ugly word. We're simply maintaining one hundred per cent usage of the existing links - something the company should be rewarding us for. And they are, every time we collect our bonuses through InterTelecom International."

"Sneaky," the PFY grudgingly admits. "So what's the problem?"

"If we whack in this conferencing stuff we're bound to get congestion problems."

"True, but we know it's a toy and not going to be used all that often after the first time."

"I expect so," I reply.

"Then I have a plan..."

A week later some very expensive kit is brought into the company under the boss's vigilant eye. The PFY has gone to our US office for the testing, and a part-time contractor is to do the same in Rome.

The testing is completed just as the CEO wanders down and electronically greets the PFY and part-timer. Response is good, and the boss and CEO seem fairly pleased with themselves.

"Now I'd like to speak to the rest of the offices please," he says.

Over in the comms room, the telephone exchange suddenly pops a circuit breaker and goes down.

The offices concerned are switched into the picture - and very grainily if I say so myself. The assembled staff listens as the CEO gives a short speech about the wonders of technology. A few comments pass back and forth before the CEO 'rings off'.

"What did you think sir?" the boss asks.

"Well, the testing bit was OK, but the office response wasn't so good."

"Yes," I admit "it's a problem with Heisenberg's certainty principle of video compression."

"You what?" the boss gags.

"Heisenberg's certainty principle of video compression. It's a famous quantum physics experiment which videoed cats in boxes. The more cats, the more certainty that you'll get quantum disturbance in video compression."

"That rings a bell for some reason," the boss blunders.

"How do we fix it?"

"The only way is to eliminate the compression, which would require larger telecoms links..."

"Make it so," the CEO says, having watched far too much Star Trek during office hours.

The boss signs a couple of orders there and then and shuffles the CEO out.

I go next door and show the PFY and part-timer the orders while I reset the breaker on the exchange.

"Shall I call the telecoms providers now?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, and tell them InterTelecom International wishes to expand..."

Fish. Barrel. Shotgun.

What could be easier...?

The scent of restructuring is in the air, as the BOFH advises a little CD scratching to remove viruses...

If I had five quid for every time the head of IT thought he'd disguise managerial incompetence with a 'departmental restructure', I'd be a rich man. It's not like he's being tricky about it. In fact, I'm sure the board only ever complains to him when they want to see an arrangement of staff they haven't seen before.

This week's masterpiece is a set of Client-Solution Buddy persons - that is, everyone in the department gets a group within the department to help.

And being a spiteful and vindictive bastard, the head of IT gives me the distributed consultants group - people with the technical competence of tree tomatoes and social skills to match.

The PFY gets off lightly with the DBA group, who already know that you only call us if you enjoy third degree burns.

The calls start rolling in - something like "The user's printer isn't working so the network must be down," and step through fault resolution only to find the paper tray is empty. At lunch my personal cellphone rings with a consultant problem and I realize the head of IT has been giving out, my private number. I make a mental note to avenge this indiscretion.

Meantime I have a consultant to deal with.

"The application I'm trying to install for a user just comes up with a write error," he moans. "Do you think their system's run out of disk space?"

"Hmmm," I respond thoughtfully, "What have you installed?"

"Office, voice dictation software, 3D design and the Online Encyclopedia. Is that too much?"

"Hell no!" I cry, "That's just a smidgen of the space that must be available on the user's 386. No, I think it's a little worse than that."

"Worse?" they ask, worried that this could be outside their technical expertise (hitting return and floppy insertion).

"Yeah, it sounds like we've got another one," I say ominously. "Another backward masked CD-ROM."

"What happens?"

"Well, it slowly but surely makes the software on the system only operate with software made by the same manufacturer. Attempts to install other manufacturers' stuff results in errors. All the big companies do it these days - it's a marketing tactic."

"Wow! What can I do?"

"Well, what CD-ROMs have you got?"

"Loads. All our software's on CD."

"Hmmm, it's probably worse than I thought. It surprises me you haven't had problems before now."

"Well, now you come to mention it, the encyclopedia was slow to install. Do you think that was related?"

"Undoubtedly. It's obviously the anti-installation virus at work."

"What should I do?"

"Well, I don't know - are you familiar with what happens to computer tapes when we want to remove data from them?"

"You scratch them?"

"Exactly. And that's what you do with CDs, except you want to keep the data but not the anti-install virus so you only scratch a tiny bit of the data, the bit that indicates which programs the software won't work with."

"How?"

"Well, do you have a micro-surgical ceramic scalpel on you?"

Dummy mode on.

"No?"

"Oh well just use the blade from a pair of scissors. You want to put two scratches, as close to each other as possible, running around the disk in what we call the 'index band' of the CD. That way the software can't look up the stuff that it won't work with."

"Really?"

"Sure," I respond, pinocchioing for all I'm worth, "Trust me."

"Should I do all the disks then?"

"Every disk you can find."

"But there are hundreds in the media store."

"Do it after hours and you could be up for a night's worth of overtime," I suggest, going for the greed jugular.

"Yeah," he gushes, mentally counting pound notes.

"But remember," I add, "If you tell anyone, they're all going to want a piece of the action. But if you were to surprise the head of IT with it tomorrow morning..."

"Mum's the word then," he cries.

"And while you're at it..." I mention

"Yes?"

"The head of department has been having problems with his personal audio CDs as well - you might see if you can fit them in if you've got the time."

The rest, of course, is history. The wailing, the gnashing of teeth, the impromptu dismissals - not to mention the destruction of several collector's edition boxed sets of live jazz.

I smell a reorganization on the horizon.

A run-in with the company cafeteria leaves the BOFH porcelain bound and the boss regretting an onion bhaji...

Something is rotten in the state of Denmark. And unfortunately, the company cafeteria served it up to me as lunch. I'm not a well man.

It would appear that the friendly 'jousting' between myself and the fifth floor cafeteria has been brought to a head by my chance remark to the PFY (within their hearing, unfortunately) that their new motto, like the airborne military, was "Death from Above".

Admittedly, the menu du jour is no worse than one would expect on death row, but perhaps I shouldn't have modified their 'Healthy Eating' intranet Web menu page to main courses of Hungarian Gluelash and Chicken Tikka Diarrhoea. Some people have no sense of humor.

The boss is loving it of course, knowing that any self-respecting contractor would be at death's door ringing for service way before they'd ever call in sick. Legitimately, that is.

No, if I'm going to be spending all day on the porcelain peripheral, I'm going to be doing it on company time. His frequent visits leave me in no doubt that he's gagging for a chance to cross a few hours off my time sheet. My attendance, though uncomfortable, continues.

The only thing I don't understand is how they got the lethal dose to me. Normally quite cautious with my food (prime directive - avoid fish, chicken and pork), the method of my dispatch escapes me.

The smug glances and sincere concern for my health by the cafeteria staff confirm my doubts as I head straight for the bread counter for a low-fiber lunch. A battle plan is called for. And hatched.

As soon as the boss has vacated the area after his usual four buckets of everything, I put phase one into action. "Well I don't really know..." I mouth, as one of the cafe staff passes, seemingly unnoticed, "...but apparently the boss reckons it's this place that did it to me. He said there's better hygiene in a Soho alley."

"Really?" the PFY asks, playing Dr Watson to the full.

"Well, I dunno," I reply noticing an attentive ear in the background, "...but the boss hates the place. Reckons the staff would be lucky to get a job cleaning the toilets of a kebab house."

The next day, whilst nature is calling me for the 11th time, the PFY cranks up the CCTV kit, today's source being the 'thermostat sensor' beside the cafeteria servery.

The boss stops by to see if anyone's up for lunch, but the PFY tells him, without a word of a lie, that I'm supervising some emergency downloads.

I get back in time to see the boss in the cafeteria, negotiating his tray around the obstacle course that is the server area. "All normal so far," the PFY comments.

"Yes, nothing out of the ord..." I mutter, as something catches my eye.

Under the guise of replacing a bucket of wallpaper paste and beef stock (labeled 'gravy') one of the caff staff has palmed an extra onion bhaji onto the boss's plate. Oblivious to it all, the boss power lifts his tray to a table and straps on the old nosebag.

"Should we tell him?" the PFY asks.

A cynical glance answers his question.

Culprit Identified, Phase One Complete.

The next day is one of the few that makes this job worthwhile. The boss has called in sick. Word on the street has it that he made it to the tube station before bringing up his breakfast.

The cafeteria staff meantime, are busy with an impromptu Health and Safety check (after an apparently anonymous tip-off), which discovered, amongst other violations, that the ratatouille had real rat in it.

A week later I'm almost back to my usual self, though still food-shy, whilst the boss appears to have made a miraculous recovery after his time away. He gloats for a while about the benefits of the company health plan, sick pay, the benefits of not coming to work, etc., etc.

At lunch he gloats some more as he packs his plate, waxing lyrical about the health entitlements of being a salary-earning company man.

His entitlements don't stop there though, as the PFY helps him bag his quota of onion bhajis.

That afternoon, the PFY talks to him some more through the jammed doors of one of the company lifts. In my hurry to release him, I've accidentally snapped the door release lever off in the keyway, so we've had to call out the lift repairman.

"How much longer are they going to be?" the boss whines. "Shouldn't be much longer," I cry, signaling to the PFY to make the service guy another coffee whilst I take the last entry in the lift-violation sweepstakes.

I give him 10 minutes max...

The boss has been 'encouraged' to relocate to Tonga, but his replacement is a nightmare. It's time to get serious...

"What'd you do?" The PFY blurts, after arriving to work to find the boss packing his bags...

"Me?" I ask innocently, "Nothing!"

The PFY's waits in silence until I come across with the truth.

"Well, I think I might have worried him slightly..."

"How 'slightly' do you mean?"

I detect a smidgen of annoyance in the PFY's tone which I guess I'll have to deal with later. True, the boss had reached the malleability of fresh putty, however one must always bear in mind that change is good.

"Well, I might have mentioned that living in Tonga would be a better long-term prospect than the UK."

"Come again?"

"Well, it all started when the boss wanted to know the status of our year 2000 project. I think he's suspected the truth - that it's a foolproof plan of locking yourself in your office for five months then coming out at the end with a smile, the words "everything is OK now", and bushels of consultancy fees."

"And?" the PFY asks

"And so I happened to mention that there really wasn't any point in worrying about it anyway."

"Why was that?"

"Because I told him that the world had the Year 2000 virus. That it would all be over in 1999, just like Nostradamus and multitudes of religious groups predicted."

"And he believed you?"

"Well you know how likely he is to believe me straight off..."

"You mean since you suggested he take the toaster into the shower with him to save time on making breakfast in the morning?"

"That and using a magnetic strip as a floppy holder, yes. Anyway, so I directed his attention to the fact that some of the oldest Cold War nuclear defense systems are computer controlled, including the ones that are primed to initiate launch if they lose connection to the Pentagon."

"And?"

"And it would be quite likely that shortly after 11.59pm on 31 December 1999 the time since last successful contact value will go, via date arithmetic, from one minute to thousands of negative minutes..."

"Integer wrap-around and launch!" the PFY finishes.

"You got it!"

"And he believed you?"

"Well, I happened to notice, after cruising the Web cache logs, that he was a frequent viewer of certain Web pages."

"You mean the Lycra Lovers home page?"

"Amongst other things, yes, but more importantly he was a frequent visitor to the 'Nostradamus Says' and 'Nuclear Danger Awareness' pages. Armed with this information, it was a simple matter to play upon his fears."

"So now he's moving to Tonga?"

"That, or some other absolutely non-strategic target which is unlikely to receive a circa 1960s warhead around 10 past midnight on 1 January 2000."

"But you don't really think it'll happen do you?"

"It might. But who cares? I'll be drunk as a skunk at a New Year's party - besides, my consultancy goodwill will be right down the tubes thanks to my well-financed answer of 'it's all OK now.'"

"So you are working on our millennium project then?"

"Full time since this morning."

"And what have you come up with?"

"I'll let you know in just under five months..."

A week later, things are much worse. The old adage 'the devil you know is better than a kick in the groin on a cold morning' holds true. The boss's replacement is far worse than he ever was, and has canned my year 2000 project out of hand, preferring to go back to our software and hardware suppliers. It's enough to make you weep...

...If you didn't have the root password, control of the telephone exchange and an almost psychopathic hatred of management.

In a matter of days, the new boss seems a little peaky. Apparently some power spike or other set half the dialback numbers on the modem pool to his home phone number and the other half to his cell phone.

If that wasn't bad enough, his phone was already running hot after his paragraph in the weekly IT bulletin Web page about the 'Version Control Server' was misspelled as 'Virgin Control Server' - apparently a lot of the younger beancounters were concerned about what form of control he was talking about...

The PFY and I pass the time by setting the clocks of equipment forward to 31 December 1999 to see what happens. After the trouble we caused with the e-mail server I feel we should be in with a chance for the tender for the resurrected seven month Y2K project...

Change really is good.

The new boss discovers that sometimes learning can be painful, especially when the BOFH is your teacher...

Normally the appointment of someone to middle management is accompanied by all the pomp and ceremony you'd expect from the changing of a vacuum cleaner bag, but today things are different. This new boss is supposedly a cut above the rest because unlike those before him he has a university degree in management. So now we have a lean, keen and completely green boss on our hands.

His first green and keen move is to organize a meeting between himself and some global network providers to obtain a better bandwidth pricing system - a group of individuals who'd sell their own grandmothers for five quid. The boss is so far out of his depth he needs a diving bell.

To save him from the feeding frenzy (and the company from bankruptcy) I force my way onto the negotiation team. Judging by the voicemail I receive from the various players this isn't a popular move.

"Call me Alan," the new boss gushes as he meets with the various potential suppliers for the first time. He's obviously been on his share of huggy-feely team building weekends and believes that the informal approach will enhance negotiations.

If I had my way, we'd enhance negotiations by locking the suppliers in a room with several half bricks and only deal with the last one standing - a policy that's served me well in the past.

"The proposals all seem to be a little on the steep side," is the boss's opening gambit. He doesn't realize they're about 50 per cent more than we're paying now - what suppliers call the 'initial-shaft' position.

"Well that is with increased bandwidth potential," one responds.

"You mean it's exactly what we've got now, except it has more potential?" I reinterpret for the boss's benefit.

"Potential for growth without extra carrier installation, yes."

"And as we already have over-spec carriers installed it means we'd be paying 50 per cent more for no reason?"

"Potential does cost money," another supplier chips in. "And I believe that our plan provides the maximum potential."

"While still actually delivering nothing extra..." I add.

The meeting goes on like this for a while with the boss doing his horse-trader act, fooling no-one. Eventually he manages to think up the final offer masterstroke.

"Well what can we get for this?" The boss asks, being sneaky and writing down a figure which is about 40 per cent of our networking budget.

"I'll give my grandmother a call," one of the suppliers responds, reaching for his cellphone.

From then on it goes downhill. At the end of a couple of hours of negotiation the boss is a broken man and liable to replace our current bandwidth with a bank of 300 baud modems via some BT-call boxes.

Strategically, I call for a lunch break, and get the boss out of harm's way as quickly as possible.

"It's all quite technical isn't it?" He blurts once we're out of earshot.

"It's a snow job!" I reply and proceed to educate him on the ins and outs of price fixing - apparently a topic that isn't covered under the Bachelor of Parochial Management Degree. I bring him back to the comms room so the PFY can back me up.

Our comments fall on deaf ears.

"But I'm sure they know what they're talking about," he mumbles naively. "After all, they've been in the business for a long time."

"Because they take advantage of managers," I respond. "Honestly, you can't believe anything anyone tells you in this business."

"That's a terribly cynical attitude," he responds, as expected.

Looks like it's time for Plan B.

"Well it'll cost a fortune to upgrade the potential of our comms risers."

"Why?"

"I think it's best if the PFY shows you the problem we're talking about."

Ten minutes, a scream, and a plummet of one floor later, I'm flying solo in the negotiation processes as yet another boss fails to check that the grating is securely in place on the 'floor' of the comms riser.

Oh dear.

"Gentlemen," I begin upon returning to the boardroom. "Due to a workplace accident Alan is unable to be with us for the rest of the negotiations, which puts me in the position of having to make a decision about our next sole global-network provider. I feel it is best that you come to an agreement among yourselves as to who that sole provider will be while I wait outside for your decision. Oh, you'll find the bricks at your feet under the table."

Sometimes you've got to pay a little extra for customer satisfaction.

Several months of beer swigging has left the Bastard feeling a tad run-down, so he takes a trip out of town...

I decide to take a couple of weeks off to get a well-deserved break from the stresses of work (i.e. alcohol poisoning) with a trip to the seaside.

Being the cautious type I leave instructions with the PFY to e-mail me daily on the events that have occurred. Sadly, my laptop is currently pending upgrade replacement (signed by the Boss in one of his more lax moments) so my only form of contact with the civilized world is via an Internet Cafe.

Like 90 per cent of the cultured e-mailing world, I prefer to read personal communications in the privacy of my office or home without the distraction of Quake playing in the background. There's plenty of time for that during chargeable hours. I'm also not a big fan of waiting for a condescending ponytail-type to log me into the slowest PC on the face of the earth, with so little memory that it has to page just to let you enter your password.

I mention that I'd like to use my favorite e-mail package, only to get a smarmy response.

"First time is it?" ponytail chuckles smugly. "No-one uses that program anymore."

I could beg to differ, but what the hell.

"Well, yes it is," I answer, anxiously. "What do you recommend?"

He bumbles on about some Alpha release of GeekySoftwareCorp's latest bugpack, and types in the password ('connect', I happen to notice) to enable the desktop machine. He then begins a well-practiced 'there's nothing to be nervous about when you've been using computers as long as me' monologue. I restrain my impatience. Eventually he finishes, turns back to the machine and discovers that all is not as it should be, perhaps because I pushed most of his applications into the recycle bin while his attention was diverted.

Couldn't help myself - old habits die hard.

"That's funny," he comments.

"Oh, it's not working is it?" I whine in a manner so familiar to me from my helldesk days. "Computers never work for me."

Convinced that I'm a first time loser, he, as expected, logs into the file server with his own user ID, depending on his 'lightning-fast' typing speed for password security ('girl bait' - tasteless and wildly inaccurate).

While he's performing the reinstall, I shell out £20 and get myself a debit account for access time from another greasy ponytail at the watered-down espresso counter. This one logs me into a

desktop and advises me to 'browse a bit' to get the hang of the system. When he's gone and no-one is looking I change out of loser-mode and download my e-mail from work.

Yet another ponytail comes by and chuckles as he monitors my incoming e-mail over my shoulder as it surges in at about 2,400 baud, thanks to a school party watching some real-time video behind me.

A quick scan of my e-mail tells me the Boss is still causing trouble by appointing a temporary senior network analyst in my absence. Definitely something I'll have to get him to keep an eye on.

In the meantime I have smaller fish to fry as one of the ponytails spills an espresso down my back as he waddles past to some unsuspecting customer.

I login to the fileserver as ponytail1 and peruse its contents. To pass the time I find the desktop login script and make a couple of modifications.

While I'm at it I decide the cafe's homepage could do with a bit of jazzing up.

A shocked gasp from behind me moments later informs me that someone's got the new improved version complete with recently uploaded non-real-time video clip.

A little taste of Sweden never hurt anyone - especially not when a quick glance tells me the gasp comes from the teacher of the school group who's trying to drag her students from the display. Methinks that the page was a far cry from the Dangermouse TV homepage they expected.

I tickle the keyboard a moment longer, adjusting my account information then wander over to catch the tail-end of the educational experience that the youngsters have been exposed to.

"That's disgusting," I cry, horrified.

By now a generic ponytail is in situ making profuse apologies. "It's true what they say about the Internet," I mention to the young tutor. "Full of perverts."

"It's just a tool," ponytail responds defensively to the teacher.

"Yes, I saw that," she responds.

Its funny how you can warm to people you hardly know.

A quick cellphone call to the local media later and I'm helping the alluring young teacher and her charges through a bunch of cameramen and reporters. My only stops are to collect a refund of the £200 account balance, and to make an appointment for dinner later that night with the young educator.

Holidays? They're nothing but work, work, work...

While the Bastard's away, his replacement sees a career opportunity - forcing the PFY to deploy shock tactics...

It's a dull day on holiday. My newly befriended educational contact is working, so I duck back to the city for my daily intake of e-mail, (seaside Internet cafes are a little difficult to get into at the moment - what with concerned parents picketing them).

Logging-in from home I notice the latest correspondence from the PFY appears to be a long one, so I crank up my espresso machine and set it on stun. I open the PFY's dispatches. It's an epic document depicting the struggle of the competent network engineer in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds.

Apparently the boss's temporary network supervisor moved quickly from the 'humble and unassuming' persona to 'sneaking and conniving' persona in a few short days. True, this is pretty much par for the course and expected of the position, but he could have waited until I'd been fired.

The PFY realized quickly that the new boy's networking and UNIX server knowledge was second to none - even nearer than that in fact - none whatsoever.

The PFY's well-tuned nasal instincts detected hint-of-rodent so he slipped a call monitor on the boss's phone. His instincts proved correct - his new supervisor and the boss were mates from way back when electricity was invented.

Further investigation revealed startling similarities between his CV and my own - word for word apparently.

Almost like the boss had e-mailed it to him. Having identified a position worth coveting, my stand-in invested every working hour brown-nosing support and managerial staff, playing up his role to the detriment of my memory. From the PFY's observations, he was either after my job, a Nobel Prize, or both.

Operations resumed with the new me wanting to distinguish himself by discovering evidence of negligence on my part, leading up to a stirring half-hour that will long be remembered. I have to rely on the PFY's version of events...

"Something strange has happened on the mail server machine," he blurted to the PFY, smelling glory, "There's a process running the pop program coming from outside the company. I think we've got a break in."

"Where's it coming from?" the PFY enquired, already suspecting the answer.

"A machine called bofh.DieGeekDie.com."

The PFY, recognizing my domain name and penchant for keeping abreast of e-mail, knew it was best to defuse the situation before it got out of hand.

"Yep, it's a hacker all right," he confirms.

"What should we do?" the temp boss gagged, already thinking about the book rights for his Internet crime detection novel.

"Should we disable logins on our machines?"

"Hmm no" the PFY advised. "That'd just annoy them. Best run a disinfectant across the network."

"How?"

"With the spray command. Use spray: HOSTNAME minus c one million minus l two thousand, AMPERSAND. Do it for all hosts in the hosts file. That should disinfect the network while I get a coffee."

The PFY returned to anguished cries. "The bloody network's down."

"No, no" the PFY commented "It's still up and running, just very slow, for some reason."

From then on, it was all downhill. Convincing him that configuring all the 10/100Mb Ethernet switch ports to 100 non-switched, "for improved performance reasons", was a masterstroke - although the 10 per cent of 100Meg capable users were quite pleased with the performance that a 90 per cent network outage provided.

In an effort to win back some client goodwill, he proactively upgraded the router firmware with some new-release software clearly unaware of the firmware golden rule: never trust an unpatched release of anything.

That accounted for another hefty outage when some obscure bug caused the slip lines to have the highest priority path to the network. Which came as a surprise to the PFY as he hadn't had time to login to the routers to do it manually.

I'm just about to disconnect when a late-breaking news report comes in. Apparently, there's been a nasty workplace accident involving my phone. It appears the receiver cable had been rubbing up against a power cable and had worn through the insulation on both causing my replacement's professional looking headset to become a boost not only to his ego.

Luckily, it's always been networking operations' policy to have earth leakage detectors on desktop mains, but unluckily one of the PFY's extremely heavy manuals was inadvertently leaning on the reset switch at the time.

The ambulance crew eventually managed to coax him from underneath the desk with a couple of chocolate biscuits and a warm blanket, but it looks like I'm going to be called back early. No rest for the wicked. Or their supervisors.

The failings of a clever new purchasing system brings out the Bastard's hitherto repressed vindictive side...

The systems guys are really getting on my tits. Not satisfied with having the run of the machine room in almost the same manner as the PFY and I reign the comms room, the pricks have now stuffed up our purchasing system as well.

Now, instead of identifying a piece of equipment that's smoked its last and shoving a well-stacked replacement purchase order under the boss's nose for his 'X' of approval, we have to e-mail all purchase requests for any computing products to the systems purchases software for the systems geeks to peruse, approve and source a competitively priced alternative to...

I'm fit to be tied. The PFY is chainable. Perhaps it's because we received a 'Crisco' brand switch instead of the 'Crisco' one we ordered - straight from Silicon Back-Alley in Venezuela. Judging by its face value the country should have stopped exports at the Miss World Competitor mark. I blame myself for the personal note to our product-of-choice sales rep of "plus all the fruit for 100base-T x20" which appears to have been interpreted literally. At least the cafeteria won't be short of bananas for a year or two.

I confront the boss as soon as possible.

"We can't accept delivery of that," I cry. "The voltage supply settings only have two options: 12 and 24."

"It's obviously a switch printing error," he says. "They left the zero off the end."

As I confront one of the purchasing system's operators with the smoking remains of the aforementioned piece of crap, the boss says defensively: "Well, we can't send it back now! After all, the switch did say 12v and 24v... We'll have to get it fixed! And anyway, you didn't specify that you wanted a 240 volt AC device when you sent your order through to the purchasing system.

"They're not mind-readers you know."

"No, but then I didn't say 'avoid buying thinwire cabling with it' either, did I?"

"Oh, the thinwire cabling's still in the basement," the purchasing geek interrupts, "Actually, we made a killing on Crisco's winter special - 'thickwire-for-thin'."

"See?" the boss says "We're saving money already."

"You bought 4,000 meters of thickwire cabling for office wiring?"

"Yep, and it was dirt cheap," he beams.

In an extraordinary change of character, I take a sick day because I really am feeling ill. The next day, when I tell the PFY, he does too. The following day, we're back at work and determined to make a go of it. I show the boss some thickwire, cabling duct and a large diameter masonry drill.

"Where do we start?" I ask.

"Umm," the boss mumbles, knowing his popularity will be inversely proportional to the noise of the drill slowly whining from one side of the building to the other. "Perhaps we should send the cable back then."

"Perhaps we should," I reply.

"Can't do it," the purchasing geek says. "We have to pay a restocking fee and the system's not set up for that."

Right. It's war.

I write a script to order 20 floppy disks, one at a time. I also set my e-mail return address to the in-mail address of the Purchasing System.

Five minutes later, when the system runs out of memory, the PFY and I have an impromptu meeting with the boss and systems geeks.

"He ran our server out of memory and crashed it!" the combined geeks whine.

"Ran it out of memory?" Clickety-click. "There, I've ordered you some more... uh-oh, looks like it's crashed again. You must be really low. Tell you what, as soon as it comes up I'll re-order some more, just to be safe..."

"Don't!" the boss snaps.

"But we have to put it through the purchasing system," I say.

"OK," the boss sighs. "Put it through in writing to the systems people and they'll enter it into the system themselves."

The PFY chirps up: "But they'll just miss out or abbreviate bits they think are irrelevant and we'll end up with another non-brand piece of crap!"

"No. They will enter it word for word as you request," the boss decrees. "Is that understood?"

The systems geeks nod, and the PFY and I grudgingly concur.

As soon as they're gone I get the PFY to write out a new switch order.

"What should I put, 240 Volt AC 20 port UTP Switch...?"

"Put whatever you like; just make sure it goes past 256 characters because that's the limit of their description field."

"That's a little childish."

"Not as childish as writing, 'A dickhead is typing this in', in the description field of an order."

"You wouldn't!"

"Did. Will do again, and planning on documenting it for the rest of the department. Any questions?"

"None whatsoever."

"Right, then get scribbling. And make it as illegible as possible."

As far as the BOFH's concerned, the season of goodwill doesn't run to the systems men. Quite the opposite in fact...

Its Christmas time and brown-nosing is at record levels as tomorrow the Xmas bonuses are announced and everyone is seizing the opportunity of enhancing their standing in the head of IT's eyes. Of course they're completely forgetting last year's bonuses, where electronic calculations of customer satisfaction to bonus size produced only two, extremely large, bonus checks. I must admit that they came as a bit of a surprise to the PFY and me, but as we all know, computers never lie.

Worse still, the head is himself brown-nosing for a Christmas party bonus from one of the mail room women by offering her a technical position in the department. Far more technical than the one he'll be offering her if he manages to drag her to the photocopier room mid-party.

As I'm stalking past the helpdesk to avoid the throng outside the head's office, a phone rings. So, full of Xmas cheer, I answer it.

"Hi, it's Bryce from marketing. Someone's worked out the administrator password for the company Web site and has been modifying our Web pages. I'd like to secure it so that it's safe from hackers during the break."

"Really?" I ask, remembering how easy it was to replace the inline product graphics with ones guaranteed to excite the customers' enthusiasm. "Well you should change the password then."

"What to? Should I make it just a string of characters and punctuation marks?"

"No, don't be silly; make it something no-one will need to write down. The company name for example. I'm sure that'll be secure."

"Really? Because one of the systems bods is saying that we should make it as complex as possible."

"They would do," I remark, remembering all too well the system purchasing nightmare of recent weeks. "They love it when you have to ring up because you've forgotten it."

"Yes, they do don't they," he blurts, remembering the shame all too well.

I swing by and check how the PFY is coming along with the 'customer satisfaction survey' results. A bit of data massage never hurt anyone.

All that remains is for me to cover up a particularly nasty bit of fiddling that the Boss might catch wind of. I arm myself with the IT operational balance spreadsheet, corner him, then regale him with bizarre terms like accounts payable, inwards and outwards goods, trial balances and the like until his eyes glaze over, then point him to the creative bookkeeping in question.

"And that's where I converted our holdings into standard European monetary units, as we'll be required to do in 1999. I thought it best to trial the software as soon as possible to see if there were any bugs - so that we could get them fixed well in advance of the changeover."

"Yes of course," the boss responds. "Good idea and what's this?"

"That's where I converted it back from EMUs to pounds as it all went well and we're not actually trading in EMUs yet."

"But the start and end figures are different by about ten thousand quid."

"Yes, well, with the exchange rate, commission, stamp duty, poll tax and Inland Revenue all taking their cut."

"Oh dear," the boss cries. "Hopefully you won't be running too many of these tests in the future then."

"Well I can't be too sure. I know that there's one more due just before I take my Easter break next year, but apart from that it's anybody's guess - who knows how many tests the auditors might require us to do."

"Hmmm, well, in the interests of the company perhaps we should put a hold on auditing our accounts until the changeover - you can't see any problem with that can you?"

"None springs to mind immediately." I respond.

"Good. But what's this?" he asks, looking at the only figure on the spreadsheet in red.

"That?" I ask, "Oh, that's the money in the systems budget that no-one seems to have accounted for. It seems to have been allocated out in two lump sums which just happen to coincide with the holidays of the two systems guys."

"Oh," says the boss, having cached my excuse for monetary discrepancies and brought it back into memory.

"Funny how it seems to have disappeared just prior to their holidays," I say, clearing his mental cache.

"You mean they've been stealing?" the boss asks as the sun of knowledge comes up over his mental horizon.

"I afraid that's what the facts lead me to believe," I sigh, sadly.

"Shall I call the police?"

"With what evidence?" I ask. "This is just a piece of the accounts. To prosecute someone you'd need a complete audit, with auditors' fees, possible EMU translations, poll tax, compound exchange rates and commission, concession allowance."

"Concession allowance?"

"Auditing overtime concession," I ad-lib "For working over the Christmas break. You're probably looking at about 15K, and there's no guarantee they'll be prosecuted."

"So I'll fire them," he cries.

"And without prosecution, be liable for an unfair dismissal action."

"Well something's got to be done."

"True," I comment, "and before the next birthday, which is second week in January if I'm not mistaken."

"What can I do?"

"Well, you could just pay them an end-of-contract bonus and not renew as of 1st January," I suggest.

"Excellent. But ..."

"But?" I ask.

"Who'll look after the systems?"

"Well, there's not that much to it. I mean hell; we could probably handle it if we took on another trainee. We'd probably be up to speed by mid-January."

"Really?"

"Of course you'd be looking at a new contracting rate."

"Oh..."

"Which would be much less than you stand to lose on the 10th of January given the current situation."

"All right then," The boss cries, and waddles off to make it so.

I let the PFY in on the latest developments at the booze-up while the systems guys help themselves to a punch - the new security blokes are like that when you refuse to leave the building. Ex-army chaps apparently.

"More bloody work?" he blurts.

"With pay rise attached."

"So?"

"And you get a new trainee."

"So bloody what."

"Of your choice."

"And?"

"And isn't it time you started 'interviewing' applicants from the DP pool? Once the head of department finishes his 'photocopying' of course."

"Eh?" The PFY cries, getting a little dose of enlightenment UV himself.

"Ah well, just call me a sentimental old Santa type..."

The Bastard Operator from Hell 1998

Series Alpha

Space, the final frontier. Well some say it's the sea, some say it's the centre of the earth, and some say "Is it dinner time yet?" These are the voyages of the Bastard Operator from Hell, his 1998 mission - to seek out boldish type people with a penchant for salt air and the company of sailors, and report them to the Widow's Pension Fund. Why? We may never know. Certainly the Widow's Pension Fund has no idea, which is what makes it all that more exciting. Go on, reach for the phone - talk to someone you haven't spoken to for years - a parent, a sibling, that guy from the video parlor who STILL works there after 20 years when the only video game they had was that shitty tennis thing with the bats and balls. Meantime...

An ugly saga of burning ambition and bootleg liquor , welcome to the BOFH's Christmas past...

A New Year, how quickly time flies. It seems like only yesterday I was at the divisional pre-Christmas bash.

Admittedly I had consumed a couple of glasses of the mulled medicine so popular at that time of year, so my memory of events isn't too clear, but I do remember helping one of our more vocal clients bob for apples in the punch bowl , letting him up for air occasionally , just before that tragic accident with the Christmas tree.

Who could have known the lights were mains voltage, apart from the installer from B-Electrix of course. Still, the burning smell, screaming and impromptu break-dance act that followed the fall of the tree into the punch bowl, just as the boss was serving up another bucket of non-alcoholic refresher, was a good finale to the day and cost substantially less than a real fireworks display.

And to think that things were going to be different for Christmas 1997. The directive had come from on-high that anyone caught with alcohol on the premises was up for a quick stroll down Unemployment Avenue, courtesy of personnel.

Some people just have no sense of humor; I remember musing as I stashed a couple of half-empty spirits bottles in the bottom drawer of a particularly annoying user's desk. Unfortunately duty called, and I was unable to be there 10 minutes later when security acted on their anonymous phone tip-off about sly boozing on work time. Still, you can't have everything can you?

The PFY and I, true to 'Secure' Christmas protocol, had our booze safely stashed in Mission Control inside a set of what to outward appearances appeared to be run-of-the-mill fire extinguishers , a supply of which I keep on hand for special occasions.

It's amazing what money can buy. And if not money, certainly a couple of photos of an occupational safety consultant in full drag ensemble on stage at a progressive (and supposedly private) London club.

Sadly, after the tree incident, I have to defer to the PFY's reminiscences as I'd had an extinguisher-full and my memory was as clear as the terms of a typical software license agreement.

Apparently, events unfolded in the following order:

At 4.15pm I helped the PFY make a replacement non-alcoholic punch , after bringing a couple of extinguishers down from the office to replace the ones used to put the boss out.

At approximately 5pm the party was starting to get into full swing with people appreciating the 'non-alcoholic' punch so much that I had to go get another couple of extinguishers to protect the PFY from spontaneous orange juice combustion while he mixed another batch up.

At approximately 6.17pm (from CCTV timestamps) I mounted a table and launched into the old party favorite 'The boss is so dumb'.

"How dumb is he?" the well-oiled crowd demanded.

"He's so dumb he can't even spell IT."

"He's so dumb he broke his toe rebooting his desktop."

"He thought preventative maintenance meant locking the engineer out."

"He has to study for a urine test. He's also lazy."

"How lazy is he?"

"He just finished his autobiography , Around the Cafeteria in 80 Days."

By 8.30pm the party was going downhill (or uphill, depending on your perspective) fast , the mixers had run out and the punch was pretty much a combination of gin and cleaning alcohol. The PFY was demonstrating to anyone interested how to secure a Windows NT machine, using only a hammer and the boss's new laptop.

The end came at around 10.45pm, as it usually does, with the arrival of the boss back from the casualty department.

Already fuming from his facial burns, his temper wasn't improved any when he heard party music coming from every security guard's walkie-talkie, courtesy of Radio IT and its drunken DJs.

Not recognizing him at first because of the bandages, the PFY apparently tried to sign him up for the spitting competition , nearest to the boss's coffee mug wins, bonus prize for getting it in.

"Right!" the boss cried, upsetting the punch bowl as he barged over to the turntables to cut the lights and music. "That's bloody it, turn that bloody music off."

In retrospect, I'm sure the boss would have thought twice about walking past the candles on the Christmas cake with punch-soaked trousers but there you go. Even my patchy memory can recall the boss bouncing around in terror, pants on fire.

If only they hadn't used the nearest extinguisher I'm sure things would have ended differently. Still, two fireworks displays are better than one, and the troops really did enjoy taking turns on the fire hose , an unexpected Christmas bonus, so to speak.

The BOFH and PFY show there is still a place for love and compassion in the world of network management...

"Networks.... AND systems," I cry, "I like it!" The PFY shares my enthusiasm, realizing the full potential for dodgy deals at our fingertips. "What was it Orwell used to say?" he responds cheerily, "All power corrupts absolute power..." "... is even more fun," I finish.

Following the coup d'état at the end of last year, the PFY and I have got it all - the network, the machines, the head of department's password-changing methodology - use the same word year after year, but just increment the numeric suffix by one.

Mind you, it beats adding an 's' to the end of it, as was his original practice.

"New car please," I cry.

The PFY depresses a button, and down in a packed storeroom in the basement, a tape stacker unit whirs into life. However, instead of the DLT cartridges it's used to working with; its current payload is seven slot cars. A robot arm grabs one and deposits it onto the track set out around the locked room. Checking its position on the CCTV, I turn to the PFY.

"Right, how about a 10 lap job? Loser has to reload the stacker and answer the phones for the rest of the day."

"You're on," says the PFY, lulled into a false sense of security by my previous effort which ended badly at a particularly sharp corner.

Just 15 minutes later the PFY's down in the basement reloading the stacker.

While he's gone. I return the acceleration settings on the PFY's slot car driver to normal - cheating on a game of skill, how can I stoop so low? Years of practice, that's how. It's been hard going but now I can stoop lower than a pygmy limbo dancer.

Upon his return the full weight of his loss descends upon the PFY's shoulders. Our increased role means increased responsibility, and worse still, increased user interaction. A newly arrived phone rings. I smile smugly at the PFY as he answers it.

"Hi, look I've forgotten my password on the human resources system and I need to get into the database this morning."

"OK," the PFY responds with uncharacteristic helpfulness. "Just bring your ID up here and we'll change it for you."

I'm just about to book in for a hearing check-up when I notice the PFY switching the lifts into weekend mode, effectively making them lockdown at the ground floor.

A couple of minutes later a chunky personnel type wheezes through the door after slogging the two flights of stairs to our office.

"I'm here to get my password changed."

"Oh, I'm sorry, the PFY has just gone down to your office to change it for you," I say, as the PFY plays dead under the desk.

"He told me to meet him up here," our visitor gasps.

"No, I'm sure he said he was going down to meet you."

"Oh. Well can you change it then?" the user pants.

"I could, but he's likely to change it and overwrite the change that I make."

"Oh," the user mutters and trundles back downstairs.

A couple of minutes later he's back on the phone.

"It's about my password," he says

"Ah yes," the PFY responds, "You weren't in your office when I came down. How about you wander up and I'll change it immediately for you?"

"But I was just up there and I talked to the other guy."

"Well, you're just going to have to come up here again aren't you?"

The phone slams down and the PFY goes back into the lift maintenance menu.

After the third time the wheezing's so bad I make the PFY come out of hiding and change the password before the poor user has a coronary. I know, I know, Mr. Softy, that's me.

Of course, it would have caused the poor guy a lot less discomfort if the PFY hadn't replaced his asthma inhaler propellant with helium, causing him to panic that his vocal passage was prolapsing, and then faint. On the way down he takes my CD-ROM drive with him, which puts me in a foul mood.

I'm forced to get the next call while the PFY drags the unconscious body to the sick bay. Well, puts him in the freight elevator and presses the relevant floor anyway. Never let it be said that we don't care about our users.

"Hi, I've got to get some important sales data off a floppy which says it's in DOS format."

"DOS format?"

"Yes."

"That's easy. Go into DOS."

"Uh-Huh." >clickety click "And use the FORMAT command."

"Oh, of course."

Another barrel shoot successfully completed.

Chaos reigns at the office and a visitor from the past is impressed by modern standards of bastardy behavior...

We return you now to Baker Street, where Sherlock Holmes and his faithful assistant, Doctor Watson have, through some undiscovered law of quantum science, been transported to the present century...

"It appears we have moved forward in time," the great man decides.

"But that's impossible Holmes," I cried incredulously.

"Not so Watson," he replied, reaching for his snuff container. "Why, on several occasions I myself have considered the possibility while partaking of this fine white powder. Mirror please, Watson. But what really concerns me is why we have been brought here."

"I..."

"Let us have a brisk constitutional and see if we cannot discover something upon which to test our intellectual mettle."

And so it was that Holmes and I came upon a large building with doors that opened as if by magic. A moving staircase that Holmes surmised was driven by electricity drew us to a mezzanine area where a smoking box lay on the floor.

"I don't know what happened," a man nearby was explaining to a uniformed gentleman. "I'd called the helpdesk because the screen was shimmering, and they put me through to the systems and networks operator. I hadn't even finished telling them about it when it burst into flames."

"Did you hear a clicking sound, not altogether unlike that of a typewriter?" Holmes asked him.

"Why, yes I did," he replied.

"And did you hear a noise on the telephone that may have been chuckling?"

"Now you come to mention it..."

"And what about that?" Holmes asked, indicating a small projection device upon which little people were running in panic.

"That's the emergency response room - there's a panic on because the fire alarms have gone off and the halon activation delay switch isn't working."

As we watch, one of the figures trips over a length of cabling.

"Uh-oh, another one down."

"Would I be correct in assuming that this room isn't used very often?" Holmes asks.

"Yeah, that's why the cabling's all over the show," the guard replies.

"And did they perchance call upon the networks and systems people to make the room available to them?"

"As a matter of fact they did."

"Just as I suspected."

"What?" the uniformed gentleman asked.

"I cannot be sure yet," Holmes replied inscrutably. "More investigation will be necessary. If you would be so kind as to direct me to the systems and networks people you were referring to."

"I can't direct you because you need swipe card access to get in and out of the lifts and rooms. I'll take you instead."

And so it was that we rose in a mechanical elevator to an upper floor of the building.

"Just knock on the door and you'll be let in," the guard murmured, almost as if he was afraid of the place.

Wanting to waste no more time, I did this while Holmes thanked the guard profusely and shook his hand. By the time he'd returned to the door, there was still no answer from the room within, although I could see people moving about behind the opaque glass.

"I don't think we're going to be let in, Holmes."

"Nonsense," he said as he slid a small card through a slot. With a beep the door opened.

"Good Lord!" I cried "Where on earth did you get that?"

"The guard's pocket."

"But doesn't he need that to exit the elevator?"

Holmes paused for a moment, listening carefully. A muffled thumping could be heard in the distance... "Apparently so."

Upon entering the room we found two men, a young one with facial eruptions, the other somewhat older, with a sense of power about him, somewhat similar to Holmes. A kind of unspoken recognition passed between them.

"I believe I can now solve this enigma," Holmes said.

"But first a couple of pints," the older stranger cried.

Barely ten minutes later, Holmes, myself, the two men and four women were enjoying a couple of lagers at a nearby tavern.

"Another case successfully concluded," Holmes murmured. "Care for some of my special snuff Watson?"

"Your special snuff Holmes?"

"Yes, the stuff I keep for guests."

"Rather... Bloody hell - that's talcum powder and cayenne pepper. I thought you said that was the stuff you kept for guests!"

"Well of course it is Watson, you don't think I'd take it myself do you?"

"You bastard Holmes!"

Through streaming eyes I saw the two strangers shake Holmes by the hand. Curiouser and curiouser...

The head's mid-life crisis and how a career in modeling leads to an executive position...

It is truly pathetic. Sad male heads-of-department of a certain age, realizing they're no longer in the youth, or even middle-aged category, suddenly attempting to alter their lifestyle to compensate.

And so it is that the head of IT, with designer-colored cell phone and laptop and brand new convertible car, has appointed a flashy young smooth-talker to the position of executive liaison officer.

It's easy to see how her previous experience in the modeling industry is so close to information systems that a couple of days of reading glossy mags will have her up to speed...

"I can't see that she's such a problem," the boss cries.

"She can't even spell IT, let alone be in the position of making service delivery promises to all and sundry," I protest.

"She must know something about IT to get appointed," the boss responds, confirming my suspicion that he's a card-carrying member of Naïveté International.

"I see. And how long did it take her to get her desktop machine going again?"

"The power switch is quite difficult to find," he replies, as loyal as a terrier.

My worst fears are confirmed when she decides to buy up a whole swag of network computers, "Because we won't ever have to worry about upgrading." This poorly researched decision has obtained the official stamp of approval and a purchase order has appeared on my desk for a 'technical sign-off'. I stuff it into the shredder quicker than the average user could say "Where's my hard disk gone?"

The boss is on the job in record time.

"These network computers are great," he gasps, flashing a glossy brochure.

"And why is that?" I ask.

"Because they act just like PCs without disks," he cries. "They're good because everything they need to operate is loaded from the computer."

"Sort of like a dumb terminal, with graphic and sound capabilities."

"Uh... no, much faster, and in color."

"So it's a bit like changing a black and white TV for a color one."

"Uh... Not exactly."

"So we're going to move from independent computers to ones dependent on a server - like ASCII terminal days. So when the main machine is down, no work gets done. Isn't that why we got desktop machines?"

"Ahhhh... No, not really."

"Oh. So they're different from, say, an NCD in what way?"

"Because we'll never need to upgrade the equipment. It'll be like your color TV set," the boss blurts triumphantly. "Once you've got one, it'll never need upgrading - just upgrade the server software."

"Not even when the software grows and needs more memory?"

"No."

"Not even when the software wants to make use of whizzy new features like Nicam stereo, Dolby surround, and wide screen?"

"Look, we're bloody buying some, so sign off on them," the boss shouts.

What the hell, I scrawl out a signature. Not mine of course, but who's to know? Except the boss, should someone check it against his?

"In fact," the boss continues, "I think you should be using the same technology as users, so order a couple for the control room as well."

BASTARD!!

A few days later they arrive and are dispatched to the test cases in various departments. The PFY and I get ours into gear - true, we did replace the motherboard with that of a small-footprint PC with high-speed laptop disk drives, but to all intents and purposes it looks like the real thing.

Let the carnage commence!

SNMP management is a damn fine tool for a machine, especially when it lets you reboot the thing remotely. I patch a game of Network DOOM with sprites of the NC users' faces and get the kills piped to the SNMP reboot command. Kill a user, their Network Computer goes down.

Of course, it's not very sporting, so I ring the users and tell them, to give them a fighting chance. Well, as much of a chance as you can get using the apps-server-based copy of the game which only lets you pick up a handgun. Still, it's amazing how good a beancounter can get at pistol shooting when two hours of spreadsheet work are at stake and you have to win a game to use the Save option.

Surprisingly enough, the NCs weren't a hit with the users and were decommissioned after only four days (and 327 kills).

"I was thinking about a PC version of that game," the PFY comments.

"You mean the same game, except that it causes the Pentium Hang bug on their desktop machine?"

"You mean you've thought of it?"

"Thought of it, installed it, and am waiting for new players with the chain gun."

The boss is on the track of two mysterious contractors, C. Omputer and R. Amchip, but the BOFH is on the case...

When the PFY and I are on top of things, running the network is simple. But then the boss attempts to do his job and it all goes pear-shaped...

"Who's this Charles Omputer?" He asks, eyeing a set of timesheets suspiciously.

"Never heard of him."

"You must have, you've signed his bloody timesheet."

"Charles Omputer? Oh, you mean Chazzer. He's a part time cable monkey we got to replace the telephone cabling that got burnt out when some idiot had his PC jammed against the circuit breaker on his desk."

"You know very well the circuit breaker was faulty. Anyway, I don't know how my PC got pushed back that far."

The PFY couldn't look more innocent if he tried.

"And it shouldn't have affected the phone cabling," the boss continued.

"It wouldn't have if someone hadn't decided to 'cut costs' by running the extra office power through the data ducting..."

The boss shuffles his feet. "Anyway, Mr. Omputer - he's been putting in the overtime, hasn't he?"

"Yes, although it's not really our fault because you made us let Frank Irmware go last week because he crashed the server."

"We can't allow mistakes," the boss says, taking the hard line. "We have to be vigilant. Can we get a replacement?"

"Well, we've got a CV for a Roger Amchip."

"What's he like?"

"He's been in computers for years," the PFY pipes up.

"We seem to be hiring a lot of foreigners," the boss comments, "and how come I never meet any of them?"

"Well, you know the sort, green and keen, can't wait to get into the thick of it."

"I see. Well, give this Amchip guy a call and organize a meeting with him tomorrow. Sort out any potential overtime disputes!"

Bugger.

"How's 'Omputer's cable replacement' going?" I ask the PFY.

"Should be done by tomorrow..."

"And we're still keeping up appearances?"

"Judging by the unhappiness in the tea-room, apparently so..."

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times; it's the small things that count. You can't just unplug 50 telephone cables; super glue a circuit breaker shut then claim a cabling disaster has destroyed the telecommunications hub of the floor - requiring two weeks overtime to 'recable'. No, you have to give the appearance of work being done while you replug the cables back in at the comms room, five per night.

Which is why the PFY and I leave wire offcuts and insulation on office floors right next to a knocked-over plant, which is supposed to disguise a hammer hole in the wall. And there's nothing like the theft of small change from a user's desktop organizer and a cigarette butt in their coffee mug to allay any suspicion that there were was no cabling job and certainly no cabling professional.

With a little extra effort, all suspicions are avoided.

Which leaves us with the problem of Roger Amchip...

The boss trolls into work in time to find a set of legs sticking out from under his desk. Being a total wimp, he sends me in to take a look. I flip the boss's desktop circuit breaker to off and grope around a bit.

"No pulse," I cry.

The boss screams and then power-unloads last night's biriani.

"I'll get an ambulance."

"No point, he's stone cold - feel his leg."

The boss squeamishly touches the leg. "Oh God. Who?" he asks quietly.

"Amchip. He was keen to get to work last night. Must have been electrocuted from the mains in the phone and data ducting."

"We'll have to call the police."

"You're right, and if I may say so, it's very brave of you."

"What?"

"To face the music like this. A lot of people would just pay Amchip's widow off to pretend he'd run off, rather than face manslaughter by professional negligence charge."

"Manslaughter!"

"Well, it wasn't premeditated was it? Although you are known to have a problem with anyone claiming overtime... Poor Mrs. Amchip."

"Do you think she'd accept money?"

"Well, these are tough times. I think she'd probably come up with a reasonable excuse for ten grand. They weren't that close apparently."

The boss whips out his check book in record time...

"Who should I make it out to?"

"Charlotte Amchip. No. That would look suspicious... Make it out to her non-profit business - Charlotte Amchip's Schizophrenics Hospice."

"How do you spell Schizophrenics?"

"Oh, just put the initials."

An hour later the boss is having a drink to calm his nerves, the PFY and I are having a drink to celebrate our recent bonus, and the head of safety is having a lie down after finding the lost CPR mannequin.

Amazing how things work out for the best isn't it?

When the BOFH suggests a team-building event, on his own time, there has to be some devilry brewing...

"Of course I bloody did!" the pimply-faced youth (PFY) shouts angrily, slamming the phone down.

Sensing tension in the air, I ask him what's up.

"A bloody user - he's been to the boss and complained about his network speed and got the OK to get it fixed..."

"And you don't fancy the overtime?"

"I'm sick of bloody overtime."

The poor blighter is getting stir-crazy from spending so much time in the office. I remember only too well the feeling of depression as I contemplated another day of calls from users whose passwords didn't work when their caps keys were pressed down. Until I discovered the wonders of electricity, contact adhesive and tinfoil. But that's another story.

"What you need," I reply, noticing a shadow behind the glass panel of our door "is a break. A chance to re-establish yourself as a member of a team. If there's one thing that contributes to workplace harmony it's the feeling of belonging to a group with a common cause."

I interrupt the PFY as he reaches for the yellow pages - no doubt to look for psychiatric hospitals - and point to the Boss's blurred form outside the door.

"But, it's not a good idea."

"Why not?" The PFY is getting into the swing of things.

"Don't tell the Boss, but a company I used to work for had this team-building weekend and when they got back, performance was up to such a level that they laid off 30 per cent of the staff."

When I looked again the doorway was free of shadow.

Later that afternoon, the boss, looking benevolent, returns.

"I know its short notice," he says, eyeing us intently, "but I've noticed that morale is down a little recently, so I thought maybe some of us should go for a team-building weekend. Apparently one of the hotels in Brighton has conference and relaxation facilities. I was thinking maybe this weekend?"

That 30 per cent must have really got to him because half the IT department is on his list. The PFY and I make a show of reluctantly accepting the offer.

Friday night arrives and the PFY and I find ourselves at the hotel along with the other IT sheep. By a strange twist of fate, our room access cards no longer access our allocated rooms, but the large staterooms at either end of the corridor.

"Who are we to argue with fate?" I ask the PFY as I place the magcard writer back in my luggage.

"See you in the morning."

Morning dawns and it's time to pay for our sins...

The head of IT has a trust exercise where the victim falls backwards off a table into the arms of his or her co-workers. But everyone was curiously reluctant to try it out after the PFY thought he saw Kevin Costner outside the window at a critical moment of the demonstration.

The boss, however, isn't dissuaded by the head's confinement to bed, and has myriad geeky games to enthrall us with.

"I can't take much more of this!" the PFY gasps as we're finally allowed to go to the bar at eight o'clock.

"I know. It's a bloody nightmare."

"And he's going to try some 'trust' thing about one person leading another person in a blindfold around the building tomorrow."

"Filthy. Although..."

"No, no, he's said he's not going to be in it. Besides, he knows where the stairwells and balconies are."

"Damn! Well, desperate times call for desperate measures."

"What are you going to do?"

"Buy the boss a drink or two."

A couple of hours later I've snaffled the boss's room card from his wallet and am making my way to his room while the PFY keeps him at the bar...

The next morning everyone's on deck, but there's no boss to be seen. I join the crowd of onlookers.

"All right, what did you do?" the PFY asks curiously.

"Guess."

"You watered his electric blanket?"

"No."

"Livened up his toilet seat?"

"No, but much warmer"

"How much warmer?"

"As warm as say, a Jalapeno pepper, coated in glycerin and placed strategically at the top of a jar of suppositories where it might be grabbed by a drunken sufferer of piles just before bedtime."

"You bastard. Will he turn up?"

"I don't know." I gave the issue some consideration. "What are the chances of the police releasing you when you're found stark naked in a hotel lobby beating the crap out of an ice machine?"

"About the same as the chances of a team-building exercise that can't be played in the bar today?"

"Exactly." I was proud of the PFY's perspicacity. "Make mine a lager!"

There's stocktaking to be done and awkward questions to be answered. But the BOFH stays cool as things get hot...

I hate inventory time. Every bloody year it's the same: traipse around and record the serial number attached to each device in a half-witted attempt to ensure that we don't steal any kit. Then the inevitable spot checks to make sure that we weren't lying.

It would almost be inconvenient if we didn't have a complete list of the serial numbers and control of the program that randomly selects the equipment that's going to be spot-checked.

And let me tell you, if someone ever steals the full-height 5MB hard drive, the 600 BPI nine-track tape drive, or the ZX81 expansion memory card, there's going to be questions asked in accounts.

Our spot-check kit's all in perfect nick of course - only in service for a couple of hours every year - besides, should we require to change the inventory's selection, there's a huge space in one of our deserted warehouses in Peckham that's jam-packed with equipment that no-one's going to steal.

Not that it's necessary, given that with the frightening turnover of bean-counters the chances of running into the same inventory auditor two years in a row is about the same as someone discovering the boss has stashed three motor vehicles behind packing cases in the aforementioned warehouse.

That's the beauty of a good alarm system - it doesn't ring bells to scare intruders - it just dials up your Linux box and chucks a real-time movie onto your X-terminal.

And so it was that the PFY and I noticed the arrival of three spanking-new top-of-the-line vehicles in the long-term storage area of the warehouse.

The boss, only recently returned to us by the police, is of course to blame. Trying to brown-nose away his sins with the CEO by reorganizing this year's executive vehicle replacement into a bulk purchase deal, he made one error.

It seems that somehow, unbeknownst to him, Mercedes got mixed up with Lada on the order form, and instead of it being faxed to the reputable luxury car dealer a SIMM's throw from our office doorstep, it somehow made it to a less-reputable economy car dealer quite some distance away. An economy car dealer who, by some quirk of fate had three, brand spanking new Ladas sitting at the back of his showroom, for the last six years.

The boss took the delivery well though. Better than he took the playing of Johnny Cash's Ring of Fire on the cafeteria juke box over and over again after recovering from the unorthodox medication he received at the recent team-building weekend.

And so it was that I felt a modicum of animosity in the air when the boss deigned to join the inventory auditors on their rounds.

"A 600BPI, nine-track tape unit?" the auditor asks.

"Ah, that would be just over here," I respond, pointing.

"That wasn't there yesterday," the boss cries, smelling rodent.

"No, we had a reshuffle to make way for new cabling," I respond in a manner that would have got me the Baden-Powell award for preparedness.

"I see. A Seagate five-megabyte hard drive?"

"That will be on the e-mail list server."

"We don't use five-meg hard drives anymore," the boss cries.

"Afraid so," I reply. "As the list server software runs on an old XT which only supports MFM hard drives."

"This is ridiculous," he cries, grabbing the auditor's sheaf of papers and fumbling into non spot-check territory.

"What about this 29-inch Sony TV?"

"Nicom Stereo, with text option?" I ask. "In the boardroom, not here"

"OK, well what about the Sega video game?"

"It's with personnel, they were going to use it for a crèche for workers returning from maternity leave," I ad-lib, and far faster than the soundcard does.

"Right," he says, in a determined manner. "The brand-new heating and cooling system, supposed to be in this room - where is it?"

"In the delivery room downstairs isn't it?"

"No, I checked this morning. They said they delivered it here."

"Well perhaps it's outside the service elevator."

"No, but I have a fair idea of where it is. Warm at home is it?" he asks, flashing a photograph of the outside of my flat featuring a new air-conditioner.

"I just installed a new unit at home because I was so impressed with the spec of the system we bought."

"Bought and put where?" the boss asks nastily. "It was in the Peckham warehouse wasn't it?" the PFY chimes to the rescue. "Because of all the new heat-generating kit that was recently dumped there," he mentions, pointedly.

"Ah, yes," the boss responds, at 1,400 backpedals per second. "Of course, I should have known. Well, no problems here."

Quicker than you can say diminished responsibility he and the auditor are gone.

"He's got it in for us you know," the PFY murmurs.

"Yes, I know. And it's just not fair, and highly unjustified. Now, how do you spell Trabant again?"

The helldesk has got a bit too big for its boots, but the BOFH has a cunning plan to knock them down to size...

I'm sitting at my desk when the PFY looks up from his task of helping users with performance problems on the back-up server.

"Hey, the Kill-9 command isn't working."

"Yeah, I rewrote it with better signals. Ones with more meaning than words like hang up."

"Well what are they?"

"They're a mixed bag - everything a discerning system administrator needs."

"And they are?"

"Let's see, there's Kill-Godfather, which is a quick shot to the back of the process's header in a quiet corner of process space, and also, while it's at it, leaves a GIF of a horse's head in their screen-saver bitmap."

"Lovely, I'm sure."

"Then there's Kill-CIA, which kills the process and makes it look like natural causes."

"Uh-huh."

"Of course, further investigation of the core file reveals the words, 'grassy knoll,' which is sure to get the furry-toothed guys in research reaching for the dandelion tea."

"Yes..."

"Ahhhhh, Kill-shotgun, for when you can't remember the whole of the process's PID - it just kills anything in that vicinity. Kill-drive by, which knocks off one process on either side of the specified one, and so on."

"It's a little overboard isn't it?" the PFY asks mildly.

"No, Kill-overboard kills all processes, e-mails a nasty message to Bill Gates about how badly we're abusing our Microsoft licenses, then writes garbage all over the kernel causing the system to crash. Oh, and tampers with a couple of things on your desktop machine."

"Hey, the system's just gone down."

"Yeah -overboard is the default if your username is helpdesk. Installed SUID too, so they have the power they've been bleating about needing all this time."

The phone rings and something tells me it's the helpdesk wanting to complain. There's no pleasing some people.

"But you know what that means don't you?" The PFY asks in horror.

"That the helpdesk is working? Yes, I know, I thought that new box of whiteboard markers would buy us a week or two in naughts and crosses games, but the boss took it out after the first couple of days."

"We can't have the helldesk trying to fix problems - it took two days to recover the database server last time."

"True - but I have a plan..."

The next day dawns and I await the fruition of my labors. Sure enough, the phone's on the job real early.

"Something's wrong with all the dictate systems," the helldesk droid says.

"And what exactly is the problem?" I ask.

"Well, the 'plain English' module's gone from every desktop, so the machines don't seem to be understanding the users any more. And the Voice Recalibration Application is missing too."

"I see," I answer thoughtfully, gesturing the PFY over. "So what you're saying is that somehow, probably due to the crash the helpdesk caused on the back-up server yesterday, all the voice-tailoring of the user's dictation systems have disappeared."

"Yes."

"And don't tell me, the install media is gone too?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"A lucky guess," the PFY shouts.

"Now tell me," I say, "there must be another voice module apart from the 'plain English' one?"

"Well that's the funny thing."

"Yes?"

"There's a module I've never seen before. It's called drunken Scotsman."

"Really?"

"Yes, but I don't know what it is."

"Well, there's only one way of finding out. Take a bottle of Scotch up to Don McCloud on the third floor, prime him up and let him have a go at it."

"You can't be serious."

"You're right. Tell the beancounters they'll be typing their reports."

"But they're due at the printer's tomorrow night."

"Then whatever you do, don't forget Don's a single-malt man."

As soon as he's rung off I'm priming Don over the phone. Like a true professional, he leaps to the task and has no problems being understood by the peripherals. The rush to get temps with accents stops after I mention the discrimination angle and how badly it might look if the papers got hold of it.

The next day at the pub, the PFY and I hear all about it...

"Well a couple of them mastered the accent quite well," Don slurs, after two days solid scotch drinking. "Although I've heard that they won't need it for long as the original voice module is due to be reinstalled on Monday."

"Oh I shouldn't worry about that," I mutter. "It's only a matter of time before one of the helpdesk people dictates the words 'computer, kill minus overboard' into the documentation system."

A drunken beancounter, sounding like Sean Connery on a bad day, brings over the next round.

Another dirty job that someone's got to do...

Shape up or face budget cuts , what will the BOFH do? Enlist the help of an ice cream and some digging gear...

You can only put off some support for so long, and the directive from on-high is that we've got to go out and press the flesh with the middle management types or we can expect our lack of support to be reflected in this quarter's budget allocation.

I cannot allow my junket budget to be tampered with, especially not after the serious cuts I've had to make in recent months due to unnecessary auditor attention.

The PFY and I go for the divide and conquer method to meet the user base. I step lively to complainant number one, a cost manager loosely attached to the beancounters.

"I've got some performance problems," he cries forlornly as I roll up. "Yes, I've heard the rumors," I respond, icing up what appears to be a budding relationship between him and his attractive young personal assistant.

"But never mind, it happens to the best of you , what about your PC?"

"I was talking about my PC," he cries.

He leads me through to his office, at which time I realize that not even our beancounters like him, his PC's so old it still has the 'This Side Up' sticker in Noah's handwriting.

Feeling a smidgen of pity for the bloke, I say: "Looks like a Magnum job to me."

"Not the gun?" he asks fearfully.

"No, the ice-cream. Bung it down the back, switch her on, and bugger off to lunch. And take anything flammable off your desk just in case."

"But they'll blame me."

"Not if you leave the wrapper in your assistant's bin they won't."

"But she's..."

"...expendable," I say.

Problem solved, I move on to my next victim. On the way I meet the PFY, who doesn't appear to be in a good mood.

"How was the design group manager?" I ask.

"Manager? He couldn't manage a good crap without written instructions."

"Annoying?"

"Annoying, he bloody wanted me to move one of those workstations with the twin 21-inch monitors downstairs."

"Ah yes," I cry, recalling loud noises from the recent past. "So best to avoid the south stairwell for a bit?"

"The bottom two floors and basement level anyway , I got them down two flights without hitting the handrails."

"Bally good shot old man," I cry supportively, slapping him on the back. "We'll make a career administrator out of you yet. Right, I'm off to find out what the head of IT wants help with."

"You're seeing our boss, why?" the PFY cries.

"Apparently he's in need of some advice."

"Really?" the PFY smiles, eyes lighting up.

A few minutes later I'm in the office of our very own head of department, with a fair idea of what he has in mind.

"We're thinking of expanding our operation and moving into Asia," he mentions, confirming my suspicions. "We really need to get this videoconferencing thing off the ground."

It was always a matter of time, and that time appears to be at hand. Before the PFY and I know it we're going to have to release the bandwidth that we're using to receive cable TV from the States.

"Yes?" I murmur.

"I've been hearing good things about something called IP Tunneling.

I'm not sure of the ins-and-outs of it, so what can you tell me?"

"Well, it's basically a way of directing Internet traffic from one site to another , usually used to provide a virtual private network."

I switch to dummy mode.

"Is it fast?"

"Oh yes."

"How much will it cost?"

"Your cabling's probably going to be cheap because we already have all the fiber bearers and everything, so I guess the main expense is just going to be hiring the digging equipment."

"Digging equipment."

"Yes, to make the tunnel to Asia."

"But we can't make a tunnel to Asia , it would take years."

"No no," I laugh, "only joking."

"Oh thank goodness."

"No, we'll only have to dig the tunnel to the BT office switch room about half a mile away. Should cost us about four or five grand in rental."

"Four or five grand."

"Well, they might do a cash job under the table for three , if we provide our own project manager."

"Where will we get a project manager?"

"Well rumor has it there's a PA in cost management who's up for a new position. Of course I'd have to liaise fairly closely with her for the duration of the project."

"Make it so," the head cries, like a real Star Trek pro.

Beam me up Scotty, there's no intelligent life down here.

The users are away from the office and - shock horror - the BOFH and PFY miss them. Surely this can't be right...

Bored, bored, bored. The building is all but deserted as the company hosts its 'New Initiative W3' day for the workers - a disgusting event where the heads of the various departments report on the three where's of existence - where we came from, where we are, and where we're going.

I notice that my overlay picture of a lavatory has been removed from the posters in the cafeteria. Perhaps that's why the PFY and I have the dubious honor of joining security in being the only staff not to get an invite.

It's surprising how bored an administrator can become without external distractions. The PFY seems particularly melancholy now that there are no users to bug him. A lesser man might be drawn to question his real feelings in the light of this knowledge. The PFY and I however have larger fish to grill - over the boss's under-desk heater as it happens.

Amazing what they'll do when you cover half the air inlet and disconnect the thermal cut-out.

In no time we're tucking into a tasty lunch - and crispy too, thanks to the PFY's discovery that by removing the safety cover you can place the food nearer to the bare heating wires.

"You know, it's funny," the PFY says as he gobbles the last of his fish butte, "but in a way I miss the users."

"We should give Dr Robb a ring."

Dr Robb is the company shrink. He used to come in once a week for huggy-feely sessions with the staff, but the presence of a video camera in the room seems to have had some effect on his popularity. I guess the deputy store man never did get over his tape being played on the front-desk security monitor one Friday evening after drinks.

"Hello?"

"Hi Doctor Robb."

"Ah... hello Simon."

"How's the PC?"

"I don't use computers anymore," he says nervously. "In fact I don't use any electrical appliances."

"But what about the phone? That's an electrical appliance of sorts isn't...."

>CLICK "That's strange," the PFY comments. "He's hung up. And what about that crap about not using electrical appliances?"

"I know - sounds like neurosis if you ask me. Sounds like he needs another dose of that shock treatment they go on about."

"What do you mean another dose?"

"Oh, nothing. So it looks like we're going to have to deal with this problem on our own. I think the horrible truth is - we actually need our users."

"No!" the PFY is almost hysterical.

The rest of the afternoon is spent in sad contemplation.

Normality returns when the first W3 victim enters the workplace early to get some back-ups of his Linux box while the portable tape unit is free.

"Hello," I say, grabbing the phone.

"It's about my back-ups - they don't go through."

"That's because you back up all your applications instead of the data that is changing. You don't need to back up your applications because we keep copies of them all on the server."

"But I really do want to back up my applications," the user cries, not fooled for a second.

"Then you'll have to use the ultra-fast Non-Unwinding Longitudinal Length drive."

Dummy mode on.

"Duh... OK. What's that called?"

"/dev/null"

"OK. Hey, it is fast. How do you track it?"

"Uh, the command is 'cat /dev/null' piped to 'ls -alR /'."

"OK, thanks."

"Don't mention it."

"What was all that about?" The PFY gasps. "I thought we'd realized that we needed the users?"

"Don't be stupid. I'll never need a user while I have the Doom and Quake boxed set and the Internet. And grilled fish for lunch of course. Speaking of which, did you put the safety..."

A scream from the boss's office answers my question before the PFY can respond.

"Whoops," says the PFY.

While the PFY is busy with his Tunnel-Monkey work, the BOFH is sorting out the e-mail system and diverting complaints to sex lines...

It's a tedious morning at Network Central so I while away the hours by getting the PFY to do some Tunnel-Monkey work checking the earthing straps on the cable trays in the comms risers.

True, it's a hot, cramped and pointless job, but it does give him a broader view of the world of networking. And helps him remember that when I say "Don't play with my laptop," I mean it.

The calls are coming in thick and fast this morning and without the PFY I have to start screening them myself. The helpdesk has started giving out our number to anyone who seems important, and since the boss fixed them up with an exchange console, our usual ploy of changing numbers every day no longer seems to work.

After a few calls I can see that there's a trend towards one single complaint, so I 'screen' the rest of them by diverting the phone to an outside sex line, then fire off an e-mail memo to the beancounters saying there's been a lot of telephone abuse in that area recently, and perhaps they should investigate.

But unlike Wells Fargo, my mail does not get through. In fact it hardly ever gets through. Not since the Boss, off his own bat, got our Systems predecessors to 'Upgrade' the mail server with some 'fantastic' software which does everything but drop a lipsticked kiss on the bottom of your personal e-mail.

Everything but deliver the bloody message that is.

I corner the Boss once more about this by pointing out the software's many shortcomings. However, he gets evasive.

"Well, it did cost an awful lot of money - and besides, a lot of our Meeting Calendars are plugged into it too!"

So it is that a few days later the Boss is looking through the manual archive in the store for his mailer guide when the PFY interrupts my dedicated labor with a question.

"What're you doing?"

"Ensuring the return of my beloved sendmail," I reply.

"How?"

"Ah, just helping the 'flash mailer' software 'deliver' the boss's e-mail. The 'Visible Queue' screen is actually quite good - it allows me to 'deliver' some messages personally."

"How?"

"Well, you grab certain messages and drag them onto the Trash icon."

"Which messages?"

"Oh, just one part of any multi-part message."

I show him on the screen. "See the Mail-IN queue? The Subject contains the sequence number of the part. So you delete part 23 of 24 and let the other parts go through. It's driving him insane. And, of course, I'm 'delivering' all of his outgoing mail altogether, so he's having to send everything important by internal mail just to make sure it gets there, never really knowing what's getting there and what's not."

"Well, what he doesn't know won't hurt him," the PFY mutters.

"That statement has never proved accurate in my experience. For instance, I don't believe at this point in time the Boss knows that the top step of the storeroom stepladder is very loose..."

We both listen intently to the sound of an overweight manager plunging 5 feet into several large boxes of line flow paper.

An hour later, as I'm reverting our mail server to my first choice (I think it was the 10 e-mail messages that I'd claimed to have sent to Buildings Maintenance about stepladder problems that swung it), the PFY comes over looking perplexed.

"I don't understand why we installed it..." he says.

Sigh. Just when you think he understands, you realize that he's still out there somewhere, looking for answers.

"As your position in the company increases, your perceived responsibility increases, your actual responsibility decreases and your understanding of the issues decreases as well," I explain.

"So why did we buy it in the first place?"

"We bought it because someone thought it was a good idea, and no-one at managerial level knew it was crap."

"I think that's a little cynical..."

I interrupt with a hands-free phone call.

"Hello?" the boss answers.

"Hi, I was just wondering why you authorized the upgrade to the new Object Orientated Programming package."

"Well, it was your idea - you said we'd run out of objects."

"Of course. Thank you."

I ring off.

"Point made?" I ask.

"I still don't think..."

"Hello?" the Boss answers.

"That graphics accelerator I removed from your machine, why was that again?"

"Because it ... something about the graphics travelling too fast?"

"Of course, I remember now," I reply hanging up.

"But..." the PFY adds.

"No BUTs - it's them or us. You can lead a boss to a decision, but you can't make him think."

Sigh.

The company architect's presence in the building creates an air of expectancy and pushes the BOFH into a bit of bastardly trickery...

There's a feeling of excitement in the air that I haven't felt in a long time. The same sort of excitement that precedes the Xmas get-together when the yearly bonuses are handed out. (Recent years excepted, of course.)

The font of all joy becomes apparent almost immediately. The company architect, usually only called in for "department refits" is on the premises. That in itself is a surprise, as I don't remember hearing of a wave of redundancies.

This time, however, my perusing indicates that there's been no departmental Axe job. (Sigh.) It must be something else. The Head of IT is sure to know.

The PFY, trained to respond to just this kind of situation, fires up the building 'topology monitor' and we home in on the 'Big Guy's' belt buckle - a chunky slab of metal that could stop a scud, complete with 'tasteful' picture of a rampant mermaid engraved into it - a gift from loyal staff.

And they say that quality never goes out of style. As luck would have it, the PFY and I gained access to it prior to presentation and loaded it with the sort of hardware that keeps civil liberties groups busy.

Some people just don't understand.

"Do you think the belt will work?" the PFY asks, just before activation.

"Of course it will," I remind him. "The bug is so sensitive it could pick up an ant farting at 10 paces. Which reminds me, make a mental note to deactivate it an hour after lunch - no point in overloading its circuits."

Meanwhile, the sub-miniature microphone in the mermaid's eye hears all...

"Gentlemen," our Head begins, in hushed tones to the assembled board. "As chairperson of the committee to investigate expansion solutions, I've the following to report: first, this building is expensive to rent; second, it's becoming too small for our purposes; and third, it doesn't have the networking infrastructure to allow us to expand into the 21st century. For these reasons, I have taken advice from certain quarters..." he pauses, indicating, no doubt, a couple of board members known for their property speculation, "and signed the company up for the occupation of a larger facility at a waterfront location at a far more reasonable rent which we could move into almost immediately."

"BULOODY HELL!" the PFY cries, echoing my own thoughts to the letter. "He can't be serious!"

"Apparently so," I respond. "And using his lack of technical expertise as a selling point too."

"Lack?" the PFY blurts "He's not completely stupid; after all, he was on that TV program - what was it, Beyond 2000?"

"Ah no, the TV program he was on was Beyond Help, a completely different documentary altogether. Had a whole show on train spotting apparently."

Within the hour, the Boss is upon us, breaking the news, A-Z in hand.

"We're moving," he cries annoyed, indicating a spot on the river.

"I only just bloody found out!"

"Best start packing," I shout.

"You mean... you're not going to oppose the move?" he asks.

"Why?" I ask incredulously. "I can't wait! The chance to design a new and future proof network."

"But what about access to the city?" he sniffles.

"Highly overrated - smog, congestion. Give me river views anytime."

"Me too," the PFY concurs.

"But what about... all the work you've done here?"

"In the past. I'm looking forward to the challenge of the future."

"But..."

"All right. Fifty quid and I'll put the kybosh on it. What about you?"

"Twenty pints," the PFY cries.

"You can't be serious!"

"All right then, we're not serious. Let's get packing."

"Uh... OK. But what are you going to do?"

"Well, I'd tell you, but then I'd have to strap a bulk eraser to your head and stick you to one of the metal floor tiles."

"You mean it's that secret?"

"Not really, I'm just curious to see what would happen."

Taking the hint, the boss takes his leave. I get on the phone to the company's head shark, a lawyer so dodgy his business card's got someone else's name on it. I invite him down for a little chat about that tenancy contract loophole we discovered ... in about 10 minutes.

Sure enough, the end of the day finds the Boss in a giving mood.

"I don't know how you did it," he cries cheerfully, "but its money well spent. How'd you get the head lawyer to go for it - I thought he was one of the landlords?"

"Oh, he's quite reasonable when you get him down to ground level," I respond.

"Oh," The PFY blurts, "Speaking of which, should I turn off the eraser?"

"Hmmm. Maybe not just yet. Let's leave it a couple more hours."

It's true what they say, you've just got to know how to communicate with these people...

The BOFH and PFY are hurt when they're left out of the games day , but it's nothing that a mallet and a spot of violence can't take care of...

So the PFY and I are deeply hurt when the CEO decides to ease the proles' building move disappointment by holding an IT and clients 'games' weekend - complete with Murder Mystery Saturday party - without the PFY and I.

Rumor has it our 'tame' lawyer spilt the beans about the whole tenancy contract loophole deal before departing to the relative safety of a rival company...

What hurts is that the head of IT used one of our very own excuses on us - that the network always needs someone on call because of the overseas offices, particularly now that IT will be absent for the whole weekend.

Which is bollocks, as half the offices couldn't call the International 24-hour helpdesk if it wasn't the top right-hand button on their phones.

It's almost as if they don't want the PFY and I socializing with people on a fun outing. As if they don't trust us. Apparently the interest dropped off exponentially when the Murder Party was announced.

Still, it's an ill wind - it'll give us a chance to perform some disk- warranty checks (a couple of whacks with a rubber panel-beating mallet that leaves no marks just before the end of the warranty period.) You'd be surprised how many disks fail the tests requiring a free replacement.

I'm checking we have all the kit on hand on Friday afternoon when the boss breezes in.

"Evening all," he cries cheerily, obviously gagging to break some news to us.

"Guess what I've managed to wangle?"

"Yes?" I respond, without enthusiasm.

"You've been Okayed to come to the Sunday games - after you do some software installations in Personnel of course," he says, handing me a list longer than the 'known bugs' of Windows 95.

Saturday dawns and, never ones to turn down a challenge, the PFY and I pull out all stops to ensure that the upgrades get done on time. In fact, we even have a little spare, which we put to good use.

Monday comes, and I go to work knowing full well I'm going to be burdened by a conversation with the boss. Sure enough, he calls out to me before I can get to mission control and gestures to his office which, from my angle, appears to have more than its usual allocation of Personnel management in situ. The PFY is also on the scene, so it's very cramped in the boss's office.

"Simon," the boss starts, "I've just been going over a number of complaints that Justin here has raised about your conduct yesterday."

"Yesterday?" I ask, innocence my new middle name.

"At the games? At Balesworth Castle Grounds?" Justin snaps.

"Oh yes! And you say there were complaints?"

"Yes! You realize that this was supposed to be a 'fun' occasion, where members of the various departments could meet in a spirit of sportsmanship."

"Yes, I did realize that. In fact, I did my best to try every game even though some of them were quite new to me."

"So it would appear. Justin seems to believe that you may have been a little over-enthusiastic."

"Really? I can't think why. Can you?" I ask the PFY.

"Not really."

"What about the Pétanque game?"

"The Pétanque game?"

"Yes, where you played your ball from the rooftop?"

"Oh yes! Well I had to - I got a helpdesk call on the cellphone and the reception on the playing field was lousy. So, in the 'spirit of sportspersonship', I didn't want everyone waiting for me to have my turn. Anyway, I don't believe there's anything in the rules about what height you have to play the ball from."

"Perhaps not, but pretending to light a fuse on the castle's cannon before playing your ball didn't add to your competitors' sense of well-being..."

"It was only a bit of fun."

"Like the Pétanque ball that dented the bonnet of Justin's coupe?"

"Oh, I just needed a little fine-tuning on my aim," I cry, still going for the innocent look.

"And that would be the same excuse you'll be using for the 'Hacky Sack' game?" he continued.

"I admit I did get a little enthusiastic," I reply, "which, combined with the angle of the sun, may have led to some confusion."

"Confusion...yes," Justin hissed.

"Well at least I managed to kick the sack."

"You managed to kick a sack. Unfortunately for Justin, the sack concerned is more commonly known as a scrotum."

"As I said, the sun, me not being used to steel toe-capped shoes..."

"I might be able to accept these excuses except it appears that neither of you performed the software installs I asked..."

"Yes we did," the PFY cried.

"None of the machines are booting!" Justin shouted, unable to restrain himself any longer. "They're just sitting there."

"I told you," I said to the PFY "Those bloody hard disks were faulty."

"Which brings me to this," the Boss sighed, holding up a piece of disk-testing equipment. "Anyone care to tell me how this got into Justin's office?"

"He's fixed the coupe himself to save on insurance?" I offer helpfully.

The PFY and I settle ourselves comfortably for the wailing and gnashing of teeth to follow...

A US buyout results in a visit stateside, a lesson in the Zen of lift shafts and plenty of new kit... all expenses paid

It's a crisp Monday morning when the CEO pops into our offices to ask for a bit of a favor. The boss, nose always alert for the truffles of office kudos, creeps in.

"I'd like you to rig up the video conference stuff up so that I can give a quick speech to the entire company" he requests.

"You're not retiring, are you?" the boss blurts, eyes on a prize WAAAAY above his station.

"No, no"

"An early Easter message to the troops, then?"

"No. The truth of the matter is that we've been bought out. Lock, stock and Barrel"

"THE BLOODY JAPS!" the boss cries.

"No, no!" the CEO sighs, "Anyway, with the world money situation, about the only other place it would come from would be Amsterdam."

"Oh thank goodness for that!" the boss blurts, "I don't know a word of Belgian!"

The things you hear when you haven't got your nail gun...

The day arrives and the CEO spells it out for the masses around the world. An American conglomerate looking for foreign investment stumbled across our well-doctored Annual Report and liked what they saw so much that they bought the company. The news that there are no plans for resizing is met with a collective sigh from the assembled proles. For now, it's business as usual...

"Simon," the CEO mumbles, away from the relative security of his executive en-suite for the second time this week (a new record). "Just need you and your Man Friday to pop over to the Mother company in the US for a week or so to see how they do their stuff. Smart cookies over there apparently, all state-of-the-art palaver. Anyway, the bosses there just want to go over and chin-wag with their techos. Hope you don't mind..."

An all-expenses paid junket to the US...Hmmm.

"Well, it would definitely be helpful, but it'd take ages to ship the equipment over."

"Oh, we'll fly you business class and you can take it as luggage!" he cries.

"I don't really think that will QUITE cover the network analyzer hardware and the..."

"Well, I suppose we could squeeze you both into First Class" he cries magnanimously...

And so it was that two days and many, many first-class drinks later, the PFY and I are awaiting collection in a holding cell at the port of entry into the US. Apparently they don't take too kindly to heavy drinking at Customs, especially not when you use the "strange customs" joke too many times.

Luckily, our parent company actually does a bit of wheeling and dealing in the field and manages to spring us from custody. After a night's rest, we're met by our tour guide - the boss's equivalent in the mother company. He gives us a quick overview of their operation, introduces us to the systems and network blokes, then beats a hasty retreat. We're shown around the site and have to admit to being impressed with the equipment.

"It's certainly impressive," I mention to one of my counterparts as we're looking at their collection of brand-spanking new kit.

"Well, we like to keep up with the times. Besides, a lot of the older stuff was damaged when we relocated to the second floor."

"Damaged?" I ask, smelling professionalism lurking in the wings.

"Yeah, we're not exactly sure how, but the lift doors opened when the lift wasn't there..."

"Ah," I nod knowingly, "and a laden trolley of equipment plunged down the shaft?"

"THREE laden trolleys as it happened - unfortunately, I was wearing the ear muffs that the company makes you wear in the computer room and didn't hear the kit hit the bottom."

"How unfortunate," I sigh meaningfully.

"Not quite as unfortunate as the boss not trusting us with his bonsai plants and carrying them to the lift himself."

"Where he subsequently dropped them?" I ask, filling in the blanks as appropriate.

"Actually no, he held on to them all the way to the ground floor. Mind you, the paramedics did trample them in their hurry to rescue him."

A week later, the PFY and I are bailed out of a holding cell at Heathrow (what the hell, an opportunity missed is an opportunity gone forever) and the next day make our report to the boss and CEO.

"All their equipment is miles ahead of ours! We'll need an extensive systems and networks management upgrade! Worse still, our operations centre has a network latency problem because it's so far from the satellite dish on the roof. We'd need to move at least two floors up to cut the distance and reduce the delay. I'd suggest we move in after we organize the purchase of compatible equipment through the systems and networks guy over in the US head office once he's worked out what we need..."

...Meanwhile, on the other side of the water, my counterpart is presenting his compatibility proposal...

"All their equipment is miles ahead of ours...etc."

A couple of days on, I get my check from the US office to buy some compatible gear...

My progress to Oddbins is delayed only momentarily by the sound of a trolleyful of kit hitting the bottom of a lift shaft. That's the PFY's dedication for you - it's all work, work, work.

Good of the boss to lend a hand moving his prized cactus plants...

Translating engineer excuses into non-fiction can be a difficult task , but nothing is too tough for The Bastard Bible...

So I'm putting some finishing touches to The Bastard Bible, or as the PFY and I refer to it, 'Everything your users ever wanted to know about systems and networks management but were too afraid to ask because they didn't want to spend a bank holiday weekend stuck in a chemical toilet.'

The PFY wanders over after logging a hardware fault on an old RAID cabinet that's near the end of its serviceable life. Noticing my disdain, the PFY can't stop himself: "You don't like engineers very much do you?"

"Not particularly. It's such a crap paid job that all the good ones bugger off to private contracting while all the crap - or new - ones get sent out to look after our gear."

"It's not quite that bad," the PFY says, shaking his head. "They get the job done."

"Time will tell." I don't want to raise his hopes as I know that our maintenance contracting company tries to reduce costs by religiously claiming the fault is software, not hardware. When that fails, they'll attempt to 'repair' gear on-site using your tools to disguise the fact that they don't actually have a workshop. That is, they're operating from the back room of a minicab company.

As expected, the engineer arrives exactly at 11:53am, just in time to hook on to the crowd going out to lunch. He wants to blend in with the rest of the department so he can get some free food. Like company, like employee.

After lunch the PFY and I let him back into the computer room to see if he knows what he's doing. He flicks a couple of switches on the RAID unit to see if any of them will make the Disk-Fault light extinguish.

When that fails - maybe because the disk has a fault? - He comes up with his carefully considered diagnosis.

"Hmmm. That's interesting," he says. I direct the PFY's eyes to that phrase in the 'Engineer Speak' section of the Bastard Bible: "I have no idea what's wrong."

"So the disk is faulty?" I ask.

"Could be, but I'll need to get my service kit from the car."

The PFY reads the translation to himself: "I need to get XXX from the car/van/courier," equals, "I'm going to bugger off back to the office and hope the call gets re-assigned to another engineer."

"Oh, we've got one here!" I cry, knobbling him completely.

"Oh... great."

Now he's stuck. He's going to have to open the cabinet up and have a poke around. Otherwise we'll know he has no idea. I give him a clue by pointing at the dud disk in the unit.

"So I guess you'll replace that?"

"It's possible," he responds, still avoiding the commitment of having an opinion. "But I'd like to check it over first."

As I take my leave, he prepares the unit for the hot, removal with a hammer. A minute later he's back in our office.

"Have you got a bigger hammer?"

At this stage I feel compelled, if only for my personal sanity, to point out the quick release latches that are preventing the disk's removal. He yanks the drive from its bay and brings it into the control room for a once-over.

"Yeah, as I thought, it's a dry joint on the logic board. I'll just re-solder it."

"I'm about to ruin a piece of your hardware," the PFY reads aloud.

"Pardon?"

"Nothing." The PFY closes the translation chart before the engineer can peer over his shoulder. "Just talking to myself."

He plugs our soldering iron in, letting it melt the mouse pad he's laid it on.

"We'll have it back up in no time," he says happily.

"It's about to become a f***ing expensive paperweight," the PFY reads.

"Pardon?"

"Nothing - just my Toilette's Syndrome kicking in."

Before the soldering iron can work its way through the mouse pad to the table top, I decide to take steps.

"Shouldn't you work on that in the computer room to prevent possible thermal expansion /contraction problems?" I ask.

DUMMY MODE ON.

"Duh... yeah... I was just going to do that. Just making sure the soldering iron was working."

He wanders back into the computer room, then returns a minute later.

"You don't have any solder do you? I seem to have left mine in the car."

"Yeah, sure," the PFY replies, handing over some of our stash.

"Wait!" I cry. "You don't want that - you want the solder with the flux core to act as a catalyst to the soldering bond."

DUMMY MODE IRREVOCABLY ON.

I hand over some chunky stuff that's more suited to plumbing than electronics, and the engineer smiles.

"Cool, I was just going to ask for the catalytic stuff."

He wanders off happily.

"What did you give him that crap for?" the PFY asks. "It's horrible to use and always gives off tons of smo..."

His question is answered as the computer room fire alarm triggers.

We watch through the viewing window for a while as the engineer fumbles with the Halon Hold-Off switch, which some Bastard appears to have epoxy glued open.

Of course, we let him out before he passes out. Just...

Call me Mr. Kind-hearted.

When the boss and the PFY both suffer from acute computer 'acronym dependence', it's time to visit Harley Street to play in the traffic...

"...So I think the proposal for an ATM network to back up the FDDI backbone ASAP would be appropriate," the boss says.

"I beg your pardon?" I ask, thinking for a moment that I am in some 'twilight zone' replica of my workplace.

"I read your FYI last night on TCP/IP latency. I think we should get the problem solved PQD!"

"I see," I reply, realizing what has happened.

I break like the wind to the office and nudge the PFY awake.

"What is it?" he asks.

"It's bad!" I reply, deeply troubled, "I think the boss is suffering from acronym dependence...It's where a non-technical person over-compensates for the lack of intellect by..."

"...over-using acronyms in conversation...And it's most often seen in managers and sales droids who believe that it gives the impression of computing competence," the PFY completes. "I read your article about it on a bulletin board yesterday at lunchtime."

"You read a bulletin board? In your own time?" I ask, worried.

"Well, yeah," the PFY responds guiltily, "but I was only browsing while waiting for a picture to download from Netscape."

"Smut?" I ask approvingly.

"Uh...no, it was a photo of the layout of the new laptop Pentium Pro motherboard...It's got this really small profile and..."

"Bloody hell! You're worse than the boss! You're computer dependent!"

"No I'm not!" he cries.

"You bloody are! You're reading computing mags at home, aren't you?"

"No..."

"Don't lie to me!"

"Well, maybe a couple, but it's not like I'm addicted. I could give them up any time."

"Yeah, because you only read them socially, right?"

"It's just a couple of magazines! What's the harm in that?"

"So you wouldn't mind your name and photo being submitted to the Geek-Mag blacklist that gets distributed to newsagents?"

"Uh...no." he gulps.

"You've got a machine at home haven't you?"

"What if I have? It's just an old 486 that you told me to dump. It seemed like such a waste, so I..."

"So you took it home! I warned you about the dangers of working in computers! One minute, you're a highly-paid occupant of the planet earth, the next you're a mindless geek scouring ad pages for budget anorak sales. You've got to know when to switch off."

"When's that?" he asks.

"The best time is 10 minutes after you get into work, but in your case I think sterner measures are called for!"

"It's not that bad!" he cries defensively.

"Not that bad? I've seen it happen hundreds of times! One day you're working with a normal human being, the next you've got R2D2 sitting opposite you, talking about how neat it would be to port Linux to his car computer!"

"That's just silly. Linux would never fit into the memory. You'd have to retrofit some SIMMS and then find someone who'd been through the hoops to port the kernel to..."

"See what I mean?" I ask.

"What should I do?"

"Well, in situations like this I normally advise the workmate of the afflicted person to take them to Harley Street."

"Is there a specialist there?"

"No, but the traffic on Euston Road is murder. Literally. If they shunt the afflicted into it...It's the only way to be sure I'm afraid..."

"There must be some other way!!" he snuffles.

"Well, there is cold turkey."

"You mean, never touch a computer again?!?!?"

"No, I mean real cold turkey - they're serving it at the cafeteria today and I was tampering with the fridge controls again last night. By morning you'll be throwing up so much you won't want to risk going near anything electrical!"

"Can't I just... wean myself off?"

"You mean, like read a book that's almost as geeky - say a train spotting journal - as a form of computing 'methadone'?"

"Yeah!"

"Well, it's worth a crack. But you'll have to get rid of the mags and machines."

"OK. But don't you have a machine at home?"

"You mean the one work got me for dial-in access?"

"Yeah."

"The top-of-the-line Pentium Pro II with all the fruit?"

"Yeah!" the PFY cries, seeing a 'pot and kettle' scenario ahead.

"Swapped it for a stereo system."

"But what if you get called up in the middle of the night?"

"On the phone that I had disconnected?" I reply.

"Ah."

"Right, I think I made my point! Now, I think it's time you took a couple of weeks' holiday."

"How kind," the PFY sighs. "But where will I go?"

"Somewhere where they know nothing about computing...where they wouldn't know a RAM chip from a potato chip!"

"But I don't want to visit Microsoft!" he whines.

Our conversation is interrupted by the boss who wanders in with a bleeding finger.

"I've just cut my finger on the edge of that BT patch rack. Do you think I'll need a tetanus shot?"

"Hmmm..." I respond. "Why don't you let the PFY take you to a place I know near Harley Street? Be all over in no time..."

That's my problem, you know - always looking after people's welfare...

The PFY is displaying distressing signs of geekism, beer-bottle glasses and the first growth of a wispy beard , can he be saved?

Things are hectic. The Boss is away on sick leave , apparently he tripped in front of the traffic on Euston Road last week when the PFY was taking him to see a specialist, but managed to drag himself to the central traffic island after only being clipped by a couple of cars...

Worst luck.

The PFY, too, is away , ostensibly on holiday , but really because he had a relapse into computer addiction. Apparently he'd barricaded himself inside an Internet cafe with 10 boxes of Mars bars, three cases of Coke and a copy of Steven's Unix Network Programming. By the time they'd cut their way through to him, he'd taken up wearing thick glasses and had the beginnings of a wispy beard.

The psychiatrist had prescribed complete computing-free bed-rest for a couple of days, complemented by dangerously high levels of ECT to snap him out of it.

And, wouldn't you know it, when you're understaffed the calls come through , two the first day, and three the day after that. I assume that because the Boss isn't there to pour oil on troubled waters, the helpdesk are trying it on...

Sigh.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Systems and Networks."

"My machine's making a sort of grinding noise. It seems to be coming from near where the power cord is."

Hmm, what would Lassie do now?

"Somewhere near the fan outlet?"

"Yeah, I suppose it's near there, but I don't know."

"OK, well, get a pencil and poke it in one of the fan holes."

>CATHUNK "Sure does!"

"Cool!...Hey, while I've got you on the line, sometimes my machine comes up with memory errors and the technician guy says that it's something about a seating problem with Simms. Does that sound right?"

"Yeah," I chuckle, "I'm sure he did. It's the oldest cop-out in the book. We've been having a couple of problems like that this week, due to..." >flip flip DUMMY MODE ON!

"Duh-huh. So what do I do?"

"Well, you should probably wait for the technician to come around, but if you're in a hurry, I can give you a temporary overnight solution."

"Uh. What's that?"

"You know what your memory chips look like?"

"The long thin things that plug into the board?"

"Yeah. Well take them out , don't be too worried if you snap off the plastic clips , they're only there for shipping purposes."

"Duh-huh..."

"Wrap them in tin foil to earth the capacitant charge...plug them back into the motherboard."

"Duh-huh..."

"Then switch it on and leave it in overnight!"

"Duh...OK."

"Oh, and make sure the pencil's in place."

"Duh...OK, thanks."

"Don't mention it."

First thing the next day, I get in and the phone is ringing.

"Hello?"

The voice at the other end starts chirping on about fire, health and safety etc., but my attention is diverted by the reappearance of the PFY on deck. The treatment looks as if it was successful, judging by his general lack of interest in his surroundings.

Meantime, the voice on the phone stops, so I respond with, "I'll get right on to it," then hang up.

To get the PFY back into operations mode, I chuck five double-espressos his way, then whip him downstairs and prime him with a couple of pints and a kebab.

Sorted! I let him straight back into the hot seat by giving him the phone.

"Hello?" He responds to his first call.

Judging by the shouting at the other end, it's my first caller of the day annoyed at the four-hour morning tea break.

"Yes," the PFY responds, " we were out all morning dealing with the effects of..." >flip flip
Sounds like a full recovery to me!

"We're having a lot of systems problems because of it , printers not printing documents, files missing from hard disks...have you? Well, perhaps you've been affected too...Hmmm, I don't know whether I should tell you, it might be better to get the technician in...OK, well...shut down your machine and lift off the cover. See the big metal box at the back, or maybe along the side? Right! See there's two holes, one with the letter 'V' beside it and one with the letter 'A' beside it?...well wind those clockwise as far as they go to allow for entropic interference. Right, now wait quarter of an hour for the system to reset itself, then turn it on...Don't mention it. Bye."

"Fancy a pint?" the PFY asks hopefully, grabbing his coat. "We've only got 15 minutes till the fire alarm..."

So, in true systems management form, we see a window of opportunity and double-click on it...

The BOFH explains his new 'Management Stack Theory' to the PFY, who seems to take it all with a pinch of salt , until the boss walks in...

"So who's being made redundant again?" the boss asks, breaking the silence of the questions section of my presentation.

The room is silent while the boss and the rest of senior IT management await the answer to this weighty question.

"No one is being made redundant," I fume. "I'm talking about equipment here, routers and switches. I want to replace one router with two switches, which will give us redundancy at head office in that if one switch fails, the other one can take up the core functionality."

"Two switches, doing the same thing," the boss said.

"The same core tasks, yes."

"Like two light switches at either end of a hallway?"

"Sort of like that, yes."

"So if one's up, the other one has to be down for the light to go?"

Sigh.

Later, in Mission Control, I explain the rules of 'Management Stack Theory' to the PFY because he has no idea why the meeting deteriorated so quickly.

"Managers are stack-based," I explain. "Rule one is that they have, at most, a two-item stack limit. Mention a technical term and they'll push it onto their mental stack. Mention another; they push that up there as well. Mention yet another and they stack overload and reboot. That is, they think about what they're going to do after work, how sore their bum is, whether the marketing assistant knows her blouse is almost see-through, and so forth."

"But then they'd be rebooting all the time," the PFY says.

"Afraid not. Rule one; subsection B, deals with Stack Leakage. Technical terms leak from the stack at about one per sentence."

"Oh."

"Rule two of Management Stack Theory is that the frame size on their mental stack is pitifully small , terms are compressed to fit into the available frame. I mention 'Disk seek latency', they hear 'Disky Latex', 'Seek Latex', 'Disk Lazy', or something similar."

"So they didn't get much out of your presentation, is what you're saying? But they can't be that stupid," the PFY comments.

Oh, such innocence...

"Which brings me to rule three of Manager Stack Theory," I cry. "After a manager reboots, Volatile Memory is not zeroed, meaning that the contents are indeterminate. What the manager is left with is a jumble of terms, which, after Manager Internal Logic has finished with it, might become: 'Seek a see-through Latex Blouse'."

"Ah," the PFY doesn't quite believe me.

I can see that some form of proof is required...

"Right, you apply my rules to the following sentences. Use the whiteboard as your Manager Stack."

"OK," the PFY accepts the challenge.

"I think we need some redundant switches."

The PFY dutifully writes redundant switches on the board.

"You forgot rule two," I point out.

The PFY amends it to randy swatches.

"Which we could dynamically route to..."

dynamo root.

"Which would allow us to multi-home..."

My bum hurts, writes the PFY, erasing everything before it.

"Correct," I comment. "And what's left in memory after booting?"

"I need a new swatch for the randy man with the root password."

"Sounds reasonable to me."

"And a load of bollocks to me!" the PFY splutters, only to be interrupted midflow by the boss poking his head around the door.

"Yours too?" he asks, noticing the PFY's whiteboard scribbles. "Mine was aching all through that last meeting. Now, which one of you needed the new watch for rooting?"

Vindicated, I smile at the PFY.

"That'll be me," I say, grabbing hold of the tasteful new wrist accessory.

"What was it for again?"

"Oh, I'll be using it to benchmark the L2 cache performance of the new symmetric multiprocessor machines."

REBOOT

If the boss had a console screen option, I'd be watching a memory test at this point...

"I'm sorry, what was that again?" he asks.

"I just said I'll be needing a Dual-ported PC to run my Lempel Ziv compression , apparently it's a new algorithm."

REBOOT

"Cyclic redundancy checking! Electrically erasable EPROM! File read lookahead!" I blurt it all out, before the boss has gathered his wits about him.

The boss has a faraway look in his eyes.

"What happened?" the PFY asks, waving his hand in front of the boss's face.

"I've heard of this. I think he's stuck in reboot mode. He needs a manual reset."

"How the hell do you do that?" The PFY is worried.

"Uh... The male non-maskable interrupt..."

"I couldn't!" The PFY cries.

"It's that or have him stand in front of your desk all day..."

Reluctantly, the PFY kicks the boss in the crotch, and he goes down.

"What happened?" he cries, getting painfully to his feet.

"You just fainted and fell on to the corner of the desk. And you missed the end of my idea about Level 5 RAIDing all our legacy data as a data warehouse repository for the canned queries in the database front-end."

Blankness...

"I think he needs rebooting again." And I take a couple of steps back for the run-up...

The LAGERS invoice should have gone through smoothly , but a turncoat beancounter and a computing audit get in the way...

So, wouldn't you know it - I'm filling one of our 44-inch sheet plotters with toner for about the 10th time this month and it's really GETTING ON MY TITS! And it's always the red toner that needs refilling, which can only mean one thing - someone's lining their bedsit with spank-pic wallpaper.

The culprit isn't hard to find, considering that I keep logs of the size of the color raster files to determine which plotters will need filling with what toner (and definitely not because pink usage is a good indicator of a potential blackmail candidate.

Except for that sneaky bastard in design who was printing all those midget-fetish pictures, of course, but I tracked him down with the print-time statistics - anyone who uses a full-color printer after 10:30pm and NEVER during the day is bound to be up to no good.

So the Mission Control Lager Fund, A.K.A RG9030-NSEXOP-002 ("Running Grant, Cost Centre 9030, Non-Standard Expenditure, Operations, Account 2" in beancounter lingo) is looking extra-specially healthy this week.

It's much easier to extort money through a cost-centre transfer - the victim doesn't put up quite the same kind of fight when it's their department's money they're spending and not their own.

In fact, the lager fund is looking so healthy that it's time to "purchase some equipment" for this coming Friday night in case the balance attracts unwanted beancounter attention...

An invoice arrives and I take it to the boss for a signature as the PFY's out on a job.

"What's this for, then?"

"Ah, that's for the purchase of a new...Licensing Attribute Geopositional Accounting Receipt System - LAGERS, for short."

>click "A new system. I see. Oh well, best get that, then! But hang on...are you sure this is correct? Only £270?"

A hundred-plus pints is a good shout for the Bastard Operator Club at the best of times, but to allay suspicion, I feel it necessary to ease the boss's mental pain.

"TWO hundred and seventy pounds!?!!" I squeal. "My mistake - it was supposed to be FIVE hundred and seventy pounds."

I make a mental note to order myself a taxi home before I go to the pub as I'm unlikely to be able to find my mobile phone, let alone use the bloody thing by the time I've drunk my share of the "software".

I send the invoice to the beancounters and call up my fellow bastards.

They say the best laid plans of mice and men do something or the other, I'm not really sure as my attention span doesn't run that far, but I'm sure it means something relevant to someone. As far as bastards go, the best laid plans shouldn't be put through bloody beancounters.

It appears there's been a query on the invoice as some bright young beancounter has decided that the Blue Posts is not one of our approved software vendors. That in itself is a piece of the proverbial to cover up as years ago I got a lot of our legit software routed via the local boozier as a back-up plan. The real problem is that a mole inside Beancounter Central, who owes me a few favors (for losing the voice-tape evidence in a harassment complaint), has indicated that the Lager Fund is going to be audited.

The disturbing news is that they've contracted in a consultant to do the computing audit...

I ring the PFY on his mobile and bring him up to speed. He ducks out to lunch and gets a mate to ring in a non-specific threatening phone call. While he's at it, he orders us a take-out pizza to relieve the boredom at afternoon tea.

Security, bored mindless through months of inactivity, rise to the threat. Doors that were wedged open for months are closed, security passes checked, and building searches activated. Nothing appears out of the ordinary.

I watch with interest as a suited geek-type bloke is met by the head beancounter. They take no chances and use the stairs to get to Beancounter Central...

Now it's a waiting game. The data storage facility van pulls up outside the building right on time, no doubt with a box of back-up tapes recalled by our computing professional to deal with the unfortunate head-crash on the finance database machine. What a coincidence that three disks in a RAID array all failed at the same time! The odds on that must be phenomenal - not that the local bookie's stupid enough to take that bet, of course.

The data tapes, written by some untrusting person in Beancounter Central (which was lucky, as ours appear to have been lost by our data storage facility), are passed through security and rushed up the stairwell.

Our pizza delivery causes a stir in security, but it scans clean so we ask for it to be delivered to Beancounter Central where we'll pay for it.

"Something's wrong," the turncoat geek is saying to the head beancounter as we roll up. "The tape seems to be stuck in the drive!"

"Try the other drive!" the head man cries, noticing us.

"I did - it's stuck, too!"

Vexed by the apparently temporary delay, his annoyance is directed at us.

"What're you doing here?"

"Just picking up a delivery," I respond, as our pizza turns up.

"BLOODY HELL!" the PFY cries convincingly, "It's scorching hot!!"

"Oh no!" I sigh. "Don't tell me the X-ray parcel scanner is on the blink again. Last time this happened we lost a whole box of...OH NO! DON'T TELL ME YOUR TAPES WENT THROUGH THE SCANNER!"

[Later that same week...]

"UURGGLE MURG HURGRLE," I gasp.

"Sure, that's just off Sloane Square, isn't it?" the cab driver asks, passing me a bucket through the window should I require it.

"Unnnn!" I respond, lapsing into a lager-induced semi-coma.

There's nothing the BOFH likes more than a contractor still wet behind the ears. But even he thinks it's time to show pity when the boss hatches his latest mad scheme...

That's the problem with the head of IT's technical management meetings - because Brownie points are in the offing, the managers get a little over-excited. Things develop into a one-upmanship auction with people, like the boss, throwing in outrageous bids - like claiming that we already have the software to allow anyone in the company to query and order stores across the Web.

"And here's where you'll be situated," the boss burbles as he enters the office with a programming contractor, press-ganged in from an agency at short notice to write the program that the boss lied about already having. Feeling slightly magnanimous towards the poor blighter (after all, he has had a half-hour exposure to the boss's BO during his introduction to the wonders of the photocopying machine - a dose of which is usually fatal) the PFY and I don't put up the expected arguments to the boss's encroachment on our territory.

"Find him a machine to work on will you - something that he can use to finish the development of the Stores Project."

"The Stores Project?" I ask. "Could be tricky - might need a grunty machine for that one..."

"Well, order one then. Get the order to me ASAP!"

The PFY and I spend the next 10 minutes selecting a machine - preferably one that is fully equipped with every possible peripheral and enhancement.

The boss signs the order without a second thought and I fax it through to our local supplier, who rings back to indicate that they're rushing it over immediately.

As soon as it arrives, the PFY and I install some extra airware - in other words, steal all the guts out of it - and pass it on to the new guy in its newly customized state...

Meantime, he's busy partitioning his whiteboard.

"So what are the boxes for?" the PFY asks.

"Well, they represent the three phases of the software life cycle - development, implementation, and feedback," he responds happily.

He's so green he needs mowing...

"Don't tell me, fresh out of programming school?" I ask kindly.

"Well, I have had a bit of experience writing Web apps," he blushes.

"But no real life experience?"

"I..."

The PFY and I sigh in unison as I rub out and draw some arrows.

"The real program life cycle is more like this" I say. "Design, implementation, feedback, implementation, feedback, implementation, feedback, implementation, and so on until you die. If you actually ever get out of the design phase of course."

"So what is your answer?"

"Simple, there's one phase, implementation."

"But there's bound to be feedback."

"Of course there is, which is why most offices come with at least one feedback receptacle per desk that gets filed for you by the cleaning staff every night."

"I don't know. I think I'll do it properly."

"Don't say we didn't warn you."

A day later, the poor bastard still has no idea of what's wanted, so the PFY and I force him to bypass design and lend him a hand to whack together a passable database query and mailing package from the guts of the HR-Web system. He then puts in long hours implementing some fancy utilities for stock control, and so on.

After some careful schooling in the art of software presentation, we release him into the boss's care.

He returns half an hour later with a sick look on his face.

"How did it go?" the PFY asks.

"He didn't even try it. He just wanted me to change the colors of the buttons, the font style and things."

"No surprises there," I comment. "So you changed them?"

"Yeah, but then he wanted to try some different colors."

"Of course he did. And different fonts?"

"Yeah."

"What about the banner - did he want to change that as well?"

"Yeah, he wanted the company logo on the centre and not on the left of the page."

"Don't worry," the PFY responds. "He'll want it back on the left tomorrow. Then on the right the next day. Then the centre again..."

"What am I going to do?" he sniffles. "He didn't even want to see it in action."

"He just said it was fine as it was and signed off your contract?" I ask knowingly.

"Yeah, that's it. All I have to do is finish the aesthetics and my contracts over."

The demoralization of having his skill and expertise reduced to colors and fonts is obviously taking a toll on the poor bloke.

"Yep, he doesn't care what it does, so long as it looks good. Now you did say what we told you?"

"Yeah. I said it was a test version and not ready for release yet."

"Good, which means he's probably given the URL to the head of IT already."

"And he will have passed it on to all the other heads of department," the PFY adds.

"But it's not even finished," he sobs, obviously upset at the thought of producing a buggy piece of code. "I'd really like to make it work properly."

I can see this is a job for a professional...

Two days (and 5,000 rolls of toilet paper delivered to the home of the boss and the head of IT) later, our green and keen contractor is back working on the project.

I'm more than pleased to see that his feedback basket is full of loads of design suggestions in the boss's handwriting.

He may well work out to be all right after all...

There's nothing the BOFH and PFY love more than a challenge , except for violence. And the boss's devious plan calls for quite a bit of the latter...

"Hi, this is Sonya, David's PA, and he's got some stuff he wants me to sort out before he gets back."

"David?"

"Your boss."

"Is that his name? He doesn't have a PA."

"He does now. He read how good they are at clarifying..."

I switch off while the benefits of PA-dom are explained in full. I'm a little concerned as this means the boss has been reading management periodicals during his recovery from non-specific stress disorders.

Surprising how some people react to a couple of hundred volts administered to the testicles through the seat of a wheelie chair...

Sadly, the appearance of a PA on the scene has put a rather large spanner in the works of the PFY and I, who were planning to use the boss's absence to steal a foot of his office to lengthen the computer room - a simple job when you have a team of builders that owe you a favor.

Bugger!

"How can I help you, uh...?"

"Sonya," she snaps, a little miffed that her name has already slipped from my short-term memory. (Just using mental-cache wisely.)

"Of course. Now, how can I help you, uh...?"

"SONYA!" She snaps again. "David wants me to audit the purchases he's signed off, to make sure they've all been delivered."

"That would have been done when the items were delivered," I've already sussed the boss's plan. Lacking the bottle to find out if the PFY and I have been stealing the equipment we've ordered, he's put some new blood on to it - someone who doesn't know what happened to those who've gone before. Mind you, she could probably visit a couple of them when she goes to see the boss.

"He thought it best to make sure, so if you could just run off a printout of the orders..."

"Well, I'd like to, but unfortunately the database had a major disk fault, and we lost everything."

"When was this?" She asks. "Because I was only on the database 10 minutes ago and it seemed all right - though I don't have access to the purchasing stuff."

"As a matter of fact it just happened," I say as I hand the PFY the rubber panel-beating hammer we keep especially for emergency disk failures.

"What about a previous printout from back-up?" She asks.

"All old printouts go to security shredding services once they've been used, and the back-up system has a tape jammed in its drive," I say, passing the PFY a suicide cartridge (full of epoxy resin) as well.

"So there are no records?"

"The boss - David - has printed records, and stores have an inwards goods printout. I'm sure you could match those up - it's a bit of a job, but it'd all work out in the end."

A snuffle sounds on the earpiece as she puts the phone down.

"Something terrible has happened!" the PFY cries, in mock horror, as he enters the room.

"I'm sure it has," I reply, as I plan the future. First things first, I dial in to the private institution that's looking after the boss and figure a way into their server. 'Freud', the third administrator password attempt I try, works...

I make a couple of modifications to the boss's patient record, changing 'history of violence' from 'nil' to 'extreme', and, the real killer, changing his 'charge to' field from 'medical insurance' to 'NHS' - guaranteeing that he'll be strapped into an iron bed in the budget basement wing in no time at all. Sure, he'll be released back into the community, 'cured', after three ECT sessions, but what the hell!

He misses out on the expensive NHS treatment when I find that it's not a quid per volt - NHS might have gone as high as 10K were that the case...

While I'm at it, I toggle the 'allow visitors' field - he'll probably need his rest.

"What's the problem?" the PFY asks curiously. "I thought we weren't nicking any kit this quarter?"

"We're not, but a careful perusal of the books might find that a lot of kit has been paid for twice - once by our department, and once by the department it was destined for. It was when they were changing cost centers around and no one knew who was supposed to be paying for things..."

"So you kept the dosh?"

"No, no - that would just draw attention to ourselves. No, I got two lots of kit and used the second lot to update all the machines in the data pool."

"The same all-women data pool that sent you the birthday card and cake?"

"Might be..."

"With the invite to birthday drinkies?"

"Yes, that rings a bell for some reason."

"The day after which you arrived to work, late, in a cab with a couple of the aforementioned women?"

"Yes, yes, I suppose so! Was there a point to this?"

"Oh nothing," the PFY mutters, wandering off.

The next day, who should arrive at work but the boss, by his glazed expression I can tell he certainly got the NHS's money's worth of electricity, which just goes to show that the mental health situation isn't as bad as everyone says it is. As luck would have it, he's in a signing mood, too - if you hold his hand and arm for him and stop him dribbling on the ink before it's dry. So we write his PA a nice reference letter, give her two weeks' notice, and order the data pool a whole set of gas-operated chairs - what the hell, it's the PFY's birthday soon.

I just love happy endings.

So much so, I plug the boss's chair back into the 24 hour timer...

The game's the thing by which to humiliate the Boss but it serves him right for getting the Head of IT1s fancy woman to do the shopping... war and peace as usual

It is truly pathetic! Having successfully repelled the invasion of the PAs, I feel ready to claim the peaceful spoils of war.

Until, that is, the head of IT, designer-colored cellphone and laptop, brand-spanking-new company convertible car, appoints the boss's former PA to the position of "executive liaison officer".

I am sure that this has absolutely nothing to do with the long lunchtime rides she takes with him in the aforementioned convertible. It is easy to see how her previous two days' experience has her thoroughly versed in the ins and outs, so to speak, of IT.

"She's excellent!" the boss cries, defending his ex-assistant.

"Excellent?" I cry. "She couldn't count her bum cheeks and come up with the same number twice..."

"She must know something about IT to get appointed!" the boss responds, ignoring my comments.

"Of course...And how long did it take her to get her desktop machine going again?"

"The power switch is quite difficult to find!" he replies defensively, loyal as a terrier.

"Yes - the switch on the front of the machine is deceptively prominent..."

The boss realizes that this conversation is sinking faster than the Titanic and absents himself. Issue unresolved, I expect bad things to follow...

My fears are confirmed when she buys a swag of cheap network computers at bargain basement prices. This poorly researched decision has obtained the official stamp of approval, followed by a purchase order on my desk for a 'technical sign-off'. I stuff it into the shredder quicker than the average user can say "Where's my file gone?"

The boss is on the job even faster.

"These network computers are great!" he says. "Sonya's just been proselytizing us."

"Really? I can't say I approve, but hey, what's good for Amsterdam is good for

London!" I cry.

"No. I mean she's converted us."

"So you're all prostitutes? Wouldn't quit the day job if I were you!"

"I'm talking about network computers!" he snaps.

"Of course! And the prostitution?"

"There's no bloody prostitution!!"

"Of course there isn't! Walls have ears and all that," the PFY murmurs, winking.

The boss gives up and resumes his tack...

"Anyway, these NCs are great because they act just like PCs without disks!" he cries.

"They don't boot?" the PFY asks.

"No!" the boss responds, "They load everything from a server."

"Sort of like a dumb terminal we used to have 10 years ago, except with graphic and sound capabilities?"

"Uh...no, faster, and in color!!"

"You mean like those X-terminals we threw out and replaced with PCs three years ago?" I ask.

"Uh...not exactly."

"So a desktop machine dependent on a server is better than an independent desktop PC in what way again?"

"Um...because we'll never need to upgrade the equipment!"

"Never?"

"No, it'll be like a color TV set!" the boss blurts triumphantly, "Once you've got one, it'll never need upgrading - because everything comes from the station?"

"Not even when the software wants to make use of whizzy new features like Nicam stereo, Dolby surround and wide screen?"

"Uh...no..."

"What about when they bring out faster chips, better mice, tablets, scanners and software that needs them?"

"Look, we're bloody buying some, so sign off on them!" the boss shouts. Cornered by logic, he produces from nowhere a duplicate of the shredded purchase order, patience at an end.

What the hell. I scrawl out a signature. Not mine, of course, but who's to know? Except the boss, should someone check it against his...?

"In fact," the boss continues, "you should be using the same technology as the users, so I'll send a couple to the control room as well."

BASTARD!

On arrival they are dispatched to the test cases in various departments. The PFY and I get ours into gear as well and the carnage commences!

SNMP management is a damn fine tool for network computers, especially when it lets you reboot them remotely. I patch a game of Network Doom with sprites of the users' faces and get the kills piped to the SNMP reboot command...

I ring the users and tell them, to give them as much of a chance as you can get using the server copy of the game which only lets you pick up a handgun with one round of ammo. Still, a beancounter can get good at pistol shooting when two hours of spreadsheet work is at stake and you have to win a game in order to ungrey the SAVE button (another little patch).

By Friday, the results are in. Surprisingly enough, the NCs weren't a hit with the users and were replaced with PCs after only four days.

Oh, and 327 kills...

The boss gets a slapped wrist for signing them off, the head of department's little helper receives a pay rise regardless (salary really is performance-linked), and the PFY and I get back to normal.

"I was thinking about a PC version of that game," the PFY comments later. "You mean the same game, except that it causes the Pentium Hang bug on their desktop machine?"

"You mean you've thought of it?"

"Thought of it, installed it, and am waiting for players with a chaingun!"

Sigh. Once more into the fray...

The millennium bomb has nothing on BOFH's boss who, on the strength of just one pint, manages to blow BOFH's cover sky high...

So I'm sitting at a presentation by some American bloke who's an expert on Year 2000 problems.

Now, far be it from me to come over all sanctimonious about someone seeing a chance of good old-fashioned graft and seizing it with both hands, but at least he could make the bloody talk entertaining. It's as interesting as watching nail polish dry - which is, in fact, what I'm doing - on the hands of an attractive young systems professional beside me.

Up until morning tea-time, when her common sense takes over and she does a runner. That's the trouble these days, no one has any commitment. Except the boss, of course, who catches me trying to sneak out to the pub we'd agreed to meet up in.

"Hurry up!" he cries "or you'll miss the bit on..." (scrabble scrabble) "...the necessity to re-engineer Cobol-based Database Query Forms."

Now as far as I'm concerned, there are only two ways we'll be re-engineering any of the crap written in COBOL, and they are:

A) With the "rm-rf" command, except that the operating system of the era (before RSI [or the fear of dying of old age before you'd got to the end of a command] was a worry) this translates to: "DELETE/ERASE/NO CONFIRM [...]*.*,*" or, my personal preference:

B) With an axe.

Anyway, seeing as how I've been busted, I figure I'm going to have to no-show at the boozier until the Boss drifts off to sleep.

Quarter of an hour later and I'm in the pub, chatting over the freshly polished nails of a systems safety engineer.

"So what does a systems safety engineer do?" I ask, engaging her immediately in geek-talk.

"Well, it involves all aspects of software and hardware safety. I deal with privacy and security as well as software design and testing with the aim being to ensure that no person of institution comes to harm - physically/mentally/ financially - from the operation of a computer or its software. It's a very interesting role, as you have to be constantly aware of."

My mind clicks off as I attempt to hide my distress from her - and not just because she feels users are worth saving. The worst has just occurred to me. SHE IS THE ANTI-BASTARD!

Immediately I start edging away from her to a point where I know we're not in any danger of accidentally touching. I remember my theoretical physics well enough to know what happens when matter and anti-matter collide...

"So what do you do?" she asks.

"Well, I'm a systems and networks administrator."

"And what brought you to the Y2K presentation?" she asks, expecting a response laden with altruism and concern for users.

"Well, I'm just here to ensure that our users aren't affected by any potential problems that might occur before, during and after the turn of the century..." I respond, simultaneously hating myself for being such a brown-noser, while mentally congratulating myself on a first class piece of spadework.

I just can't help myself.

"Really?" she gushes, happy to find a kindred spirit among the masses of computing professionals she's undoubtedly met in the past. "Oh yes," I cry, "You have NO IDEA the lengths my assistant and I have to go to just to ensure that users get what they need." She's thinking systems handholding, and I'm thinking of a swift kick in the unmentionables, but as I said, it's unmentionable, so I let her keep thinking along those lines. What the hell, those physics geeks might be wrong... We chat for a bit, and then wouldn't you know it, like a bad smell on a northerly breeze, in blows the boss.

This can only mean one thing...

"There's no free lunch!" he cries, disheartened. "Yeah, I thought I'd pop down here for one," I answer, placating him with the offer of a lager, thus reinforcing the "bloody good bloke" theme while simultaneously bearing in mind the boss's rating as a "one lager to lift-off man".

I enhance the effect with a vodka top, which means he should be under the table inside 15 minutes. I get back from the bar and the boss is overflowing with bonhomie at my purchase of a beer.

About halfway through his pint I realize my fatal mistake.

"Let's get wassisname down here!" he cries, to no one in particular, rummaging around in his coat for his mobile phone. He dials up the PFY and extracts a promise of his attendance. BUGGER.

Having spoilt my chances of a quiet 57 G&Ts alone with my guest, he continues on his trail of destruction. "Great bastard this," he cries, bursting with affection for me. "Remember the time that user asked for a hot spare disk, so you heated one up in the furnace and dropped it in his lap?" I'm busy making lager-tipping motions in the background when the boss lurches once more down memory lane. "Or that time you told that accountant that his chair was picking up static so he'd have to earth it - AND GOT HIM TO PLUG HIS CHAIR INTO THE LIVE TERMINAL! HA HA HA!"

So it's just me and the boss by the time the PFY gets there. Mind you, the boss is only semi-conscious by now, so it only takes about 10 seconds to fill the PFY in. I buy the boss a parting drink then pour him, glass and all, into a taxi home.

"I have to say, you took that bloody well," the PFY says.

"Forgive and forget," I cry magnanimously. "Besides, just about now he's going to figure out that his drink isn't lager."

"Number ones?" the PFY asks

"Don't be disgusting!" I cry, offended. "It's a warm fish milkshake - just the thing for a queasy stomach..."

A newcomer named Sharon, a safety retrofit and a GPS transmitter leaves the BOFH on course for sipping tequila in the sun...

"Yes, we've already met," the newcomer announces, as she enters Mission Control with the boss. "At the Y2K thing last week. Don't you remember? I met you at lunch."

"My memory of events is...a little hazy," the boss burbles.

"Yes," I interrupt, "unfortunately it appears that he was set upon by an angry taxi driver after dropping two pints, a plate of chips and a fish milkshake on to the front seat of a cab after the event. By way of his stomach."

"Be that as it may," the boss cries, seizing back the mantle of the conversation. "Sharon here rang and offered to check out our systems for potential risks - you know, company liability, software and hardware oversights that may lead to injury or other accidents, overall security, and so on."

How bloody thoughtful of her.

"Anyway," the boss continues, "I'm sure you'll give her any help she requires. OK, time we were moving on to the next stop, which is the head of our department."

The boss and our new computing safety consultant wander off in the direction of the head's orifice while the PFY scurries over.

"What does it mean?" he asks, well aware of the part the boss played in alienating me from Sharon's good books at our last meeting. Thanks to him, getting back into Sharon's good books would require spadework of back-hoe proportions.

"I'm not sure," I respond, "but I think it means trouble."

The next day my words are proved true when Sharon's analysis of the site accident logs points one or two bloodstained fingers in the direction of Systems and Networks.

"These things are supposed to be fitted with earth leakage detectors," she cries, investigating the power points of the serviceman's workbench which have sent more than one unfortunate engineer off to the sick bay for some burns cream. (While the PFY and I rifle through his toolkit, of course.)

"Ah, no, we use a different leakage detector for this," I say, pointing at a faceplate on the bench. "Feces and urine - cuts the power the moment someone loses control of their bodily functions."

"That's ridiculous," Sharon cries "And anyway, you can't test it."

"I test it every month," the PFY cries indignantly.

"He certainly does," I concur. "He downs a jar of pickled onions then tests the desk when his digestion says so."

Having no comeback for this one, Sharon moves on to investigate how the freight elevator came to be on the 6th floor when a trolley full of user equipment was pushed through the doors on the 5th floor by the PFY.

I could say it was standard procedure to stop the boss offering our services as porters, but instead murmur something unconvincing about PLU controllers being affected by spikes.

By the end of the day Sharon has reached the conclusion I desire - our kit needs a safety retrofit. That, combined with the glossy mags on 'Systems Safety' that the Boss discovered in his briefcase (outlining the benefits of the equipment produced by a corporation in the US), is more than enough to hint at junket time.

"I don't think that is at all necessary," Sharon responds, upon hearing the boss's plan. "Everything we need can be sourced locally."

"We should investigate all options," the boss cries, not inclined to miss out on a junket to the States.

According to plan the boss attempts to add credibility to his junket by suggesting that we all go "to cover all technical bases".

And the boss does know best.

The plane lifts off and the PFY and I get into the drinks ASAP while Sharon wanders up to business class to curry some more of the boss's favor.

"I don't get it," says the PFY.

"SOP for a boss," I respond. "If you want something, get it for someone else 'for technical reasons' then it looks that much more legitimate if you get yourself one. Cell phones, laptops, you name it!"

"What are we going to do when we get there?"

"I plan to drink tequila at a beachside bar."

"I don't think there are beaches in Ohio."

"Ohio?" I cry, "We're not going to Ohio. Not after the hijack anyway."

"You're going to hijack the plane?" the PFY hisses. "You're not serious?"

"Deadly."

"But..."

"Oh don't worry, there's no gunplay. Just track one of this CD," I murmur calmly, holding up my portable CD player.

"It's a CD player!"

"Ostensibly yes, but also... a mini GPS transmitter."

"You're screwing with the plane's guidance system?"

"I prefer the term 'having a meaningful encounter'. This little baby will shortly start pumping out some low-wattage GPS information - information the plane will use to get its flight path. And, over the course of the journey, the information will deviate slightly - because if I do it all at once the pilot might notice."

"You'll never get away with it," the PFY whispers discouragingly.

"Of course I will. Have I ever steered you wrong?"

"Uh, last week when you told me the power was off when I was replacing the fuse in that rack. The week before when you told me that all the ducting has door handles on the inside, so it would be all right to shut the door."

"I let you bloody out, didn't I?"

"After you'd drunk all the lager I'd found in the boss's locker."

And so it is that I'm sitting in a South American bar, drinking tequilas while the boss tries to get us a return flight to civilization. Thanks to the super-spadework I put in when we almost ran out of fuel because of the extra miles, Sharon is my new best mate.

To escape the boredom of routine, the BOFH volunteers to man the Helldesk. But does he still have his special touch with the users?

It's a quiet afternoon when the boss slips in unobtrusively and shuffles over to my desk.

"Just want you to know that I sorted out that little Helpdesk roster mix-up," he mentions quietly.

"What little Helpdesk mix-up?" I ask.

"Oh, some practical joker had written your name in the roster to cover the Helpdesk during their team building week."

"Yes, that was me. Tomorrow from midday till five wasn't it? I'm quite looking forward to it."

"Ah!" the boss cries, no doubt ducking off to press the speed-dial button for the company's insurance broker.

The Pimply-Faced Youth is obviously confused about this - there's nothing in the Helldesk area left to steal because we did all that the last time security had its CCTV system repaired. The truth of the matter is that I'm bored. Bored, bored, bored.

Heeding the advice that a change is as good as a rest, I've signed up for a tour of duty at Idiot Central. Besides, I want to know if I still have what it takes to deal with users on a routine basis.

The next day dawns and after lunch I head directly to the Helldesk to do my best to, I mean for, the users. To be honest, it's not half as bad as I'd expected - things are pretty quiet.

In the end I put the phones back on the hook, and three lines light up immediately. I pick one at random and answer it.

"Hi, look, my machine's smoking a little, and there's a burning smell. It was really noisy this morning when I turned it on, so should I turn it off?"

"No. No need to worry - we had a little bit of equipment fail in the comms room this morning, so it's probably just the smoke and the smell coming down the lines."

"Is there anything I should do?"

"Not really, I'd just shut your office door and go to afternoon tea early until the smoke clears - it'll probably take an hour or so."

"Hey, hang on, why isn't it affecting the other machines?"

"Because you're on the hot back-up server for your department, the one that got too hot, as it happened."

"Oh, of course I am!" he gushes, gasping thanks and ducking off for an early break.

Now that I'm on limited time (till the fire alarm and sprinklers cut in) I take the last two calls as quick as I can).

"Hi," a secretary from PR chirps, "every time I try to send e-mail my program comes back and says something about a DNS thingy."

"Was it something like 'DNS look-up error'?"

"Yeah...I think so..." she mumbles.

"Oh dear." I sigh. "I'm really sorry."

"What is it?"

"You mean you don't know?"

"No, what?"

"Well DNS stands for Database of Names and Salaries."

"I don't understand."

"Well, if it can't look you up to send your e-mail, it must mean you've...been fired. Or you're about to be."

"But I've only been here a couple of months!"

"Yes, and I bet you turned down your boss when he asked you out to lunch too, didn't you?" I ask, playing a hunch based solely on the fact that the guy concerned wears babe-magnet labeled clothes and drives a convertible. And he's a loud-mouthed flashy git at staff functions. Not that I'm jealous...

"But I couldn't make it because I had to arrange my bank payments!" she snuffles, falling for it hook, line and sinker.

"Well," I respond kindly, "for what it's worth it was good working with you...unless of course..."

"Unless what?" "Well, you could go and see the complaints officer in personnel and say that he threatened your job unless you...you know."

"Unless I what?"

"Checked out his firmware, so to speak."

"What!"

"Well it's up to you. If you wait till you're fired they'll just think you're making excuses. But if you pre-empt it, and mention nothing about the DNS stuff they'll think your accusations are true."

"Do you think it would work?"

"I would think so. It's happened before. You were just one of the lucky ones..."

"I suppose you're right. OK, I'll do it. Thank you very much for your advice."

"Don't mention it." I respond, moving on to caller three while gesturing to the PFY so he can record the head of PR's "resignation" later in the afternoon.

"Hi, my Linux box won't seem to mount a CD in it. It says that it must be mounted read-only. What's the parameter to tell it to mount read-only?"

"Ah Linux relies on hardware write locking. You have to write lock the disk itself."

"Huh? I've never heard of that before!"

"Most operating systems do it in software. It's because Linux has cache-based hardware architecture open compliance," I say, calling up as many buzzwords as possible to foil the UNIX geek.

Dummy mode on.

"So what do I do?"

"Just make a 3mm hole - no larger - in the CD, right in the middle of the label, that's where it expects write protect. And make sure it's 3mm and exactly in the middle, or you might hit the Read Protect hole too."

"Oh...OK..."

He rings off without asking why the hell anyone would have read-protected disks, obviating the need for me to explain WORN technology to him (Write Once, Read Never - just like the floppies).

As the fire alarm goes, I total up the day: off work early because of fire, one less git at social functions, and one foiled geek.

Yep, I've still got what it takes!

Will the BOFH use Roboboss again in this year's gladiatorial clash with the R&D boys? Or will the Mutant Floor Polisher win the demo-derby?

So it's all on! Networks and Systems versus R&D. No, not some trivial contest like 'guess who can get the most laxative into the other team's water cooler without being noticed' - although that's fun too, especially when you have a contact put it in at the factory. This is a game of champions - Robowars!

The Pimply-faced Youth and I are competing against Research and Development in an annual contest of skill and technology. The rules are simple: both teams enter one or more robots into the competition - robots which must find their way out of a fairly simple maze constructed of passages and rooms in the sub-basement of the building.

The PFY is particularly excited as this is his first time in the competition.

"So this is a yearly event?" he asks, helping me put together our mechanical entrant.

"Since last year, yes."

"I don't remember it."

"No, I think you were in Mr. Happy mode at the time."

"What?"

"On a jolly."

"Oh. How did we do?"

"Well, as far as I was concerned, we'd won fair and square - none of R&D's seven robots were left, however, there was a bit of a protest lodged about my robot."

"Why?"

"Aaaaahhhh, because it was basically the boss with a car aerial strapped to his back, blundering around in the basement trying to find his new laptop."

"And he won?"

"Yeah, there wasn't a laptop and when his enthusiasm waned I switched the lights off and the fire alarm on, and he picked up speed dramatically."

"And what was their protest?"

"Well, there were two actually - the first being that the boss running blindly around caused the destruction of most of the competition (which, incidentally, helped us win the demo-derby event by default) - and the second being that the boss wasn't a robot."

"So what happened?"

"Well, I showed them that, to all intents and purposes, he was a robot - he had a limited and very simple instruction set; you have to punch information into him and without it he can't think for himself..."

"I see. So why don't we enter him this year?"

"Ah. Well, the restrictions are somewhat tighter now. The robot has to be based on the processor board that R&D designed for those automatic floor polishers."

"The ones that are supposed to drift randomly around the building at night?"

"The very same."

"So what's all this crap for?" he asks, pointing at enough hardware to start my own hardware company.

"Well, part of the event is the demolition derby where the surviving robot takes line honors. My thinking is that the bigger the robot, the more chance it has of still being mobile at the end."

"So you're using a machine rack laid on wheels?"

"Yes: a) It won't attract much undue attention in the basement before the competition, and b) the rules say it has to be battery-powered, and I need quite a lot of power to keep the circular saw blades spinning, and c) It's a four foot-long steel chassis. It's going to make it through the demo-derby - especially considering the largest of the opposition robots comes to just over axle height on it."

"Where are you going to get all the batteries to run it?"

"Oh, I whipped those out of the UPS last night."

"Didn't anyone notice?"

"No, I chucked it into bypass mode - not even a glitch. Anyway, all that remains now is for me to install the polisher board with its bastardised maze-solving program, add the batteries and chuck in a little ballast..."

"Magic!"

Three nights later, the R&D boys are down in the basement setting up their robots while the PFY and I sit around on ours. Smart money seems to be centered on a small robot nicknamed "Reggie" because of its rapid cornering ability.

"Actually, I think they've got a point," the PFY mumbles, seeing a warm-up demonstration. "It's much quicker to corner than this thing will be."

"Au contraire!" I respond. "You're forgetting two things I didn't tell you about; one: with the 20 UPS batteries and the four-wheel, rare-earth-element-magnet motors on this baby..."

"Five..." the starter counts down.

"...it's got phenomenal acceleration itself..."

"Four..."

"But it's still going to be a pain to corner!"

"Three..."

"That was point two: with all the weight inside that solid steel chassis..."

"Two..."

"Yes?"

"One..."

"It would be a waste of time cornering in the first place..."

"Go!"

Ten minutes later the PFY and I are at the pub. Admittedly, the plan of driving straight through walls wasn't one of the more orthodox ways of solving mazes, but it proved successful nonetheless.

"Who'd have thought the robot would run amok in demo-derby mode and circular saw through the mains cable?" I ask the PFY.

"Who indeed?" the PFY asks, fingering the prize money that the R&D blokes were too busy to collect in their panic... "It could have chased R&D around the building..."

"Got to save some surprises for next year..."

BOFH 1998 Series Beta

Part II you say? The Bastard Operator from Hell 1998

While the PFY's holding a torch for Carole, someone is putting a torch to the Welsh office. But nothing compares with the Master Plan...

Its early morning when the Boss rips into the office in a foul mood.

"All right, which of you bastards told the consultant in the Welsh office that you can't recover a hot database back-up from a cold tape?"

"I beg your pardon?" I ask in all innocence, knowing full well that my conscience is clear. (In other words, it was the Pimply-faced Youth.)

"Which of you told the Welsh IT consultant he'd have to heat the 8mm tapes up in a toaster before he could recover their billing database from it?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about!" I cry, furthering my claim of innocence without implicating the PFY in any way.

"Don't give me that crap! You almost set the office on fire last night after you told him to put a ream of printer paper on top and tape the toaster lever down!"

"I did no such thing!" I shout, mentally toasting the PFY's ingenuity.

Ten minutes later and the PFY and I are left to our own devices.

"Well done," I tell the PFY, once I'm sure we're not being observed.

"What do you mean? I was just about to congratulate YOU!" the PFY burbles.

"So you're saying it wasn't you?"

"No!" the PFY blurts.

"Then who the hell was it?" I wonder out loud.

"There's no way to tell?"

"Don't be silly. Grab the voice recorder tapes from yesterday while I crank up the phone logs."

"What phone logs? I thought we only recorded the trading lines."

"As far as anyone else is concerned, we don't keep phone logs - it's not possible."

"And as far as we're concerned?"

"Every call, duration, and destination plus its position in the voice recorder tapes. And as for the tapes - liberal use of the muting functions makes it appear that we're only recording the traders."

"And in actual fact?"

"All but one line is potentially recorded..."

"All but one?"

"The one in the comms cupboard labeled "Faxmodem" that we use for our international personal calls."

A mere quarter hour later we've tracked the offending incoming call from Wales. A quick earful of the conversation identifies the offender as the latest recruit to the helpdesk - one who, apparently, had all the hallmarks of a servile practitioner of computing aid at her interview.

I place a call through to the helpdesk operator concerned, introduce myself and play back the recording to her.

A non-committal silence greets my revelations while the PFY scans the access-card database to put a face to the name.

"Ah, I'll take this one if you like," he blurts, tilting the screen away from me so I can't see the results of his look-up.

This would have worked had I not installed PC-Anywhere with a permanent window to his screen. A glance is more than enough to determine the source of the PFY's new-found liaison-based altruism.

"I s'pose I can go and fix Carole's screen while you're doing it," I respond.

"There's nothing wrong with Carole's screen!" the PFY cries, well aware that my exposure to Carole, his long-term love interest, at this juncture, could prove extremely painful to him. Especially if I were to drop the phrase "debriefing the new helpdesk stunner" in response to her enquiries on his whereabouts...

"No, but better safe than sorry. Off you go, I'll handle it."

"You bastard," he mutters in defeat.

"In the flesh, in your home directory, and rifling through your e-mail!" I cry, starting my victory walk to the helpdesk area.

A quick interview with the woman concerned reveals a kindred spirit - a config geek, who only took the helpdesk role because it paid the bills...

"So you're not too pleased with the users?"

"Just the Welsh ones. They've got no tech support and all their equipment still has luggage labels from the ark."

"Yeah, it's the filter-down approach. All our old stuff goes to the Scotland office, all their old stuff goes to Wales."

"It's a pain in the arse and having a consultant who can't tell one end of a power cable from the other is too."

"But there is a way forward." I respond, outlining a plan that's forming in my head...

Two days later the PFY is browsing the boss's outgoing e-mail when...

"Bloody hell!" he blurts. "That helpdesk woman's been transferred to tech support Wales! They must have found out about the phone calls. That's cruel."

"No," I respond. "She wanted to go. She's worked out that once she gets the place shipshape and puts some new kit in, she can telecommute from London..."

Our conversation is interrupted by the entry of the boss.

"Just thought I'd come in and apologize. It seems I was a bit hasty the other day in accusing you of sabotaging the Welsh office."

"Oh yes?" I respond.

"Yes, it appears that the technical consultant in Wales was a pyromaniac - security caught him last night spraying lighter fluid in the back of their apps server. His excuse was that someone from the helpdesk had called and said the CPU heatsink was getting too cold."

"Terrible."

"I know. Anyway, just thought I'd fill you in," he sighs, leaving the room...

"Onward VBGN!" I cry.

"VBGN?!"

"Virtual Bastard Global Network. My Master Plan!"

"Uh-Ohhh..."

The BOFH and PFY attend a 'bored' meeting, everyone gets bladdered and the boss gets to 'chair' an assembly of overheated shareholders...

So the PFY and I have been roped into going to a shareholders' meeting as technical standby in case someone asks the boss a difficult question that he can't manage (like, "where's the space bar?").

There's a stuffy half-time wine and nibbles event to ensure a cheery mood and that the shareholders' views match those of current management.

"Mmm, an '89 Cab. Sav. if I'm not much mistaken," a distinguished gent to my left burbles to a fellow member of the Old School Tie classes.

"I think you'll find it's actually a '90 Cab. Sav.," his counterpart chuckles knowingly.

"Really?" the Pimpily-faced Youth blurts. "I thought it was an '88 Ford Grenada - the Ghia version with the leather seats and the wood paneling!"

You have to forgive him - he always gets a little boisterous after being locked in a meeting for over an hour. I'm a little fidgety myself...

I drag him away from civilized company while simultaneously tampering with the air-conditioning (courtesy of an RF transmitter hanging out of the back of my personnel disorganizer). Within 10 minutes the place is heating up and dehumidifying nicely and all attempts at resetting the air-conditioning meet with failure. (Which is the price you pay for leaving the unit's remote PIN number at the factory default.) After some whispered conversation with the catering staff, the CEO Okays anything that'll stop the parched shareholders getting nasty.

And wouldn't you know it - there's 12 cases of lager packed in the boardroom's catering chiller, awaiting the company yacht club's victory celebration...

Twelve cases of ice-cold beer later, the meeting is coming along nicely. Feeling magnanimous, the shareholders have demanded that management approve an across-the-board pay rise for all salary, wage and contract workers - effective immediately. Striking while the iron is hot, I get them to get management sign-off on 100 "urgent desktop upgrades" of machines with "all the fruit". The boss, who would normally head this off at the pass - also known for his lack of tolerance to even mild amounts of alcohol, is circulating hot-off-the-press photocopies of his backside - still thankfully encased in boxer shorts.

Security moves in gently about halfway through the "long jump" event (an occupied wheelie chair pushed full tilt up a ramp made by breaking the legs off one end of the boardroom table).

Apparently a participant 'abandoned chair' before lift-off resulting in two broken windows - one in the boardroom, and one in a black cab parked below.

The next day rumors are rife - the word has got around the building about who's to thank for a projected pay increase.

Feeling like the modern equivalents of Robin Hood, the PFY and I accept thanks humbly. Lao Tzu would be proud of us.

Our fame is to be short-lived, however, as there's an emergency shareholder meeting to put right the excesses of the previous night.

It's bad. The annulments are coming in fast, and we arrive just in time to hear our upgrade plan sink beneath the waters of a corporate cover-up.

"Ah," I interject, as the motion is put, "would this be a bad time to mention that I've already ordered the approved equipment last night?"

"Well un-order it then!" a voice advises.

"Then we'd have to pay a restocking penalty of 10 per cent..."

Ten per cent being a better loss than 100 per cent, the motion is passed and the PFY and I take off to cancel the order.

"But you didn't put in an order!" the PFY blurts, knowing that the only real work I did last night was negotiate the revolving door to get to a cab.

"No, no, but when I order 10 machines, to be charged to us as 'Restocking Fee', delivered to the Welsh office..."

"Oh!" The PFY cries. "The Virtual Bastard Global Network is one step nearer!"

"What Virtual Bastard Global Network?" the boss asks, stepping into the office.

"Virtual Bastard Global Network?" I ask innocently.

"Yes...what you were talking about just then."

"Oh, you mean the Virtual Bartercard Global Network?" I ask, clutching at the first straw "For...electronic transactions?"

"No, I think I got it right the first time. You engineered all this for new machines for some Global Network of your own design. I think the shareholders might like to hear this."

I'm shocked. The boss, who normally couldn't put two and two together and get a number less than 22, has hit the nail on the head. He knows too much.

While I'm twiddling with my personnel disorganizer, the boss tells the PFY to extract himself from the security console and join him and me in the boardroom.

Pleading claustrophobia in lifts, I take the stairs.

Ten minutes and three floors later, the boss wheezes to a halt outside the boardroom, having lost his asthma inhaler down the stairwell when the PFY accidentally bumped into him. We open the door and enter.

"Thank God you got the door open!" someone gasps as the wave of heat hits us. "The doors locked from the inside and the aircon's on the blink again. Don't close it!"

Twelve replacement cases of beer later, we're still locked in, surveying the hole in the window that the boss left when winning the "long jump" event. True, it might have looked as if he didn't want to be strapped into the chair, but I can assure you that he was excited enough to be whispering "Wheeeee" the whole time...

And he got a cab ride home out of it too...

When the building is repainted in the lurid color scheme of 'Teletubby Land', there is only one way to restore it to its former grey glory...

I'm coming into the office in time for morning tea when I glimpse a sight on the ground floor that I have to share with the PFY.

I am rapid-dialing my mobile phone before I'm halfway across the foyer.

"Hello, Nigerian Embassy," the PFY answers, using this week's wrong-number diversion scheme.

"You'll never guess what they're doing on the ground floor!" I chuckle.

"Painting the walls radiation orange?" he asks.

"Oh. Of course, you've got CCTV, what was I thinking?"

"Yes, and not just that!"

"What?"

"Well, do you want the good news or the bad news?" the PFY asks, in a playful manner.

"The good news..." I respond, taking the lift for a change.

"The good news is that there's only one bit of bad news."

"I see, and the bad news is?"

"The painters started on the fourth floor last night."

"How bad is it?" I ask as the lift doors open, answering my question.

I am now staring at an office that looks like the inside of a heat lamp.

The boss strolls over, smiling benevolently - or is that malevolently?

"Awful, isn't it?" he asks pastily.

Ah! What I'd mistaken for a smile of benevolence was in fact a wince of distress. Easy mistake to make with the boss only recently back from sick leave.

"Who did it?" I ask.

"The building owners," the boss responds. "Apparently in response to the request of senior management. But that's not the worst. Stores just rang to say our purple carpets arrived."

I choke down my gag reflex and manage to utter, "Why?"

"Because this study," the PFY cries, holding up a management rag, "says that certain colors are more conducive to an energetic workplace."

"I thought that was pale blues and pinks?"

"No," the PFY responds, recalling from memory sections of the article. "Pale blues and pinks are conducive to a calm atmosphere - which, incidentally, are the colors of our office."

"You're bloody joking!"

"No. Oh, and I lied about there only being one bit of bad news."

I rip down to my office to investigate.

"Yes, yes, I see what you mean," I say, relaxing into my chair. "It is a little calmer than the harsh metallic white of before. It's almost soothing in a way."

"It's not good to stay in here," the PFY comments. "It's dangerous - remember the negative ion generators...?"

How could I forget a former management plan to pump negative ions into our building in an attempt to make the PFY and I consider customer relations more.

"The computer room!" I cry.

The PFY, the boss and I head to the clinical safety of the computer room's harsh grayish walls.

"Much better!"

Through the viewing window in the fire escape door I see the IT workers going through their routines, unaware of the harmful effects of the wall color.

"Poor bastards!" the PFY cries.

"It's too late for them! We've got to think of ourselves!" the boss blurts, echoing my exact thoughts.

(Which is a worry. Come to think of it, the boss's room has always been a bluish pinky color...)

"What to do..." I murmur, looking to see the boss's level of commitment, "what to do..."

This goes on for another couple of minutes until the grey affects the boss's mind and an idea pops out.

"A fire!" he cries, as I make a mental note to give future bosses an hour a week of computer room therapy..."No! It'd never work - the extinguishers would cut in immediately."

"True!" I respond, "And all that water on the semi-cured paint..."

"It'd never wash it all off!" the PFY blurts.

"It doesn't have to wash it off! It just has to make it patchy!"

"...requiring a repaint!" the PFY finishes.

While the PFY and the boss complete their Laurel and Hardy act, I set to work removing a panel from high on the wall.

"What are you doing?" the boss asks in confusion.

"A small fire, while bloody dangerous, is not the answer, nor..." I add, silencing the PFY's next sentence, "is a big fire. We need a small fire, in the right place."

"And where's that?"

"In..." I cry, ripping off the plate to reveal a blocked-off galvanized iron duct, "the air-conditioning system."

"It'll blow the smoke all over the building!" The PFY cries enlightened once more.

"Friends, countrymen," I cry, "lend me your jackets and shoes!"

"Will we get them back?" The boss asks, stupidly.

I pry open the ducting, stuff in the jackets, shoes, some tape listings, some tapes, a gallon of tape head cleaner and, what the hell, the boss's wallet (old habits die hard).

"Halon!" I cry.

The PFY dashes over and switches the fire alarm on.

"What the hell are you doing?!" the boss cries in terror.

Nothing happens.

"There's a wiring 'fault'," the PFY says. "The fire alarm switch holds off the Halon, while the Halon-hold-off switch turns it on."

"One of yours?" the boss asks.

"You're too kind," I smirk, chucking the lit matches into the ducting and closing the panel.

Quicker than you can say "Is that the fire alarm?" the fire sensor board is lighting up like a Christmas tree and the sound of alarms echo from all corners.

"To the new color scheme!" I cry, lifting one of the raised-floor tiles and pulling out three lagers chilled to a crisp 17 degrees...

"Cheers!" the boss and PFY cry in unison.

And they say that orange inspires teamwork...

Does the BOFH know anything about the disappearance of the telecoms manager, his lawnmower and the wife he's 'grass-widowed'?

It's been a quiet morning for me.

A cynic might suggest this is because I patched the helpdesk calls through to the marketing manager who cut up rough last week when we were slow to upgrade his PC. He just didn't seem to understand that Doom does normally take precedence over RAM upgrades, although 71 callers all claiming that the network was running slow might have forced some wisdom into his brain.

Even though we've put them back on-line, the users are still restless and somewhat puzzled at the 'teething troubles' with the new coffee machines. You see, as part of the rather sudden refit the offices have undergone (if somewhat abortive, in color terms), the powers that be decided to replace the tired old coffee machines with snazzy new ones.

This choice came as a pleasant surprise down here in Networks & Systems. When the previous drinks machines were installed, the PFY and I tried the usual procedure of reprogramming the 'tea' button to deliver vegetable soup, and the 'vegetable soup' button to deliver boiled Hoover-bag contents. Sadly, this approach made the end product rather more attractive than the real thing, so we admitted defeat and put everything back to its default settings.

Now we have these new machines, however, the users can actually tell that what they're getting isn't what they were asking for, thus making the whole reprogramming concept worthwhile. And the hedgehog broth is receiving some favorable reviews, not to mention a degree of mirth from those who are convinced the labels are only a bit of fun, and it's really just beef soup.

The phone rings and I answer it. This is partly because we're bored and partly because the PFY has clocked the CLI and decided that the caller is good-looking enough to warrant attention - I only wait until the 18th ring.

"I need e-mail installed on my notebook," the monitor speaker of the call recorder proclaims, rather too confidently if you ask me.

The PFY checks the asset register and confirms that the user is as chained to the desk as they come, and hence has only the regulation issue 8MB 386 desktop running NT Workstation. "What notebook might that be?"

"The one I'm using to write my dissertation."

"Dissertation?"

"Yes, I'm doing a psychology course on day-release."

"So it's not exactly a company machine, then?"

"Well, no, it's my boyfriend's, but the dissertation is relevant to my job, and the company's paying my college fees."

"Sorry, but if it's not a company machine, we can't connect it to the network."

"That's okay; I connected it to the network already. It just needs the e-mail package installed."

"Oh, how kind of you to save us the trouble."

The PFY realizes why I have been pointing for some time to a previously unidentified blob on the management console, which I have identified via SNMP as a top-end, not-released-till-December pre-Alpha beast of a notebook. Rumor has it there are only a dozen in the country so she must have been doing some serious extra-curricular work to blag it. Tentatively, I start to explore the machine over the LAN.

"Hey," the PFY exclaims in mock excitement into the mouthpiece, "you're the one I've heard about - there are only 11 of those in the country, aren't there?"

"Well, yes, 12 in fact."

A muffled bang from the speaker indicates that it is indeed the model that is reputed to suffer from a rather explosive Desktop Management Interface (DMI) - otherwise known as the Detonate Machine Interrupt-problem.

"Nope. Definitely 11," chuckles the PFY as he replaces the receiver basking in the warm glow of a job well done.

At this point, the boss casually strolls in (we've obviously been too friendly, as he's lost that cautious look, the nervous tic and the tendency to look under his car before opening the doors - though he still wears rubber gloves when handling doorknobs). He's looking for the telecoms manager, who has apparently gone AWOL.

"It's very sad that he's gone missing, I'm sure," I assure the boss, "but what with all this voice-data convergence and stuff, does it really matter?"

"That's not the point!" fumes the boss, in his this-is-really-important-honest voice. "He hasn't been seen for some time and his wife is complaining the grass is getting long!"

I flick open the Yellow Pages at 'Psychiatric Clinics' and hand it to the boss.

He looks quizzically at me.

"It's amazing isn't it?" I start thinking aloud. "There are some strange people who think that PBXs will always be so difficult as to warrant an in-house expert all of their own. Who think that phones on desks are a right, not a privilege. Who think network operators are the scum of the earth because they have scheduled downtimes. Who don't realize that you can deliver 30,000 volts to the voice-comms frame without even dropping a cell on the fiber LAN running past it."

By now, the boss knows not to waste his breath on expressions like "I knew you were up to something last week!" or "Is he all right?" concentrating intently instead for several seconds on the volume in his hand. He snaps it shut, drops it back in the drawer, and smiles decisively.

"So he won't be needing his lawnmower back for a bit, then?"

The BOFH steps in to help with a staff identity crisis, and the PFY drives a wedge between systems maintenance and the boss

So I'm in early to do some systems maintenance.

Well, when I say early, I mean 9:15am - just when everyone's established their connections to the database and applications server.

My console beeps to indicate that the required 200 interactive sessions have been reached and I start my program to ensure the reinstatement of overtime rates...

I echo "Axeme" to /dev/kmem and the system goes down faster than a Clinton intern.

As expected, the boss hurtles out of his office like a beige tornado, only to be repelled with a resounding 'thud' by the wedge I'd kicked under the door earlier, in response to the new "Fire and Safety" policy of electronically unlocking certain swipe-card controlled doors during working hours "for ease of access". Unfortunately this means that every half-wit from PR thinks it's an open invitation to come up and talk about someone "hacking their username".

Talk of the devil; a PR geek slips in.

"Told you we should have got a bigger wedge," the PFY murmurs.

"Hi," the PR bod cries. "I think my username has been hacked!"

"No it hasn't," I respond without looking up.

"It has! It's been happening all through our department for a couple of weeks now!"

"Ever since you got that ID camera that takes digitized photos which you're printing on self-adhesive photo labels?"

"I suppose so, but I don't see what that's got to do with it?!"

"So you're saying you don't have a photo of your wife, pet, car or sly love interest stuck on your keyboard in that wasted space where the "Caps Lock" light was?"

"Uh..." he mutters, failing to think quickly.

"Take my advice - cut out the eyeholes on the picture and hit the Caps Lock key every time your wife or pet looks possessed..."

Our visitor backs out of the office in an embarrassed silence as the PFY looks up.

"Self adhesive photos?"

"Yeah," I respond "for this year's renewal of photo-id cards."

"I thought security did those?"

"They did, but the head of PR is the CEO's new blue-eyed boy, and you know what goes with blue eyes..."

"Brown nose?"

"Correct. So the head of PR is snaffling a lot of jobs that fall into the grey area of demarcation."

"Why?"

"More jobs, more workers. More responsibility..."

"More dosh!"

"Correct again. A thinly disguised plan to grab more quiddage."

"I hardly think that's true!" the boss comments, entering the room now his sense of balance is restored. "It just cuts down on photographic double-handling."

"How's that?" the PFY asks.

"Because the PR department keeps an electronic archive of photographs of staff members which they give to the press."

"Yes," I comment, "like when one of the beancounters wins Profit-and-Loss Adjuster of the Year Award..."

"I..." the boss starts, "...anyway, that's not why I'm in here. Why's the Apps server down?"

"Apps Server..." I mutter looking at the maintenance whiteboard. "Yes, it's got routine maintenance scheduled - see,"

I point to the lettering thereon.

"You're supposed to schedule that sort of thing out of hours!"

"Well, I'd like to, but you asked us to watch the overtime."

"Yes, but I didn't mean for maintenance on crucial machines!"

"You did!" I cry, reminding him of events recently past. "You started this after a weekend's overtime on maintenance of a crucial server!"

"The bloody espresso machine is not a crucial server!"

"Speak for yourself," the PFY quips, baying for blood.

"It's not! Now get that server up!"

"But..." I start.

"No buts, get it up!"

Pseudo-reluctantly, I remote-boot the server.

Which only leaves the problem of the recent influx of PR types.

A quick scan of the PR network finds the right PC and, thanks to lax group administrator security and default passwords, within a minute I'm browsing the profile of the attached photo-label printer.

And back me up on read-protected media if the printer doesn't have several up loadable photo overlays to choose from, including the words "security", "contractor", "cleaner", "board member" etc.

The next day a resounding thud announces the boss's arrival. After a minute, a second thud confirms the PFY's theory that a larger wedge has done the trick...

On release from the sick bay with mild bruising, the boss returns and knocks patiently on the door. The PFY lets him in.

"What's behind this?" he asks.

"It's a photo-id of an accountant," I respond.

"Why is the word Beancounter printed over his photo?"

"Because it's his job?" I ask.

"If that's the case, how many Wankers are employed in the building?"

"I wouldn't like to speculate on that one..."

"Seventy three apparently. Twenty-seven Beancounters, 35 Tossers and one Bumbag. Which I resent! Oh, and two Good Bastards - but you know that..."

"Someone's hacked a PR username!" the PFY comments.

"Yeah, but I can't believe that PR didn't check the photos before they sent them to security for printing!" I reply. "I suppose they'll have to be reprinted."

"They can't!" the boss cries "Security has run out of blanks and can't get new stock for a fortnight..."

The next day there's some upset when security gives the new cards to the great unwashed. Funny. Even with an updated photo they're still not happy...

When does saying less mean making more? When the boss suggests adding needless desktop capacity and you're renting out any going spare.

"...which is why I propose that we standardize on full-height disks to effectively make use of all the spare space we have in our desktop machines..."

Something startles me and I wake to find myself in the middle of an IT discussion group meeting - one of the boss's great ideas to bring the minds of the department together.

Sadly, there's no IQ barrier, the entrance criterion being the ability to find your way to the meeting.

I comfort myself with the thought that if we go overtime I'll be able to hear what the cleaning staff have to say, which is bound to bring a bit of sanity to the conversation.

"Ah, I don't think full-height drives are a good option in the new low-profile ca...aagh!" the PFY comments, as he gets cut short by an under-table blow.

It's too late, of course, now that opposition has been raised to an idea. By Incompetent Meeting Law, there now has to be a discussion of the relative merits of the idea being opposed. It's a discussion that is bound to bring us half an hour closer to the end of the day, but half an hour further away from a technical resolution.

We break for a mid-morning coffee, at which time I corner the PFY and ask him, as politely as possible, what the hell he was trying to do in there.

"But he was recommending full-height drives for all desktop machines!"

"Some of our machines don't even stand that high!" he blurts.

"That's irrelevant. You know they're only taunting you so that you argue and string the meeting out, and then they don't have to do any work today."

"But it's our job to offer sound advice, isn't it?"

"Don't be ridiculous! It's our job to interpret what they decide and use it to our advantage."

"So the full-height drives would be...?"

"Hmm...half-height 7200 RPM 18 gig jobbies."

"But desktops don't need that sort of space!"

"No, but if we get enough of them out there we can use it as a wide area multiple mirrored RAID-5 system!" "Huh?"

"OK, your average user's desktop machine has what on it?"

"Their operating system?"

"Yes, yes, but the rest."

"?"

Sigh. After all this time he's still an amateur at heart.

"Their e-mail folders, personal work, the pirated copy of Leisure Suit Larry - the smutty pictures in the windows directory hidden under the name YENROH1.DLL etc."

"Oh! Yeah?"

"Well, all that, what does it take up? A Gig, max. Which means there's 17 Gig free on them for really deserving projects!"

"Like?"

"Our personal work, games, and all those smutty pictures we have on the tapes 'System Snapshot' 1 thru 200."

"So we use their hard drives?"

"Sort of. But you know what users are like - couldn't find the space bar if their stomach didn't roll into it. So we need mirrored copies."

"But why RAID-5 it as well?"

"Just in case one of the workers goes postal and brings a bomb into the building. Wouldn't want to interrupt the smutty picture slideshow just because Bean-counter Central's halfway across the high street."

"You're kidding, aren't you?"

"Almost. But bear in mind what sheep departments are - all stopping for lunch together and powering down their machines."

"No. I don't think you're telling me the full story."

Bugger.

"All right, so I've contracted half a terabyte out to a couple of companies as on-line HSM disk."

"Hierarchical storage management?"

"Yeah. Our users don't use the stuff, so I use them as a network archival device."

"You're selling the company's desktop space!?"

"Yeah, to a couple of oil companies that want off-site back-ups."

"I can't believe it!" the PFY cries, shocked to the core.

"What, the Machiavellian megalomania of it all?" I ask.

"No, that you didn't cut me in!"

"Well, it's funny you should mention that. The next time Dave suggests full-height drives, I'd like you to keep your gob shut. The same goes for when he suggests monochrome monitors to cut down on sick time because of eye strain. We've got a buyer who wants a job lot of SVGAs."

"But that's just ridic...Dave's working for you, isn't he?" the PFY cries, the penny finally dropping.

"Not for - with."

"But he's completely thick!"

"Oh, that's just a cover story. He pumps out stupid suggestions at top speed to prevent other managers from getting their own in there."

There's a knock at the door.

"Speak of the devil."

"Uh, I think I've forgotten my password," Dave mumbles.

"It's OK, he knows," I respond.

"Oh. Right. Well, I've just heard rumors that your boss is going to propose that all management get a laptop conversion kit for their cars - complete with 12 volt LCD monitor, cellphone hook-up etc."

"Bloody hell," the PFY gasps. "That'll be our whole equipment budget for a couple of quarters! What are we going to do?"

"Well," Dave comments, "for a start I'd cut the monitor deal, bring in Dvorak keyboards to prevent repetitive strain injury, RS232 networking to reduce Ethernet collisions, and, when that fails, dial-up networking between floors."

Unfortunately, two days later the flaw in the plan becomes apparent when 18 ultra high-speed modems arrive in the office - courtesy of the boss who was so swayed by the inter-floor dial-up networking argument that he cashed in our budget on them.

So it is true then: you can't win 'em all...

Sigh.

Hypochondria in the office is all the rage. In fact, rage is all the rage. But when a psychiatrist is called in it's only a means to an end...

So I'm destined by fate to have a run-in with the boss. I know it, he knows it, and everything else is just window dressing.

It's his fault. He recently took on a secretary who suffers from XXXX disease, i.e. the inability to do anything she doesn't want to on medical grounds. If it isn't RSI it's some version of the 'flu hitherto unknown to medical science.

Finally I've had a gutful, so I corner the boss to see what he's going to do about it. The assistant head of personnel is there, purely coincidentally of course.

"Well, I'd like to do something about it," he responds, "but the company has fairly strict guidelines on dismissing employees due to medical conditions..."

"So she's here to stay?"

"Unless there's some disciplinary issue that you'd like to raise?" personnel replies.

"Other than she's crap?"

"She is not crap. She has simply discovered some medical conditions that are exacerbated by her work here. So we're going to lighten her workload accordingly to allow her a chance to recover."

"Lighten her workload?! She doesn't do anything!"

"She's made a good job of organizing my meetings," the boss chimes.

"That's because her hands hurt too much to take down the details! You haven't met anyone since she's been here."

"I'm meeting you aren't I?" the boss counters smugly.

Then it becomes clear to me. It's the boss's sneaky plan to insulate himself from the workers by having an obstructive secretary...

Sure enough, as I leave the office I notice a similar self-contented expression on the part of the employee in question.

"Two can play at that game!"

I blurt as I re-enter the office, gesture the PFY aside and force a reboot of every switch and router in the building.

The boss storms in seconds later, with his personnel partner-in-grime in tow.

"What's going on?"

"Routers have all gone down. I typed 'all reboot' instead of 'all status'. I must be typing dyslexic!"

"Well get them up!" the boss blurts, concentrating his attention on the lynching that will occur at the next systems liaison meeting...

"Well I'd like to, but I'm also suffering from attention defici... Oh! Look, a green cellphone! Is that new?"

The boss goes straight to the PFY and demands that he restart the equipment.

As the great unwashed beat a path to the door of mission control and the networking equipment finishes its booting, the PFY accedes to the boss's demands at full speed, with a cry of "Bastards!" and queues a 60- minute UPS disconnect test for five minutes from now - 60 being 23 more minutes than the rated capacity of our system.

"Oh no!" I cry. "Keyboard rage!"

"What are you talking about?!" the boss shouts.

"Keyboard rage! It's like road rage, only worse! It's not his fault; it's a psychological condition he's been getting counseling for! He was diagnosed by the same doctor who diagnosed my attent...Wow! This gas operated chair's really got a smooth descent! Look at this!"

"I want that UPS test stopped!" the boss shouts.

"Please don't shout," I sniffle. "My dyslexia gets worse under pressure. Bugger, I've just set the fire alarm test off by accident!"

The PFY, meantime, is beating his keyboard senseless in a very convincing manner while our two visitors make for the door.

"Be careful!" I cry, "I can't remember whether I locked out the lift system or not, and if I did - Ooooh, is that an Armani suit?!"

The next day the PFY and I meet with the head of personnel, the boss, and the head of dept.

A calm knock on the door announces the arrival of our personal psychiatric advisor.

"I don't believe you've met our psychiatric advisor, Doctor Brian Analpeeper - PhD in Abnormal Psychology from the Bognor Regis Polytechnic."

"Good morning gentlemen," Brian starts. "I have here the diagnoses of my patients' conditions which, I must say, appear to have been aggravated by the inability of their superegos to express their thoughts about current management decisions..."

Brian goes on to explain that yesterday's unfortunate power and systems outage etc. is all a result of our inability to get to the boss because of the new secretary.

"They're just a couple of freeloading layabouts who are milking the company dry," the boss snaps angrily.

"I feel at this juncture I must ask for some time alone with my clients to discern any mental harm that your comments have caused them."

"What the hell?!"

"My clients are sensitive people. Who knows what your comments may have done to their delicate psyches. This meeting may accelerate a whole new set of problems, uncovering repressed memories of employee abuse."

"What?!" the boss cries, dangerously close to blowing a major blood vessel.

"Wait," the head of personnel interjects, recognizing an escalating situation when he's in one. "We'll transfer her."

"To stamp-licking in the mail room?" I ask evilly.

"We have a franking machine," the boss comments dryly.

"Not for much longer," the PFY comments. "I think I feel a bout of frank rage coming on."

"Interesting manifestation of trauma," Brian comments. "Well, I see no need for my remaining here."

"You bastard!" the boss snarls before yelping as Brian's briefcase crushes his hand.

"Sorry," Brian explains. "I'm a recovering briefcase rage sufferer."

Amazing what a psychiatrist can find out, if you pay him enough...

The BOFH is fazed by the remote working boom - but not for long. He and the PFY find more devious ways to keep the Operations beer fund topped up.

There are times when I believe that the PFY and I are the only ones who actually spend any time in the office these days.

There is a distinct tendency toward home working, which is bad news indeed.

Bad news in a number of ways. First, there are fewer people in the office to admire the support 'efforts' of the PFY and myself; this, in itself, implies a reduction in the level of available victims.

Second, for every user on the remote access server, we lose 64Kbps (before compression) of our PRI Quake connection to the US arm of the company.

Finally, and most importantly, remote access equals more user moans.

You see, remote access is hard to use. It involves not only using Windows NT's user interface, but also a modem and a phone line. It also involves calling the right number in order to gain access to the company network.

Difficult, you may think. Except the reason we run NT Workstation is because we can lock everything down tighter than...well, just think of the anatomy of waterfowl. And the modem is internal to the PC, so they can't get the wires wrong when they connect it up.

And the phone line is Araldited into the modem card, so they can't put the wrong end in the wrong hole. And the other end has a big green label saying "Plug this end into a telephone socket". Made of steel. And the dial-up number is hard-coded into the modem software. And it's even the right number on ten per cent of the machines.

So what exactly is it that these people find so hard? These are people who, by and large, can figure out which way round to sit on a toilet. Who - with the exception of the senior purchasing controller - know which end of a biro goes on to the paper? Who somehow passed a test and are legally allowed to drive a big heavy car with a big engine and sharp edges to work but still can't figure out how to plug a power cord into the only socket it'll fit into in the back of a computer.

For example, a call the PFY answered by mistake the other day:

"I can't dial into the network."

"Really? Is the modem plugged in?"

"Yes, that was the problem last time, so I made sure it was okay today."

"Have you been able to connect at all?"

"Well, I got in yesterday."

"Have you changed anything?"

"No."

"Really?"

"NO!"

"Try it again now."

"Okay...hang on...it says 'no dial tone'."

"How many phone lines do you have in your house?"

"Just one. Why?"

>CLICK

But it's not all bad. Remote access users do have their uses, of course. You see, a while ago the beancounters decided to ban people from charging their home phone bills to expenses.

They figured that if people couldn't be bothered to come into the office, they weren't about to pay. Therefore, we in IT decided to be very friendly to the poor little cherubs who were too delicate to face a daily commute and give them an 0800 number to dial into.

Sadly, something appears to have gone wrong with the local cable franchise's phone billing system. Somehow

I don't seem to be getting the bill for all these allegedly freephone remote access calls. Yet I've heard rumors of relationship rockiness becoming rife among our remote access friends. Something to do with wives finding £800-per-quarter phone bills full of itemized, premium rate numbers with suspicious-sounding names...whatever the case, the Operations beer fund appears to be ticking up nicely at a rate of 44p per minute (35p off-peak).

Not only this, but the management are starting to catch on to the fact that there might be something in the remote-user thing after all. Something called hot-desking, I'm told.

Manager theory goes along the lines of: if someone isn't there, I'm getting charged for their bit of the office, so let's put someone else in there and save money. It is, of course, perfectly logical to take on extra people on thirty grand a year in order to fully utilize eighty quid's worth of square footage.

Anyhow, as the PFY and I gaze out of the window we can see a whole load of big vans and men carting into the building what look suspiciously like cubicle partitions. A suspicion looms...

I wonder...

Three o'clock comes, and it's time for the PFY and I to adjourn to the cozy meeting room on the corner that has a full-sized pool table and serves such a nice pint of Stella.

As we battle our way across the yard, weaving a path through the head-butting and the fist-fights, we find ourselves musing about how ironic it all is that one of the junior programmers should have discovered the old cubicle-allocation application I wrote five years ago for the previous management (most of whom have now, sadly, passed on or checked into rehab units).

For some reason hot-desking didn't work then, either.

The Operations room is lit up like a set of traffic lights when the head beancounter asks the BOFH and the PFY to account for their time...

An edict has come down from on high that we have to account for our time. It's all about accountability, internal recharging and all that jazz. Seems the boss has been getting grief for having such a big cost centre, so he's decided to make us into a profit centre by making people pay for our services. The financial director fell for the idea and appears to be writing us some terms, conditions and SLA clauses.

"We pay how much per hour?"

The PFY is startled by my exclamation, though realization dawns as he looks at my screen-scrape of the financial director's Word window. It seems that our department loses money should my humble assistant or I be late fixing someone's machine. To the tune of a grand an hour, give or take a few pennies.

True, it's nice to labor under the misapprehension that they think we're worth that much, but in reality I suspect they're just trying to induce urgency. They also think we care how much the boss's budget loses, but that's another issue entirely.

"Quick, change it while it's in the print queue," the PFY shouts, seeing the 'Print' dialog appearing. He dives for his keyboard, but stops himself as he notices my smug grin.

Sure enough, a few days later the boss walks in, with the financial director in tow, to see how we're doing. Just so he can be kept happy we've installed a big 'job status' screen (103" TFT displays don't come cheap, but it had to be flat to be wall-mounted) which is showing lots of healthy 'green' jobs.

Allow me to explain. A 'red job' is a call on which we have missed our deadline. A 'green' job, on the other hand, is a call which has been logged but not yet attended to, but whose deadline is still in the future. We persuaded the management that we didn't need to record completed calls, as they were largely irrelevant to progress. True, the fact that there weren't any made it even more pointless, but we didn't exactly press that issue.

"Good show chaps," the financial director booms in his clipped retired-Army-lieutenant-who-still-calls-himself-colonel tones. (Note at this point the derivation of the word 'colonel', as in COLON-el). "Keeping ahead of things, I see!"

"Oh yes, sir, we make a point of hitting our targets." Yeah, but I'm not telling you what with.

The phone rings, and the PFY flinches at the intensity of the boss's "answer it or die" look.

He's certainly learning.

"Operations, PFY speaking."

The boss manages to shepherd the financial director out of the office while he's still happy, leaving the PFY to look after his 'customer'.

"Yes, I realize we haven't managed to get round to you yet, but we're very busy, and we're still within the permitted fix time - yes, I know you called on September 8th - yes, I know it's the 30th today. What's that? Sure, I'll just look it up - ah, here it is. 14 April 2003 seems to be the deadline. Tell you what, I'll call you on the 13th just to make sure you still work here, just so I don't waste my time coming up to your office only to find you've fallen out of a window. No, that's not a threat, just a vision of the future. Bye now."

The days pass and we while away the time as our part-time assistant (drafted in for two hours a week to cope with the vast demand being placed on our human resources) knocks off the odd job here and there just so the board isn't too full.

Meanwhile, unrest is growing among the users, who don't seem to realize just how hard it is to keep that board full of green call reports. It's a full fortnight before the boss catches on to what we're up to. It took him a while, but his training is coming along nicely and every so often he spots what's happening.

"Tell me," he prompts, "just how many calls actually get as far as being closed?"

"Depends how you mean 'closed'," I reply.

"Like, problems getting solved."

"Depends what you mean by 'solved'."

"AAAAAGGGGHHHHHH!!"

"Okay, let me explain. We set deadlines to give ourselves enough time to do the job properly. Right?"

"Riiiggghhhhttt..."

"We have two alternatives. First, we can go and fix the problem. This takes time and draws us away from our real job."

"And I'm not even going to ask what you think that is. What's the other option?"

"We sit in the pub doing essential network maintenance and, by the time the many-months-off deadline arrives, the problem, or preferably the user, has gone away. The deadline generator is tied into the HR staff turnover measurement system."

A twinkle in the boss's eye tells me he's plotting. And he knows better than to come up with anything that isn't grossly beneficial to my spotty colleague and myself.

He strides off purposefully, returning half an hour later looking triumphant.

"I persuaded the financial director that stuff might get done a little bit before deadline if there was some incentive to our department for finishing jobs before deadline."

"How much?"

"Don't ask. Enough."

Within a day and a half the call-board is darker than a gorilla's groin, and the Operations beer-fund, which is index-linked to the boss's budget, is looking healthier than ever. I could grow to like the idea of accountability.

One wager and a lager frenzy later, the BOFH is feeling somewhat worse for wear after messing with the teatime continuum

I'm not a well man.

In fact, I'd go so far as to say I'm feeling poorly.

But having used up my sick leave entitlement during the World Cup and considering a bomb threat too drastic, I struggle into work. After all, if you're going to be crook, you may as well do it on company time. It always makes me feel a little better anyway. The source of my illness was plain to see once I'd emerged from the bed to focus on the congealed remains of a half-eaten kebab solidified on the top of the TV set and half a pot of cold coffee sitting on the table.

A vague memory crosses my mind, collides with a patchy recollection and goes down...I seem to remember a lager frenzy starting at the pub just down from the office following the outcome of some wager that ended in my favor. As they do.

A wager that must have undoubtedly involved the boss in some way, shape or form, following his imperial command just a few days ago with regard to morning and afternoon tea. Apparently we're only supposed to take one of each a day and they're only supposed to be 15 minutes long. And they're to be measured by the company's clocks and not by any personal equipment. Talk about cruel and unusual punishment.

Of course no one expected him to enforce the ruling, so it came as a little bit of a surprise when the unauthorized timesheet prunings were brought to light by a less-than-expected payment check.

I manage to drag myself to work, although I have to admit to feeling very seedy by the time I get to the relative security of my office. A rest is called for.

I redirect my phone to the voicemail of the networks and systems group of the company, three buildings over, and then catch up with some well-deserved sleep.

An hour later I'm woken by the entry of the PFY into the room. Well, more accurately, the sound of the PFY falling through the door to Mission Control.

His condition is no better than my own, but I'm hoping that his memory of events will tide me over.

A hope that fades quickly when he informs me that the last thing he remembers was when we pulled the toner cartridge out of the fax machine and shorted out the 'toner low' and 'cartridge-removed' sensors.

Further questioning is pointless once the PFY reveals that the next thing he remembers is waking up in the telecoms access duct at the rear of the building.

Curiouser and curiouser...

I can only assume that some major form of celebration occurred, the likes of which is not often seen in computing circles (i.e. as rare as a bug-free Microsoft release).

CCTV is no help, revealing only that we left the building at approximately 5:22pm, considerably the worse for wear, in the company of half the secretarial pool, who also looked like they had a bad case of bottle fatigue.

Being a troubleshooting professional of long standing, I apply the first rule of problem solving by asking the question "what has changed?" Observation: there aren't many healthy-looking staff at their desks.

I apply the second rule of problem-solving by tracking the problem backwards - 5:22 is far too late for me to be working, so

I must have been propping up the bar at the company anti-social club.

I put in a call to one of the more human company lawyers, who's rostered on to bar duty this week to see if he remembered us.

I eventually track him down to his cellphone.

"Yes, you called me to open up the bar rather early..."

"When was that then?" I ask.

"About 10:30am."

Missing time and memory accounted for, more important questioning must follow.

"Spend much?" I ask, with a due sense of trepidation.

"As it happened, no," he said. "Not after you pointed out that your boss's memo distinctly states that the company shall provide beverages, at its own expense, for all staff between the hours of 10am and 11am."

"So what happened at 11?" the PFY blurts over my shoulder.

"That's not come around as yet. It's only about 10:49am at the moment. I'm not sure, but the clock appears to be running incredibly slowly. Mine is not to reason why though..."

Yet another penny drops and I vaguely remember tweaking the calibration knob on the pulse-advance unit of the company's timekeeping system to buy us a longer tea-break. Perhaps a hammer wasn't the best tool for the tweak job.

"You mean it's been between 10:30 and 11 for a day?" the PFY gasps.

"Ah...two days I think you'll find."

A quick squint at the unfeasibly small numbers on my wristwatch confirms his story.

"Bloody hell. What's management doing about it then?"

"Well when your boss left here about 16 hou...I mean about six minutes ago, he said he'd be back in five minutes. The whole of legal's here still, because they were on the late morning tea shift, and the DP pool are taking their morning tea in one-minute installments."

About 43 hours [11 minutes] later, the PFY, myself and some hardcore legal and DP drinkers are helped out of the building.

By the police.

If I've said it once, I've said it a thousand times: "AGG AAARRICC GUBB IN FARLIN GOT!"
And you can quote me on that.

A bluff report may fool auditors that the company is running smoothly but try telling a hospitalized boss why safety procedures have been ignored

Something feels wrong. I know it immediately. It's a seventh sense among seasoned support professionals.

The PFY confirms it when he gets back from morning tea - at the pub - and looks around as if to check everything is as it should be.

It's like a funny-colored smell.

The boss must be up to something. We could be over-sensitive, but I think he's a bit upset about me telling the helpdesk staff the grey powder on their furniture might be asbestos dust. That was two days ago, but the mass walkout and hypochondria is yet to end, despite proof that the dust concerned was in fact talcum powder dyed grey.

Some form of retaliation is expected and the waiting game ends fairly shortly when we see the boss waddling in our direction.

"I think it's about time you did some documentation," he blurts, after exhausting his list of social niceties ("How are you?", "How are things going?" and "Isn't that memory the stuff that's missing from my desktop machine?").

"Documentation?"

"Yes, a site guide, configuration standards, network and systems topologies, installed software, site customizations," he bumbles, reeling off the sentence he's obviously spent half the morning committing to memory at great personal risk to the other contents of his brain (where he lives, what his name is, when it's appropriate to unzip his fly etc.).

"But we've got all that already - in the fireproof filing cabinet over there," I respond, pointing at a dull grey monster in the corner that I've only ever opened once.

"Well, let's have a look at it."

"Well, I'd like to, but apparently my assistant locked the key in it the last time he was updating the information!" I cry, using the PFY as a scapegoat for this particular excuse (as previously arranged, of course).

"Then get a locksmith in!" the boss yells, not one to be put off by small details.

Three hours and one fire alarm later the 'documentation' is a mass of ashen remains in the now open cabinet. The fact that they were a mass of ashen remains when I put them in is beside the point.

"I can't think why the PFY would have put that large jar of tape head cleaner right next to where the locksmith would have to gas-axe the lock open. What an oversight!" I wail, stifling a snigger as the boss gingerly applies some burn cream to his hands.

"It's irrelevant now. I want some documentation to show the auditors."

"The auditors?" I protest. "What do glorified beancounters want documentation for?"

"Not monetary auditors, company auditors. Since the company sold itself to that US combine we have to have our every move audited to ensure the place is a smooth-running machine."

"My money's on a '73 Ford Escort running on three cylinders with water in the fuel tank, but I take your point."

"So I'll expect reprints of your documentation first thing tomorrow," the boss says, leaving.

"Auditors?" the PFY asks. "I haven't heard anything about them."

"First thing you'd better do is OCR scan some random manual pages - the older the better - into a word processor to add a bit of bulk to our documentation. I'll dump the network topology mapper output into another document in 24 point, which should use up about 100 pages by itself. Then push the DNS through a Perl filter to add some fancy field information to it. Then I'll work on some table of contents pages, etc.," I reply.

"But won't they know its crap?" the PFY asks.

"Nah, there'll be so much of it they'll look at the table of contents, check the first few pages, then randomly open the documents at certain pages. Which reminds me. Anything that's reasonably legit should be printed on heavier paper than the rest of the document so that anyone flipping through will stop there.

"You sound like you've done this before."

"One of the tricks of the contracting trade. There's always a run on 100gsm paper at company report time."

Three hours later, we have a document that would fool the average beginner. However, bearing in mind that the auditors have probably seen a few of these in their time, I'm going to have to insert some believable stuff into the procedures area.

An hour later, I've whipped out ten good pages of bumpf on "Hot Swap," "Disaster recovery," "Host configuration and naming," "Router configuration standards", etc.

I also chuck in some roughly accurate palaver about cabling, trunking and patch panel locations, as well as a brief outline of emergency service and security configuration information. I slap it all together into an appropriately named folder, then subject it to the ageing process (meaning I jump up and down on it, kick it around until some of the pages fall out, then spill some food and ink on it) to make it look like it's heavily referred to.

The document gets submitted, and, judging by the lack of evidence to the contrary, the auditors must be happy.

And so it was that the next day the PFY and I were standing beside the network monitor when it started emitting the telltale signs of a router not talking to anything anymore.

"That'll be the boss turning on router redundant takeover."

"How can you be sure?"

"The old ROMS don't support it - it causes a memory leak. Of course, I forgot to document that. Actually, come to think of it, I also forgot to document..."

A large crash from the floor above interrupts me.

"The emergency duct access retracting ladder isn't screwed into the roof yet."

Five minutes later the boss is on his way to hospital and the documentation is on its way to the incinerator.

A bogus computer range may con the propeller heads in polyester but not the clever BOFH who has a nasty sabotage surprise waiting in his pocket

So I'm at this presentation where a manufacturer's showing its new range of mini-computers.

As expected, it's wall-to-wall propeller heads with 100 per cent polyester appearing to be the clothing order of the day.

And, also as expected, the vendor wheels out the new hardware while simultaneously reassuring the assembled clientele that this is not a REPLACEMENT of the kit that they bought a few months ago, just a parallel product.

The fact that last quarter's machines have been removed from the hardware catalogue (along with the support from the maintenance catalogue) is purely coincidental...As is the fact that the serial number on the new kit implies that it was actually manufactured SIX months ago. No, no, it wasn't a product-dumping exercise at all. Just coincidence.

Oh, and a complete change of architecture...

So we see the new model, with a new bus (which means that stockpile of peripheral cards you bought are about as in demand as XT thin-wire cards), 20 per cent increase in processor speed, 80 per cent increase in cost, 200 per cent increase in size and ugliness of logo, and immediately the brain-dead among the audience start drooling.

"As you'll see," our presenter says with a coat-hanger grin, "the SpecWPIOP Int figures for our machine are much higher than for any other manufacturer's machine of comparable price..."

"Ah," I interject, suppressing with great effort my sense of annoyance at their transparency, "could that be because you just made up the SpecWPIOP Int standard to take advantage of your new kit's design?"

"Certainly not," our presenter hotly denies, "the SpecWPIOP Int is an open industry standard!"

"And who," I ask, knowing full well the answer, "developed and opened this standard?"

"Well I have to admit, somewhat proudly, that our company has excelled in developing a standard which truly reflects the loads on an active system of varying users more accurately than something which performs simple integer test cases."

"In other words, you made it up?"

"No No! Bookmarking figures have, for some time, not taken into account the true loads on a system which may have users of varying types, from development, to database, to data entry. The SpecWPIOP takes into account all these things to produce a figure that is fully representative of the 'whole-system', or 'holistic-interoperative' approach, as we like to call it."

I look around me and notice that the guy's got about 60 per cent of the customers sold, with their proverbial pants already at half mast.

"So SpecWPIOP, what does that stand for?" I ask.

"Specifications When Pmmmmmdmd Idndn Ouidud Pddnls," he mumbles. "Pardon?"

"Specifications When Plugged Into Our Peripherals," he murmurs slyly.

"Oh! So what you're saying is that when you plug one of your SCSI disks, say, into another manufacturer's hardware, the processor is so busy dealing with the errors generated by your non-standard interface that it works much slower."

"That's not it at all," he gasps, incredulous. "Why, just looking at the system in action would convince anyone otherwise!!!"

He proceeds to power the thing up and it whirrs into life with an impressive start-up sound.

Worth at least half of the purchase price alone, when combined with the new full-color start-up graphic!!!

"And if I could get a volunteer from the aud..."

I almost pop a hamstring in my hurry to be first out the gate and up to the podium. I can tell that I wasn't the volunteer that he was looking for - probably having primed some Infomercial dropout with questions to ask and 'Gosh, look at that!' responses to give.

"Ah," he murmurs, not wishing to let me near his kit, but not really having much choice in the matter. "How about you start up the Graphical User Interface by clicking on the little screen icon then?"

I do so and am actually very impressed with the speed of the start-up. As is the rest of the flock, who crowd in closer to get a good look...

Obscuring my hand briefly... quicker than you can say: "What is that, aluminum foil cuttings? Chocolate wrapper bits? Iron filings?" I've surreptitiously flicked a small handful of aluminum foil underneath the machine...into the thirsty holes of the cooling-inlet.

The subsequent short-circuiting, smoke and minor explosion rounded off the entertainment for the afternoon - ruining the new business prospects for the manufacturer and sending the presenter home with a 'shocking' new hairstyle - after he regained consciousness. Suffice to say that the rest is history - the model isn't being pulled from the market per se - another demonstration is being organized in a month from now when they iron out the "power supply problems", but at least it's restored, temporarily at least, the resale price of my peripherals to give me a chance to offload them on some poor, unsuspecting alternate customer of our vendor.

Ah well, you know what they say - all's fair in love and hardware acquisition...

You won't believe what's been going on the Boss's credit card...and it's not just the BOFH who thinks that'll do nicely - he's got a new flexible friend...

I'm scanning through the swathes of my early morning e-mail, culling out all the spam messages about credit cards, free home loans, career opportunities and new, improved sex sites.

Propagating our Web cache with smut apparently destined for the Boss is a sure-fire way to get immunity from a bollocking if you're caught browsing at it yourself during work time, and it solves the hassle of having to wait for the stuff to load over the smut site's crappy Ethernet connection.

True, loading the Boss's corporate credit card details into the robot was a little on the nose, but it all boils down to what you're willing to pay for a good cache service.

And the Boss sure is paying - I've had to have his credit card limit extended twice this month just to keep up with the volume of incoming material the patient and inquisitive robot has found.

If he didn't want to buy anything with his credit card, he wouldn't have got one in the first place. Nor would he have left it carelessly lying around in a sealed envelope, locked in his briefcase, secured inside that filing cabinet drawer marked 'IT94 conference proceedings', in the cleaners' cupboard at the far end of the building. He was just asking for it to be used.

However, I'm pleased to say that the cache is responding well to the challenge now that I've whacked those two new nine gig drives into the server. In other words, it's a happy ending - or beginning...

"I've got a problem with these machine usage stats," the Boss blurts, entering the office in such a hurry I have to terminate my 'cache-occupancy hit stats survey' by switching my monitor off.

"What problem is that?" I ask.

"Well, according to this, my machine does a hell of a lot of traffic in off-peak hours."

"Really?" I respond, upset that my little smut-acquiring goldmine looks like meeting its end.

"Oh that'll just be DHCP mapping playing up again," the PFY jumps in. "It's just because our DNS isn't dynamic, so it's charged against your machine, but really is some other machine using the IP address you were using when the IP usage stats program was run!"

"Duh - really?" the Boss responds, so far out of his technical depth he's looking for a life raft and water wings.

"Yeah, it's nothing to worry about."

"Oh," the Boss says, happy in the knowledge that his desktop is faithful to him only. "So who is generating the IP traffic then?"

"Ah...that'll probably be our site's Web server," I jump in.

"But I thought you told me last week that servers weren't going to use DHCP?" the Boss quips, annoying me with an unexpected attack of accurate recall.

"No, no, I said that surfers don't use DHCP - because...ah...most of them don't even have PCs...and those who do don't take them to the beach anyway..."

"What have surfers got to do with our company?" the Boss blurts, even more confused than normally...

"Nothing that I know of," I respond.

"So why did you tell me about it?"

"Just passing the time of day..."

Our conversation is interrupted by the arrival of a beancounter wearing a worried expression, which can only mean that the credit card eagle has landed. Crash landed by the sour look on his face.

"It's about your company credit card," he mumbles anxiously.

"What about it?"

"It's £23,000 in the red!"

I'm a bit shocked at this figure, as I only cranked the card limit up to £10k, but put it down to a credit card company keen to generate revenue...

"That's preposterous," the Boss blurts.

"It's all here in black and white - but mostly red," the beancounter says, handing over some papers.

"What's this www.strap-on.com...and too-tight-leaderhosen.com? And who the hell is the Progressive Press in Amsterdam?"

A warning bell rings in my head as I don't recall any Web-site by that name. I grab the papers from the beancounter and find that Web traffic accounts for only about 10 per cent of the charges therein, the rest appearing to be for merchandise shipped into the UK...

"I have no idea," the beancounter responds. "But it's all above board on your card..."

"It can't be, my card's locked away safely, in a drawer in a cabling cupboard."

"A cleaning cupboard, I think you'll find," I mention, cheerfully.

"And in a filing cabinet," the PFY adds.

"Sealed in an envelope, in a briefcase," the beancounter finishes smugly, much to the surprise of the PFY and I.

So it seems there's a new player in the game - a beancounter gone bad. Excellent.

The Boss burbles some crap about us not getting away with it, and rushes off to get his card cancelled.

"The horse has bolted on that one," the beancounter chirps happily. "Besides, I used his old card as leverage for a new one with a different bank."

"And...?" I ask, preparing for war.

"I sent the Boss's details in e-mail. Not encrypted with his public key of course, yours in fact - what an oversight!"

"So what you're saying is the Boss has an e-mail message he can't read..."

"That anyone with your private key intercepting that e-mail could..."

It's a wet and windy afternoon when the crack security force of the building break into the Boss's office and drag him up to the board for a good spanking. Apparently his claims of innocence fell upon deaf ears when enquiries revealed that the shipping address for the 'progressive' media was the Boss's summer house...

One down, too many more to go.

But at least we have an ally in the enemy camp...

The eye on the wall has seen all, so it's time for desperate measures to cover up the half measures of sherry left in the boardroom decanters...

Sooner or later, it was bound to happen. We know it, we prepare for it, but it still comes as a proverbial kick in the goolies.

Security wants its systems back. Well, actually not Security at all - we have a great working relationship - but its new manager - an ex-military type who takes the job far too seriously. He (outrageously) believes CCTV security systems should be Security's responsibility, and that Network and Systems Operations types shouldn't have unrestricted swipe card access to the building "to enable rapid support".

In other words, he's trying to make us join the great unwashed.

Our new boss is no bloody help. With the spine of a jellyfish, he backed down in record time.

I don't like it.

The PFY doesn't like it.

Something's got to give.

And give it does. The final straw comes when the new boss pops into the office and asks what we were doing in the boardroom last night at 6.35pm.

Obviously the answer, "Drinking ourselves senseless with a couple of members of the secretarial pool" - is out of the question.

So it looks like I'm going to have to ad-lib. And we're not talking sound cards here.

"Ahh...checking the connectivity of the individual ISDN desktop ports," I blurt quickly.

"Really? It doesn't look like that!" he cries, brandishing a frame-grabbed image from CCTV showing the PFY topping up a half-full sherry decanter with a reconstituted version of the original.

"That's disgusting!" I cry heatedly.

"Yes it is," the boss concurs, saddling up his high horse for the 11.30 hurdles. "As is this," he continues, flashing another image - of me this time - making up the PFY's shortfall (he's just young).

"And what do you have to say about that?" he challenges.

"Well, obviously I need to reduce my vitamin B intake," I cry.

"What?"

"I'm only joking. It's obviously a fake."

"Well, if it's a fake," he responds smugly, holding up a strangely familiar vessel, "you won't mind taking a quick swig of this."

"Not at all," I respond, pouring myself a healthy dram, or 57, and downing it in record time. "As I said, it's a fake - a plan by security to discredit us with misinformation."

"Obviously a video edit. Look at the pixilation around the thing. It's been digitized and re-enhanced."

"I...uh..." the boss mumbles, inquisition in ashes.

After he's slouched out in despair (not having the bottle, or even a decanter) to face up to the head of Security, the PFY comes over.

"Can't believe you bloody drank that," he gasps disgustedly.

"Ah, don't be silly - I put the full one at the back and swapped the seal with that one. The board's stupid, but not stupid enough to mistake that for sherry. Not until they've had a couple of priming decanters anyway."

A swivel from the camera behind the computer room viewing window alerts me to a potential problem.

"Reckon he can read lips?" I ask the PFY from behind my coffee cup.

"It's possible," the PFY comments, apparently yawning.

"Right. Emergency action is called for!"

The PFY and I race up the staircase to the boardroom to dispose of the evidence. But we are too late. The head of Security is already in the room and has hurled glassware everywhere in his haste to find the decanter at the back.

With any luck...but no - the sole surviving decanter is much, much clearer than the one I drank from.

"We're stuffed," the PFY whispers.

"Not quite," I blurt, remembering the access card system's configuration parameters. I swipe my card through the reader, and then punch in an incorrect PIN number. And again. And again.

The fourth attempt triggers an alarm, and the Security boss rushes over to the door to swipe the door release from his side...but too late. The ten-minute lockout has occurred.

Quick as a flash the PFY pulls the phone and network connections from the room, then manually locks the access corridor to the boardroom.

"Hang on, he'll break the emergency release glass," the PFY cries.

"He would. If I hadn't replaced it with the bulletproof stuff years ago."

We pull a couple of chairs up and wait for the inevitable, swiping the door invalidly every nine minutes or so to keep the lockout in force.

To his credit, the head of Security held out well - the military influence no doubt. It takes nearly ten hours for thirst to set in. And a full two more before he unstoppers the bottle.

"I'd have tipped it on the ground," the PFY says quietly, at the pub a day later. "That would have solved it."

"Yeah, there's no understanding the military mind," I sigh, as I contemplate the names he's going to be called by his troops, who were too busy making video dubs of the proceedings to come to his aid - even if they'd wanted to.

Different horses for different courses...

A fellow bastard in Wales who doesn't have cable TV turns out to be the ideal excuse for procuring some extra bandwidth

I'm tunneling a few episodes of an extra-terrestrial TV drama series down the Internet because a good-bastard acquaintance of mine in Wales (OK, a poor-bastard acquaintance as well) hasn't seen them all and wants to get up to speed before he rents the movie.

As a result of the (albeit compressed) video and audio stream, our connection to the rest of the world isn't performing up to what we laughingly refer to as scratch.

And there's NO POINT in getting into a discussion with the new boss about bandwidth requirements, as he's been trawling through the notes of his various predecessors (including the ones in crayon from the loony academy saying "THEY'RE OUT TO GET ME!") and has already informed me that there IS no upgrade path...

However, this doesn't solve the perceivable lack of response of transmission, but with any luck it'll pick up once I patch the video onto a live redundant bearer that our network carrier company ran to our building but neglected to configure as 'down'.

I mean, that's just GAGGING for it, as all of their competitors wouldn't have left a spare NTU in the building in the first place.

Of course, I justify the temporary unofficial upgrade by telling myself how much the carrier company is screwing us for. Who says I'm not the sentimental type?

I liven up the link and run a test. Sure enough, it's even on an active router port! I route the video through it, thanking the gods for a provider with more ports and money than sense...

It's just a matter of time of course, so I make sure that external caller-ID and subscriber look-up are configured into the phone. Sure enough, in a couple of hours, I get a call from our network carrier's customer rep.

"Hello, Belgian Steak and Waffle House...do you need a reservation?" I say carefully, in an accent somewhere between Eastern Europe and East London.

"Sorry, wrong number," the caller mutters, and then rings off. Two seconds later, he's back. "Belgian Steak and Waffle House...do you need a reservation?"

Now he's confused. He verifies the number he has in front of him against mine, and then asks if we have computers on the premises.

"I theenk you mean the peepill upstairs," I say. "Day haf many computers."

He verifies that the company name is right, and then asks how I'm on their phone number.

"Oh, that ees a long story," I say. "There was a beeg accident into the building, and now all the phones, they don't go so good seence dee man came to feex it..."

Realizing that my accent is rapidly heading towards Mexican, I make my break. "So sorry, I haf some customer - can you call back afder lonch?"

So now I'm on limited time. I know that they're not going to disconnect me in case the problem's a result of work that THEY have done - or worse still, the connection is supposed to be in place but no one's told them about it - but I also know they're not going to let me have free bandwidth for long.

A sneaky plan is called for.

I call our customer rep (after disabling caller-ID look-up) and ask him what the hell is going on with our link speed.

"What do you mean?" he asks.

"Something's using all the inbound traffic!" I blurt. "Just after one of your guys came and fixed the link for us and screwed up our phones at the same time."

"But we don't supply your phones!" he blurts.

"I know you don't!" I cry, "But now they're all mixed up with the other companies in the building and no one's able to do anything!"

"But we never had a service call for you!" he wails. "Have you got a job reference?"

I switch my phone line to modem and flick it into manual connect so he gets an earful of garbage, then switch it back and forth so it sounds like a Dalek reaching puberty.

"You haven't got a service call?" I ask.

"No," he blurts, while I check the CCTV to see if the boss's company car is still in the basement.

"But it was just recen..." I blurt, then switch in the modem for the rest of the call and slip off to the basement.

A quick spray of matt-black on the security camera lens later, I've got the boss's bonnet open and a pair of vice grips on his wide-open accelerator cable. Now all that remains is to slip the vehicle into reverse and disconnect the start-in-park-only switch.

Barely half an hour later, the boss's car rips into the telecoms room at about 30mph, more than sufficient to terminate all network and phone connections.

I rip down to the basement and help the boss from the car to a point where he won't see me retrieving Systems and Networks tools from the vehicle.

While he's in shock I add a couple of finishing touches to the NTUs with one of the few remaining fire axes the US company owners supplied as part of their corporate safety plan.

"It just ran away on me!" the boss cries. "Well, the whole building's out!" I say.

"Can't you get it live again?"

"Yeah, but it'll take all night at least and we'll have to enable the redundant link just to get the throughput. Besides which, both NTUs are destroyed, and they only make faster models now and..."

A day later, I'm watching the video of the aforementioned TV series as it comes to me from Wales. Link speed perfect.

"How long will we need that redundant link?" asks the boss.

"Phew," I mumble, "I don't know - how long is the complete Star Trek series?"

"Why?"

"No reason."

When the BOFH signs up for company therapy sessions, he wants to freely associate about problems. But whose? Blackmail's in the air...

I get in one morning and find posters around the coffee machine to the effect that the US owners of the company, under the expanding umbrella of their Health and Welfare scheme 'for all workers' (which eliminates half the staff for a start), are offering free therapy sessions to anyone who feels they need them.

"It's crazy!" I blurt to the PFY, as soon as he rolls in, holding one of the aforementioned posters.

"Why?" he asks, with the air of someone seriously contemplating taking up the offer.

"Oh, puhleeze. Who would turn down the opportunity of spending an hour of paid time whining to someone about how their mother didn't love them and their deep-seated problems concerning trains and tunnels?"

"Sorry?" the PFY asks, obviously a little short on his Freud appreciation.

"Look, half the staff already whine to each other about how hard they have it. This just legitimizes the whole process!"

"You really have a problem with this don't you?" the PFY quips. "Perhaps you should seek some help with your feelings of..."

(One very long high-pitched scream later): "So do you get what I'm trying to impart?" I ask, opening the drawer that contains the PFY's testicles.

"Yes, yes," the PFY gasps, on his way to the ground. "But..."

"But?" I cry, opening the drawer for round two.

"But don't you think that management knows the staff spends lots of time whineing..."

"And are trying to reduce it by making the whole process 'street-legal' so to speak?" I finish.

"Yeah. If they get real help, instead of a chance to grumble..."

"...they might become more productive?"

"Yes!"

"I see your point, but I don't think that management knows how much the staff likes to complain. Still, this warrants keeping an eye on..."

And so it was that, two days later, I was getting first-hand experience of the therapy 'thang'.

"...and so what we use is a therapy called 'RET' - Rational Emotive Therapy, where we ask you to face your problems as problems that you, and you alone, have to deal with, challenging their reason for being there in the first place."

"Ah yes," I interrupt, to avoid lapsing into a boredom coma. "I've done a lot of therapy in the past, mainly 'TPC', but it doesn't seem to work - my problems are back by the next therapy session."

"TPC? I'm not familiar with that."

"TPC? Ten Pints and a Curry. Every Friday, down at the local boozier and then down the local Ruby."

"Yes, very droll," he comments, lounging back in his comfy chair. "Now perhaps we can talk about what brings you here?"

"Of course! I'm actually here to find out all the dirt you've amassed on our staff!"

"I'm sorry?"

"You know, the dirt - who's a bed wetter, who has a predilection for the company of furry rodents, that sort of thing."

"All the information I gather is confiden..."

"Like the boss being impotent?" I ask.

"How did you...?"

"All in your notes," I murmur.

"I don't keep them on computer!"

"But you do keep them on a pad in full view of the elevator CCTV cameras..."

"But they're in modified shorthand!"

"That abbreviated Pitman's?! It took eight minutes of processor time to decode on a machine with a technical vocab, phrase analysis and variance..."

"But..."

"Face it - I'm going to say you told me anyway, so why not cut out the middleman?"

"I can't. I swore an oath."

"The one about not dobbing in nutters?"

"We don't use terms like 'nutter'."

"Or like 'professional misconduct'?"

"What do you really want?"

"Dirt!"

"Oh, all right!" he shouts angrily.

"Your boss has an irrational fear of power staplers."

"That's not irrational. Almost everyone I know does! The PFY has nightmares about them. And drawers now, too, I shouldn't wonder..."

"And one of your telephonists feels she may be a nymphomaniac."

"Which one!?" blurts the PFY, bursting in from behind the door.

Honestly, that boy should eat less red meat...

"Small potatoes," I complain. "I'm after the real stuff no-one should know about..."

"There isn't any!"

"Breach of professional confidentiality means personal damages proceedings now, doesn't it?" I ask the PFY in an off-hand manner.

"Oh yes," he chirps, grinning evilly.

"All right," my personal therapist moans, throwing in the towel...

I really did feel better at the end of the session. So good, in fact, that I booked myself in every week...

"...for about two weeks, until word gets out that secrets aren't so secret," I mention to the PFY, as I start my TPC therapy early Friday afternoon.

"That won't be for a while will it?" the PFY queries.

"I dunno, ask me after six pints when the 'workers' arrive. I feel a 'cathartic' experience coming on in my therapy..."

"Sounds nasty..."

"Bound to be. Your turn to pay for therapy I believe?" I mumble, handing over my medicinal vessel.

That's the thing with therapy - you've got to want to get better.

When you need a few spares, why not depth-charge your boss' Minesweeper game and use the replacement parts to leave him shell-shocked

The boss is screwed. After I'd installed the software on his brand spanking new laptop, I slapped a "Warranty void if seal broken" sticker across the front of it.

The beads of sweat on his brow and twitching fingers - as he contemplates getting his hands on the thing - speak volumes about his state of mind. He's obviously in Minesweeper withdrawal - even though I replaced the version on his old laptop with one that always explodes a bomb in the first move.

I leave him to his personal trauma.

Sure enough, he's cracked under the pressure, and enters my office 15 minutes later.

"That bloody laptop doesn't work!" he bellows.

It's not surprising considering the PFY and I gutted all but the keyboard, power supply and screen to provide the heart and soul for our latest and greatest project, the IT cleaning droid - which is infinitely more intelligent than the floor polishing droids they release into the corridors at night. I wrote the code myself, even the image recognition and seek-and-destroy - I mean seek-and-clean - code. It's a work of art.

"What happened?" I ask.

"Well, I opened it up an..."

"You opened it up?!"

"Yes."

"And voided the warranty?!"

"I couldn't use it 'til I'd opened it up, could I? The keyboard's inside when it's closed."

"Oh, I see what you mean. I thought you'd broken one of those warranty void seals!" I cry, faking the kind of relief some people pay large sums of money for.

"Ah, well, there was one seal I had to break, but that was the one over the 'open' latch."

"You mean you didn't get an engineer to install it?!" I gasp.

"You installed it!"

"No, I only put the software on it via Target-Mode SCSI upload. You need an engineer to provide the inherent firmware personality modes." (Dummy mode on.)

"But it's a bloody laptop, not a mainframe," he sniffles.

"Yes, but the engineer has to set the localization on the machine for you, and personalize the unit, passwords and stuff."

"I see. Well, you'd best do it."

"You're joking aren't you? They're not going to touch it with a broken warranty void sticker."

"Why not?"

"Because you could have set the localization to Peru, or something. That'll all have been stored in permanent non-volatile, doubly redundant, device-specific, static RAM." (Dummy mode cranked up.)

"What does that mean?"

"It means all the components have stored the fact that your machine is installed in Peru, Antarctica, or wherever it configured itself for. If that location conflicts with what the GPS tracker says..."

"My laptop's got a GPS inside it!" he cries excitedly.

"Yes, but if the hardware conflicts with what it says, well, it may as well be a machine with no motherboard, memory, floppy or CD-ROM - it won't ever go."

True, Ray Charles could have seen that coming, but who gives a toss - it worked.

"W...w...what should I do?" he burbles, contemplating the full horror of a whole day without his favorite game.

"Well, we could buy in the parts and replace them, and I could perform the engineer install. But it'd never be under warranty."

Quicker than you can whisper "executive decision" down a scrambled phone line, the boss has agreed to purchase the aforementioned items.

I, of course, slap all the old stuff back into the boss's machine - being sure to leave a couple of scratches on the casing and have a couple of screws left over so that it looks like a real engineer worked on it - then kick it into life (literally) and hand it back to the boss.

So everyone's happy. The boss has his new laptop, and the droid has brand spanking new hardware. I fire up the droid and get the PFY on the remote console to give my code a good, hard seeing-to. I've offered him a pint for every error he can detect.

"It won't go near walls," the PFY murmurs, without looking up from the console.

Dedication is his middle name. At AA meetings, anyway.

"No, it has an object back-up of a foot so people don't walk into it."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning it backs up a foot from any object."

"I see," he says, "and what about moving objects?"

"It keeps a foot away from them," I respond, anticipating his plan. "So you're not going to run it into a wall at top speed, nor is it going to let you run up to it and 'physically reboot' it the old-fashioned way."

"The thought never entered my head," the PFY replies, offended. "I was just wondering what it would do in this situation," he says, pointing at the video monitor showing the boss entering the lift with his new laptop.

"So you've not heard of a lag to prevent hysteresis?" the PFY burbles smugly (and drunkenly) at the pub later that evening.

"Uh-huh," I mumble, "where are we up to now?"

"Ah, I think we're up to where the droid backed up from the lift wall and into the boss, then backed up from the boss, over his laptop and into the lift wall. For the...11th time."

Ah...my job beats playing Minesweeper any day.

After complaints about his 'comforting bass line', the bastard makes sure the boss gets the message...very loud and clear

The boss comes in with a pasty look on his face which can only mean one thing - he's got to do something he doesn't want to.

"Er, I've had a complaint about you," he mumbles unhappily.

"Really?" I respond politely, while reaching under the table for the 2-wood golf club which I keep for special occasions.

"Yes, yes, but I'm not sure it's valid," he blurts, trying to hide himself deep in the rough.

"Really?" I ask, foregoing the 2-wood for a 6-iron, considering the lie of the conversation.

"Errm, no. You see, he's complained about your music."

"What music?" the PFY asks. "That music," he replies, indicating the surrounding air.

"That music?" I ask, waving a hand around in a similar manner while reconsidering my options.

"Yes, he's complaining that it's too loud."

"Too loud?" the PFY counters disgustedly. "But we can hardly hear it."

"I use it for relaxation," I murmur. "It keeps me calm in the face of adversity."

Now that the implied threat is on the table, there's nothing left for the boss to do but back down. Or risk life and limb in the pursuit of an unattainable goal.

"I know that you can hardly hear it, but the same doesn't go for the people downstairs. Anyway, I can't believe that it's relaxing."

So it's life and limb on the line then.

"Offspring is a very relaxing band," I say. "Yeah, it's the comforting bass line," the PFY chirps. "Besides," I add, "it's at a low level."

"NOT IN THE BLOODY COMPUTER ROOM IT ISN'T!" the boss shouts, losing patience.

"Well, no, but if we turned it down we wouldn't be able to hear it through the soundproof wall."

"The people on the floor below bloody well can, though! Why don't you put your stereo in here?"

"We tried that, but it kept popping the circuit breaker when we turned the volume past 3."

"THEN GET A NORMAL STEREO!"

"It IS a normal stereo," I gasp.

"NORMAL?"

"Yes, Notting Hill Carnival normal."

"Well it's not good enough."

"I want it TURNED DOWN!"

This just won't do. The PFY and I are relying on the 'comforting bass line' to work its magic on a rack of disks that should have been retired, but for the stupidity of management who want both zero downtime and reliable service.

So it's back to the drawing board again. I slap a set of airport-issue ear protectors on, having learnt from the PFY's mistakes (the poor bastard set off the water leak detector circuits when he wet his pants after pressing the 'play' button with the volume set at 6).

Entering the computer room, I notice the error of his ways - he'd left the volume at 6 when he stepped in his own by-products AND he hadn't switched the bass expand circuits on.

I note that the amp's power supply is 'running a little hot', as we in the trade say. Not good. I break off the volume knob (now pointing at the infamous '11' setting, then slip back into the control room, just in time to see a wild-eyed boss burst through the door.

"I TOLD YOU TO TURN IT DOWN, NOT UP!"

"I tried to turn it down," I blurt, "but the knob broke off!"

"Why didn't you turn it off then?!"

"Because the amp was so warm I thought it might trigger the heat sensors and release the halon."

So, of course, he is screwed. He KNOWS this is a 'tragic workplace accident' with his name scribbled all over it, and he's not going to bite.

"Well can't you switch the power off from the breakers outside?" he asks.

What a wimp. "We can try!" I cry, rushing to the breaker cupboard. "All the ceiling outlets in the front are on red phase, so it's got to be one of these."

30 seconds later..."Red?"

I thought they were blue," the PFY chips in.

A further 30 seconds later..."So, it's yellow then," the boss cries, in the face of a cacophony of outage alarms.

"Worth a crack!" I cry, flipping a switch.

"No, that's the old disk rack," the PFY cries from the observation window.

CLACK! "Disk rack again!"

"My mistake!" I blurt, innocently, and then flip the next switch.

"Right, let's see what the damage is," the boss cries, pushing past me to the computer room.

"I wouldn't..." I cry, but too late.

"You see the problem with kit like that," I explain to the PFY at the window, "is that turning off the power also shuts off the cooling fan, whereas switching it off at its power switch will leave the fan on until the unit has finished cooling."

"So the kit gets hotter?"

"Let's see what the judges have to say," I respond, nodding at one of the heat sensors.

A couple of short and fairly muffled 'whoop-whoops' later...

"Is the halon hold-off button still broken?" the PFY asks.

"Well, the judges' decision on that one is...final, by the looks of things. Still time for a quick wave though," I cry.

Of course, we let him out... eventually. After all, he's only new.

Someone has lifted some kit from under the BOFH's nose. Is it the boss? Is it the beancounters? No. There's a new Bastard in town.

I was mystified. The boss was giving me grief for missing kit, which was nothing unusual but this time I hadn't prepared my story. The simple reason was that it wasn't me who'd taken it. And this time it was a serious amount of kit that had gone.

Naturally, it's taken as read that a certain amount of spillage finds its way to BOFH Enterprises but very little actually disappears - the value tends to appear as miscellaneous lines in a beancounters' spreadsheet and besides, not much of this Unattributed Cost (as I believe the technical term is) finds its way into my pocket - mainly because it generally goes towards paying for a small holiday in Acapulco or somewhere equally humble.

"It's strange," I say to the PFY after we'd escaped from the boss's sanctum, our ears still ringing from the force of his invective. "It's strange that whoever is doing this has evaded all our carefully prepared traps (the electrified door handle and the strategically placed axe) and has managed to liberate some of our shiny new stock. He wasn't even put off by its careful labeling as 'defective'."

There were three possibilities: we'd had a break-in by a thief who knew exactly what he was looking for; the boss had woken up to the possibility that there was serious remuneration in 'defective' stock; or there was another Bastard somewhere on the premises.

I discounted the first possibility. Not only had none of our alarms gone off but an outside tea-leaf would surely have taken the color TV (sorry, the High-Definition Multimedia Receiving Apparatus) that the PFY and I use during downtime or when the Test Match is on (which seem to coincide with remarkable regularity).

"Could it be the boss?" asks the PFY. "Do you think that the bollocking he's just given us was all for show?"

"Impossible. The boss is not just dim, he's 20 watt. I understand that he needs an A-Z to find his way home at night."

"And even then he gets lost," says the PFY, alluding to the night that the boss foolishly came for a drink with the boys, only to discover that extra-strength Polish white spirit is undetectable in strong lager (and after three of them so is shoe polish). "Still, it was only a £30 taxi ride from the wilds of east London."

That, incredible as it seemed, left only the possibility of one of my fellow workers, a breed for whom technical sophistication means changing the text color in Office.

But which one? It was obviously no one in marketing - they scarcely had the intelligence to turn a door handle the right way. It was obviously not anyone in sales as they'd hardly be elsewhere while the pubs were open and not sober enough after they'd closed. The beancounters were a

strong possibility - those Unattributed Costs were really getting under their skin - but they'd have chosen a more subtle revenge. It couldn't have been anyone from admin and building services...

Something clicked. There was a new guy there who a few weeks before had gone round asking questions, "just to test the security of the building". Naturally I hadn't given him the right answers but how could I have been so stupid...

Now I come to think about it, this guy seemed to be a cut above the rest but then so would an orangutan. The only question was how to get the kit back, or, failing that, a contribution to the Bastard Holiday Fund.

Seeking inspiration, I idly flicked through the outgoing post log. One foreign-bound item caught my eye and I smiled.

The next day, I went down to building services and happened to overhear Kevin talking. By chance, he was dropping some big words like 'screen' and 'keyboard' so I knew we had our man. It was time for a phone call.

Back at mission control, I flicked on the intercom and heard Kevin's voice come over loud and clear, as a deep foreign voice said: "Mr. Kevin?"

"Yeah, who's this?"

"Just call me Stefan. It's about this consignment of tights that you delivered to us."

"That's right, you got 'em?"

"We have, that's just the point. I was given to understand that...er, certain other goods were being delivered."

"But...but..."

"I hope you realize that the last person who double-crossed us is now part of a motorway infrastructure."

"But...but..."

"I'm sure you want to avoid any misunderstandings. So, if you return the sum we gave you plus, say, £500 for incidental expenses, we can avoid any unfortunate repercussions. Shall we say that you deposit the money behind the dustbin shed by 12pm today?"

There was a strangled "yes".

I switched the intercom off. "Your cousin's very good isn't he? I said to the PFY. "I'm sure he'll go a long way in drama college."

"Come on," he replied. "There's time for a quick game of Doom before we collect our winnings, er... Unattributed Costs."

It takes a bastard to catch a bastard.

When the BOFH bugged the boss's office he wasn't to know the kit he'd installed would double up as a vehicle to crack the head beancounters' nut

The PFY and I are in the office teasing users by toggling their switch ports whenever their pop-client opens a connection to the mail server when an urgent alarm starts ringing on the network monitor.

"BSD?" the PFY murmurs, "What the hell does BSD stand for?" Double-clicking on the icon concerned, he continues: "It's in the boss's office."

Sensing my suppressed panic, he returns to his original tack. "So what the hell's a BSD?"

"It's a new tailor-made piece of kit I conceived and installed," I reply.

"It's a network device, then?"

"Yes, in that it delivers an SNMP trap in response to certain predetermined criteria occurring."

"Criteria no doubt linked with its cryptic acronym?"

"Precisely."

"An acronym that stands for?" the PFY sighs, losing patience.

"Bullshit detection."

"Bullshit detection?"

"Yeah, bullshit detection. I've decided that I can't be arsed spending a couple of hours a day sifting through the Boss's office conversation tapes just to see if he's planning something, so I've developed a piece of hardware and software to do it for me."

"Which is?" the PFY asks, his curiosity peaking.

"Ah, a bit of voice recognition software that parses conversations for keywords used in close proximity to each other."

"Keywords, like what?"

"'Purchase', 'buy' or 'invest in' - in conjunction with 'new technology', 'updated software' etc., plus lots of other little bits and pieces that can only mean trouble."

"You mean words like 'maintenance budget'?"

"The very same. There's no legitimate reason why the boss should be talking about that unless he's going to increase it, and that's unlikely to happen following my efforts yesterday to migrate those beancounters from that archaic tower subsystem they use for hot back-ups."

"Your efforts to migrate users ... Oh, you mean when you set the machine on fire and pushed it out of the third-floor window?"

"I most certainly did not set the machine on fire! That was spontaneous hardware combustion - just like the human kind the tabloids talk about. Besides, throwing it out the window was the safest thing to do given that there was no fire extinguisher at hand."

"There wasn't one three floors below either, was there?" the PFY asks snidely.

"I don't suppose there was, but I can't see what that..."

"When the chunky, burning machine plunged through the open sun-roof of the head beancounter's vehicle, which just happened to be parked there - setting it on fire."

"Coincidence, pure and simple."

"Coincidence?"

"Yes, and I resent ... actually, is there a point to all this?"

"No, no," the PFY counters innocently. "Just asking. So, this bullshit detection, what's it running on? Not a piece of kit that the boss is going to discover - or discover missing from where it should be?"

"Well, that's the beauty of it. Because he's got so many machines in his office, he had a ventilation fan installed, which just so happens to be the cooling that other tower machine users have already been migrated from."

"Not that monstrous chunk of iron from the sixth floor that you said was using parts from Chernobyl and expelling dangerous levels of radioactive waste?!"

"The very same."

"I never thought they'd buy that."

"Well, not at first," I sigh, "But once I'd taken that black marker to the chest X-rays in the med centre they couldn't wait to get rid of it"

"True," the PFY grudgingly admits. "So, how'd you get it into the ceiling?"

"Well, Janitor George gave me a hand lifting it into the roof as he wanted the real fan for his bathroom at home."

"A fair exchange," the PFY says. "So, what's the warning mean?"

"Well, it's a simple traffic threshold MIB: the more bullshit in the office, the more network traffic the machine reports. That way, no-one will give it a second thought."

"So what's it up to? What's the machine's owner name field say?"

"100 percent and Dave C."

"So, that means Dave C is in the boss's office talking up a storm about hardware that we should be buying, money that he should be spending etc..."

"He's a borderline DIY geek, isn't he?" the PFY asks warily.

"Correct. Rumor has it he installed his own keyboard once, but you know how users talk."

"But is it bad?"

"Oh, yes," I respond, leaning past him to point at the display. "See the 30-second average level? That's really the boss's level of disagreement."

"But it's at zero!"

"Meaning?"

"He's going to let Dave spend our budget."

We both break for the door at the same time to steer the boss away from the foolish.

But before we can get into place the God of Computing acts.

Later, the PFY and I piece together what had happened.

"So, apparently, Dave tried to fix the noisy aircon fan by prodding the roofing tile with the boss's umbrella, upsetting the BSD machine's delicate balance on the rafter and causing it to plummet through the roof and strike the DIY cowboy," the PFY finishes.

Now that's justice for you.

Web-only Episode: Christmas Eve, 1998

He was dead all right.

"You've gone too far this time" said the PFY breathlessly.

"Well, I guess I just under-estimated the amount of power going through the doorknob."

It was Christmas Eve and the seasonal prank had just gone slightly wrong. Honestly, Old Ebenezer Bastard had tried the old "electrified door handle for the computer room" trick a dozen times before and it had all been good seasonal fun. Still, this wasn't the first manager to die on him and it was sure not to be the last.

Ebenezer must have stayed a bit longer than usual in the pub that evening - this kind of event does tend to shock you a bit and he needed a few to steady the nerves. Of course, the fact that the young beancounter felt 'obliged' to buy him drinks all evening helped - and all because Ebenezer had happened to mention something about video footage from the office party. So corny, but so effective.

Anyway, the drink must have been sitting heavily on his stomach when he got back to his flat, as he could have sworn that the door knocker changed shape to look like the face of his old boss (before the scorch marks disfigured it, that is).

Putting the effects down to the ten extra pints of Brainfrazzle he'd had, he ignored the door knocker and went up the stairs. But there was a restlessness about him that night. In truth, it had been a long time since he'd enjoyed Christmas. He hated all the false bonhomie and the pleasant chit-chat from people with whom he hadn't anything in common; he hated the way that people spent vast sums on their kids when that money could have been quite easily diverted into the Bastard Holiday Fund. What was worse, some of his work colleagues expected him to buy drinks for them.

Even young Cratchit, his PFY, had been affected and was spending his days wistfully dreaming about Denise from the pool and a few quick snogs under the mistletoe. The young fool even wanted him to join him for a few drinks on Christmas Day. What did he have to celebrate, on his salary?

"Bah, humbug." Ebenezer said loudly to himself, as he heated up the instant dinner that would represent his one solid meal that day.

As he went to bed in that sparsely furnished, unheated room that he called home he saw something in the corner: this time there was no mistaking it. It was definitely the shape of his erstwhile Boss but there was a horrible, clanking noise that seemed to fill the room and make Ebenezer shrink with terror.

"Ebenezer Bastard" came the voice, and though it was recognizably his boss's there was a touch of the underworld about it.

"Ebenezer Bastard" repeated the voice. "I have been condemned to a terrible place, where men of unspeakable wickedness live out their days.

Ebenezer breathed a sigh of relief. "So you're not dead after all, you've just gone to work for Microsoft. I wonder..."

"Silence" thundered the apparition and the clanking got louder. "I speak of a place where you surely will be condemned for eternal torment."

"What do you want with me, spirit?" stammered Ebenezer, finding that the effect of ten pints of extra-strong lager was diminishing somewhat.

"This night you will be visited by three spirits: the Ghost of Tech Support Past; the Ghost of Tech Support Present; and the ghost of Tech Support Yet to Come. Listen to them - there is time yet to repent."

"Spirit," said Ebenezer. "What is that rattling sound I keep hearing?"

"You mean this?" said the shade, shaking what appeared to be long tail.

Ebenezer Bastard peered through the gloom. He could dimly perceive a chain but tied to it were all manner of devices that had made his life easier: there was the claw hammer that was such an excellent "reconfiguring" tool, there was the anvil that he'd enthusiastically "tested" PCs on, there were power staplers galore, there was every item under the sun that had made his life easier.

"I see you recognize some of them" said the apparition with a grimace. "I used all these tools when I was a young bastard. Now my crimes have caught up with me and I must drag my tools around with me for eternity. But be warned, this chain is long and the burden is onerous but the chain that is being forged for you is already twice the length and three times as heavy."

In emphasis he shook the chain until all the objects leaped up and down and the whole room seemed to rattle.

"I must depart now but remember, three spirits..." and with a low moan he disappeared.

Ebenezer's courage returned.

"Bah humbug, ghosts indeed. That beer must have been stronger than I thought".

And with that thought he staggered off to bed and fell asleep without undressing.

It was just after midnight when he awoke and peered into the gloom. What appeared to be a small child was hovering at the foot of the bed.

Suddenly, the moon moved from behind the clouds and Ebenezer could see that it was no child but an old man of child's shape, dressed in what appeared to be a white tunic. As his eyes got used to the gloom, he discerned that it was an old freebie T-shirt with CP/M emblazoned on the

front. The apparition's legs and feet were bare but round his middle was tied some thin Ethernet cable.

"Are you the Ghost of Tech Support Past?" asked Ebenezer.

"I am," said the spirit.

"Long past?"

"No, your past."

The ghost waved his hand and suddenly the walls of the flat disappeared. Ebenezer and the spirit found themselves in a busy office, where a Christmas party was in full swing. The disco was booming out, sales people were chasing secretaries with bunches of mistletoe, the chief bean counter was slumped in a corner, the marketing manager was regaling the HR manager with the tales of the last campaign before last. The air was filled with the sound of laughter, shouting, chatter, breaking glass and a thumping disco beat: in short, a typical office party.

"It's fun isn't it," said the spirit, "but isn't there one person not joining in?"

"There is," said Ebenezer.

Down in the bowels of the building a solitary person was still in the computer room. Methodically working through the personnel records of the entire staff (the HR password having long been discovered); the young Ebenezer was ensuring that his Christmas overtime was not being wasted.

"Were you not invited to the party?" asked the spirit.

"No," said Ebenezer. "Not since the year when the fire alarm accidentally went and the sprinklers all came on. And of course, all the booze disappeared. For some reason they seemed to think it was my fault, just because I'd been seen with the alarm system technical manual that day. Miserable ingrates, after all I'd done for them."

Suddenly the vision vanished and Ebenezer found himself back in his flat again, his mind still filled with the wonder of what he'd seen.

He heard a noise from another room and peered round the corner. The room was filled with light and on a pile of PCs sat a jolly looking gentleman. His copious stomach seemed to fill half the room and his beard - for he appeared to be more beard than face - filled the other half.

"Are you the Ghost of Tech Support Present?" said Ebenezer.

The spirit laughed his assent.

"Take my hand," he said, "and let us look at the rest of the world this Christmas."

Suddenly, they were hovering over the City. Time and time again they appeared outside computer support rooms where teams of workers toiled diligently to solve problems as soon as

they appeared. They worked with smiles on their faces, singing along to the boom boxes parked in the corner of their rooms.

At Megabank there was a particular tricky problem. "That's an easy one to solve," thought Ebenezer, "pull the mains switch and just say that there's a network outage. And because it's Christmas it can't be put right for a couple of days... and you still earn the Christmas bonus."

Instead he watched open-mouthed as his counterpart punched in the password and worked systematically trying to sort out the problem.

"Standards are slipping," he thought.

But suddenly, the scene changed. They were in a pub and his PFY was just buying a round of drinks.

"Here's to Christmas," he said to Denise, cheerfully raising his glass.

"And to us," she giggled.

"And to absent friends," said the PFY. "Here's to old Ebenezer."

"What, that old misery guts," said Denise. "I've never known someone hate the world so much. I wish he'd leave the company, why can't they get rid of him - no-one can stand him?"

"Well, he knows too much about what people have been up to. I certainly don't think the chairman wants all the details of his trip to Amsterdam coming out. Come on, where's your Christmas charity?"

Reluctantly, she returned the toast and the conversation turned to matters more interesting to young people.

In the distance, Ebenezer saw a shrouded figure approach. From the folds of his cape, a long, bony finger protruded and beckoned Ebenezer to him.

"Are you the Ghost of Tech Support Future that was promised to me?" he said.

The ghost nodded and again signaled Ebenezer to follow.

They trudged through the darkness until they found themselves outside a funeral directors' office.

Two undertakers were busily engaged in putting the finishing touches to a coffin.

"Good riddance to him I say," said one, with scarce regard for the sanctity of his profession.

"Though he'd never bleedin' die," said the other, with even less regard.

"When's the funeral?"

"Don't think it matters, there'll scarcely be anyone attending. Perhaps they'll just throw him in the ground and be done with it." They both cackled hysterically.

"Who are they talking about?" said Ebenezer.

The spirit pointed his finger and suddenly the coffin lid flew open. Aghast, the old misanthrope saw his own features.

He sat bolt upright in bed and saw the first glimmers of day coming through his curtains. It had all been a dream. And yet the events of the night had left him with a strange feeling.

He put on his shoes and dashed round to Cratchit, his PFY. He furiously banged on the door and demanded admittance.

It was a bleary-eyed PFY who let him in.

"Whassamatter?"

"I've just had the most amazing experience!"

"Don't tell me," chortled the PFY. "You've met three spirits like that bloke in the book and you're going to turn over a new leaf."

"Bollocks to that. In the long run, we're all dead anyway, might as well have some fun before we go. No, I've found out the admin password for the Megabank system, come let me show you how a real bastard behaves....."

BOFH 1999

BOFH '99. Too Quiet?

It's quiet. Possibly too quiet - The kind of quiet you get when you shove a thick chunk of copper wire in a circuit breaker, a nail in the phase circuit breaker and a bolt in the floor circuit breaker... then drop a screwdriver down one of the ventilation holes of the mainframe's power supply.

I make my way carefully through the emergency-lit computer room to my office, my only detour being a quick circuit breaker replacement tour and a stop at the bin to drop off a badly scarred screwdriver.

I always prefer to start the year off with a bang - or, to be more precise, a series of loud hums, a crackle or two, and a muffled BOOM from the sub-basement.

After all, it's just good manners to let the great unwashed know just who's still at the helm of this operation.

The PFY, meantime, is on holiday, exercising his Christmas bonus to its maximum potential. After all, it's only a matter of time before the Boss realizes that there's a duplicate of his credit card out there (again) and calls up the card company.

I did my bit for the PFY's R&R by pushing the Boss's latest credit card statement, envelope and all, into the shredder. Apparently he was under the misguided impression that receiving mail at work is far safer than getting it at his dockside apartment drop box... a mistake that's likely to cost him.

Speaking of the Boss's mail, it's about time to distribute all his waylaid Christmas vendor freebies among the IT troops in a manner not altogether unlike a modern day IT Robin Hood.

"What? Is that it?" a particularly ungrateful antipodean contractor (who couldn't find his bum with a mirror and a torch without a 1:1 scale map) asks after I hand him a bottle of red wine that has better disinfectant than drinking properties.

"Sorry?"

"It's a little, er, cheap, isn't it?" he snuffles.

The things you hear when the PFY isn't around with a nailgun.

"Gee, sorry Mike!" I cry. "I guess it's not like home where you get your pick of the flock for the night as a Christmas bonus."

He lets the slur pass, and grudgingly accepts the bottle, not realizing just how well I remember the time, after an agency knees-up, when he dropped me off at the farthest tube station from my destination...three minutes AFTER the Tube stopped running.

Trusting no one, he stashes the bottle in his desk-side footlocker, giving me the chance to stuff a large piece of foam packing over the cooling inlet at the back of his desktop machine.

Thermal overheating time bomb set, I wander off to distribute more New Year cheer.

And not a moment too soon, as the power is restored and the building springs back into life.

When I've run out of blocks of foam and cheap bottles of wine, I grab some of the good stuff and go on my REAL goodwill rounds, dropping off gifts to the telephone operators, the cleaning staff, and, lastly, the building maintenance guy. Know what palms to grease and when - that's my motto.

Having ensured that no one's going to investigate my long-distance phone bill, find the Boss's shredded credit card statements or wonder what's protected by the Armageddon-proof lock on the door marked 'Plant Room No3' in the basement, I return to my office.

As luck would have it, the Boss is waiting for me there with an annoyed expression on his face. It's only a 'generally-annoyed' expression, which means that he's probably not found out about his credit card yet, let alone me calling up his credit company and cranking his limit up so far he'd get nose bleeds just thinking about it.

"What's this about you blocking up the cooling vent of Mike's machine?" he asks.

Bastard!

"Oh, that - it's not sponge, it's...noise damping material."

"?..."

"Noise damping - the material has a gaseous porosity which allows air flow but reduces sound output by a factor of around 10 decibels per megalitre of vacuum-rated European Standard air."

"Err, really? So it's just to cut down noise?"

"Of course!"

"Hang on a minute!..."

I suppose it was a little too good to be true...

"Yes?"

"Why haven't you installed any on my machine?"

I don't believe it...

"Oh, I was just getting round to it - your one is in that old monitor box over there."

He ferrets around in the aforementioned box before pulling out a bit of packing.

"This? It's a bit of machine packing."

"No, it's a sound-reducing, air-cleaning filter."

"Then why has it got 'recycle this packing carefully' printed on the side of it?"

"Because... it was packed in old newspaper and they couldn't print over the top of it."

"Oh... so how do I use it?"

"Well, you make sure that it's hard up against the fan inlet so that no, er, 'unfiltered' air can get through."

"Right, well, I'll let Mike know then," he burbles as he wanders out to destroy his machine.

"No, no!" I cry. "Leave that to me - I'll sort him out."

And sort him out I will.

BOFH '99. Hooray for Payday. Or maybe not...

Thursday. Pay Day. I love Pay Days. In fact, work is always better on a pay day. People are nicer, complaints are rarer, bank managers are friendlier - a guy could get used to this.

A bastard, however, could lose the touch - that finely honed reflex that enables him (or her) to sort the wheat from the chaff (user-wise). Complacency is the enemy.

Still, the brown envelope containing a check is a useful reminder of what we do this for. Smiling happily, I fumble with the self-adhesive seal on the envelope (the glue must be the same stuff they use to hold tiles onto the space shuttle), before losing my patience and ripping the envelope open from the other end.

Ahhh!, The smell of a freshly printed check...the feel of it as it slips out of the protective environment of brown paper. The temporary but overpowering feeling of goodwill for all things beancountry as I note the aesthetically pleasing sight of my company's name laser printed on the top line, right above the amount of...WHAT THE HELL!?

THE THIEVING BEANCOUNTER BASTARDS HAVE UNDERPAID ME!

I have another look, just to make sure I've got it right. "The beancounters have underpaid me!"

"You're joking!?"

"I'm not! Look, they've rounded down the amount!"

"By how much?"

"27p!"

"Hang on, you're going to maim someone - possibly permanently - over 27p?"

"It's not that it's 27p, it's the principle of the thing. STEALING from me! It's unheard of! It's the thin end of the wedge - before you know it, they'll be riding the lifts again. They'll be questioning your expense claims, talking to you about business plans at lunchtime, and..."

About 10 minutes later I come to, with a rather nasty bruise on my head and a pain in my side.

"Sorry about that," the PFY calls from behind the door of the computer room, waving one of our low-output (aka 'warning') cattle prods.

He must have zapped me while I was under the influence of theft-crisis. "That's OK," I respond, "perfectly acceptable under the circumstances."

I go to let myself into the computer room to assure him there are no hard feelings, only to find my access card's been given 'lock-out' status.

"Sorry about that, too, but you know what you get like," the PFY calls through the safety glass.

"Of course!" I cry "No harm done," as I sneakily reach for my special reserve access card, noted in the database as a 'Fire and Civil Emergency' access card, which no one but me knows exi...

"Got that one, too..." the PFY murmurs apologetically.

You've got to give him credit, he's a chip off the old block.

I move away from the door to see if he's going to come out when he thinks it's safe, but he's not that stupid, either.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. I set my rubbish bin on fire, then reverse the direction of the office ('remodeled') air-conditioner so that it's blowing air into the computer room instead of stealing air from it.

The halon 10-second warning goes off and the PFY rushes to the hold-off switch - the real one (disguised as an intercom pager button) - and not the decoy we use to frighten contractors.

I have him right where I want him. While the smoke detectors still sense smoke the halon system is still activated. While he holds the button down, the halon countdown is paused. Currently at seven seconds...

I hold the rubbish bin up to the viewing window and throw in some more paper and a back-up tape (to keep it nice and smoky) so the PFY can see I'm serious.

Out of earshot, he scribbles a quick note on the wall. "You could be right, 27p is an insult!"

Smiling, I pour coffee into the bin to extinguish the flames, then sit down at my desk. The PFY emerges from the computer room once the halon clear has been signaled.

"So, what are we going to do?" he asks.

"Well, I thought some form of example has to be made. Firm - but not, of course, brutal."

"You mean chili sauce in the eye-rinse bottle, laxative in the water fountain or glue on the bog seats?"

"Well..."

"All three?"

"Warmer..."

"Route their traffic via the 3-Phase mains 'network'?"

"Almost there..."

"Put indelible dye in the rooftop water reservoir and trigger the sprinkler system on their floor?"

"Yes...to all of the above."

And so it was that half-an-hour later, the PFY's up a ladder, pouring a crimson cement dye concentrate into the reservoir, when...BDZZZT!!

To his credit, the PFY makes no sound as the cattle prod takes effect. Apart from the splash of course.

After I've fished him out, I disable his card, the halon system and the card known to the database as 'Installation Card (Disabled)'.

What goes around comes around.

BOFH '99. Disaster Recovery Blues..

The boss is going on about Disaster Recovery again, like the company's going to go to the wall if one of the buildings collapses in an earthquake or something. My comment that an earthquake during work hours might actually improve the company's performance did not generate the expected chuckle of assent.

One more for the seismic therapy in other words. And, as part of his enquiries, he wants to inspect all our DR planning and see just how well prepared we are for the eventuality.

I could tell him the truth, which is that we're about as prepared for disaster as Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid, but that would cause a lot of very unnecessary concern.

Not to put too fine a point on it, I told him a load of old bollocks. Certainly enough to satisfy middle-management types in any case: "Oh well, we're completely prepared with off-site media and media inventories - back-up recovery plans, disaster recovery agreements with hardware manufacturers, along with three 'cold-site' venues in our distant offices to run up a recovery system in about 36 hours, give or take half a day or so," I burble.

"Add to that our redundant cabling links, agreements for emergency cable and satellite service from the major carriers, the network side of the recovery would be the simplest part. The slowest bit would be reading the tapes into the various server machines. Client and desktop machines would be added on an as-needed basis, depending on the employees concerned and their immediate importance to the company plan."

"Excellent!" the boss cries, eyes shining with delight. "Well, I suppose all that's left is for a quick tour of the facilities!"

So now I'm up a thinwire without a terminator. The boss is bound to find out sooner or later that it's all bollocks and demand to know why.

The PFY notices my air of resignation (to having to listen to the boss rabbit on about 'professional integrity' and not job evacuation) and asks what the problem is. I fill him in on all the sordid details.

"We could just take him to one of the cold site centers and tell him that they all look like that, then get the off-site media bloke to say that they don't permit site visits," he suggests.

"The media guy might work, but the cold site's a goner."

"Too cold to be fired up?" the PFY asks.

"No, too hired out to other tenants."

"What?!"

"Well, they're normally right in the heart of the business districts. So I usually rent the space to some other company and pour the dosh to a more deserving project - in this case boosting the bandwidth of the outgoing network connections."

"Uncharacteristically altruistic of you," the PFY murmurs.

"Yeah well...But it's all over now. He's bound to..."

"Not necessarily!" the PFY shouts with satisfaction, with what looks like a glimmering of a plan in his eye.

Two days later, the boss joins me in the back of a limousine for the trip to our site. "Bloody dark in here," the boss mutters. "Can't even see out the windows."

"Yes," I ad lib. "This is a loaner from the Media Storage place - they take no precautions as they have important clients."

"Oh," the boss utters smugly, self-importance boosted. "So, where are we going?"

"We're going to the nearest site, which is about two hours away. I thought we'd tour one site a day if that's OK with you."

Two hours later we glide down a ramp into the sub-basement parking area of the first DR centre. I help the boss into a newly refurbished freight elevator (security reasons) and we drop a level to the DR centre.

"Reminds me of somewhere," the boss mumbles, slightly more confused than his normal operating level.

"We got the DR centers to look familiar so that relocation and orientation is easier on the staff."

"Really? That's quite a good idea!"

We enter the DR computer room and have a quick look around. "It's a bit quiet isn't it?" the boss asks.

"Well, cold sites are typically only fired up in an emergency - mainly to save power and maintenance costs."

"Of course."

The rest of the tour goes smoothly and we make our way back to the office.

"Where to tomorrow?" the boss asks.

"I thought we might leave early and get to the Welsh Centre...pick you up at your place at 6am if that's OK."

Once the boss has gone I tap on the driver's window. The PFY's visage appears as the smoked glass descends.

"Wales tomorrow," I murmur. "Move the kit around a bit, put some Welsh maps up with colored pins at strategic points, and leave a box of leeks in the freight elevator. Oh, and for Pete's sake, get a bit more of the city in, will you? Two hundred times round the block is just asking for trouble!"

Right, now to translate some machine names into imitation Welsh for the boss's edification (i.e. Clomputhenay, etc.).

This DR Stuff - it's all work, work, work!

BOFH '99. Back to the Helldesk?!?

However, there is little philanthropy in this act, but more opportunity for a little hell-raising. I'm so bloody nice, I deserve a medal! Out of the kindness of my heart, I have volunteered to look after the helldesk in their time of need. It appears that thanks to winter chills and staff holidays, the helldesk is chronically understaffed.

The PFY, bless him, is cut from the same selfless cloth as myself and has offered to keep watch for - I mean, assist me in looking after - the users.

Nothing much has changed since we were here last. Well, it is daytime now, and I'm not carrying a sack and a crowbar, but apart from that it's pretty much the same.

"This," I say to the PFY, "is a telephone. You've seen people talking at them before, and now it's your turn to give it a go."

I ignore the PFY's hand gesture which, under normal circumstances, would denote something to the effect that "you have a sexually fulfilling relationship with your right hand" (which, incidentally, I have interpreted as, "I am in desperate need of a damn good kicking - perhaps you could see your way clear to organizing me one in the near future?") and get back to the job at hand.

"You take lines 1, 3 and 5. I'll take 2, 4, and 6," I snap.

"What? I thought we were just going to divert all the calls to the Religious Thought-for-the-day message line and rifle through their desktop machines for anything useful or incriminating!" the PFY whines petulantly.

"A complete waste of time," I respond, "since I swapped all the good hardware with the shite stuff in the comms-closet PCs to allow us to have a multi-user Quake II challenge from any floor in the building."

"You mean we can't even play Quake on these things?"

"Afraid not. These machines would be lucky to load ANSI graphics, let alone SVGA stuff."

"But..." the PFY pouts.

"No buts, we're going to use our time profitably by getting to know our users once more. We've been far too isolated from them this year - it's time for us to renew our ties!"

All this altruism is making me feel a little queasy, but I gulp down the nausea and continue.

"RIGHT!" I shout. "Synchronize excuse calendars, page 47, Hypotropic Osmotic Leeching."

The PFY's eyes glaze over momentarily as his attention-span safety cut-out trips, but he's back with me in record time.

"I'll just call it H.O.L," he murmurs, blinking rapidly as full consciousness returns.

"Alrighty! Let the games commence!" I cry.

"Games? What games?" the PFY asks.

"You'll find out..."

"I still don't know why the boss didn't veto this," the PFY cries. "I didn't think he'd be stupid enough to go for it."

"He wasn't," I answer cheerily, "but he's been transferred to the Leeds office after a little incident earlier in the week."

"Oh yes?" the PFY asks, curiosity piqued.

"It was tragic."

"REALLY?" the PFY asks, interested.

"It appears that he may have disgraced himself at that Harassment Procedures meeting that the US people made all management types go to."

"The one they imported all those Huggy Feelies from head office for?"

"He didn't say he thought it was a How-To course?"

"No - apparently he had something with him at the meeting that didn't go down well. In fact, that's perhaps the best way to describe it."

"You mean he had a..."

Apparently so. He made some wild claim that someone must've chucked Viagra in his coffee, but I ask you..."

"Weird," the PFY concurs. "Speaking of which, coffee?"

"Yeah, but stay away from the 'instant decaf' till I've had time to dispose of it."

"You complete..."

Our conversation is interrupted by the first call of the day. "Hello, how can I help?" I ask in tones that can only bode goodwill to all comers.

"Hi, my machine keeps losing the time, and my workmate says that it's probably the battery inside the machine!"

"How old is the machine?" I ask.

"Three months."

"Normally batteries don't fail that soon," I respond.

"I think the problem may be that when your machine boots, it sets its time from our network time server, only it's setting the wrong time because your time zone setting isn't GMT."

"Well... >clickety< >clickety< YES! It's set to Winnipeg! Where on earth is Winnipeg?"

"I believe it's in Canada," I respond knowingly.

"Thanks very much!"

"You're welcome!" I respond, then hang up.

The PFY meantime, is gobsmacked.

"What was that?" he cries in disbelief.

"Oh, didn't I tell you? That's the game. Winner takes all - first one to crack has to shout the beers on Friday."

"It's not much of a game. Doesn't sound like much fun!"

"What, and MONOPOLY IS?!"

"Well, no, but it's not that sort of game!"

"I think you're CHICKEN!" I taunt.

"No way!" the PFY shouts. "You're used to it."

"All right, I'll take line 1 as well, giving me twice as many potential callers. Happy now?"

The PFY nods, then grins as Line 1 lights up.

Perhaps I've bitten off a little more than I can chew...

BOFH '99. Omniscience?

So I'm in a downtown cafe, grabbing a moment's respite (well, a couple of hours, let's be honest) from the maddening crowd - with Mission Control's phone diverted to my unlisted cellphone number, when the phone rings.

"Hello, Networks and Systems," I cry pleasantly, in the manner of one still competing for the 'who can be the nicest to users' competition...

...which I'm certainly not, having won off the PFY by performing a lot of 'space reclamation' on the data servers then leaving sound-byte constructed voicemail messages 'from the PFY' claiming all responsibility and no remorse for doing it. The ill-will towards him at the moment is such that the Boss thought it best he take a little time off.

"Where are you?" the Boss asks, voice muffled by the sounds of traffic from outside my current location.

"In the machine room!" I cry, as indignantly.

"Really? Then what's that noise in the background? I can hear cars!"

"Yes, yes, that's just the Multimedia Demo package that starts every time this new bloody server gets booted," I ad lib. "I'd pull the speakers out but we need them for initial de-bug sounds."

My output bullshitometer is registering three out of 10, so I feel that this excuse will probably suffice for the boss.

"Oh," he responds, confirming my suspicions. "Well I need to get into the computer room as I'm showing some new employees our computing operations. So if you could just pop round and let us in..."

Now call me old-fashioned, but the LAST thing I want is the Holiest of Holies exposed to drooling half-wits with no idea of how or why computers work.

Being a forward-thinking type, I'd planned for the access eventuality by locking out both Mission Control and the Computer Room from all but myself.

"I'm afraid there's some problem with the electronic lock system and I can't seem to get the doors to release," I tell him. "So it seems I'm locked in and you're locked out."

"I see," the Boss murmurs slowly, possibly getting a nasal indication of a rodent in close proximity. "I'll just try the emergency release."

A couple of loud bangs later, the boss picks up the phone, wheezing heavily. "The BLOODY GLASS won't break!" he gasps. "What sort of emergency access is this?"

"I don't know, but it sounds good for security," I mention, knowing that this is bound to get his back up.

"I'm going to call in Building Maintenance to get to the bottom of this - you just hang on in there!" he cries decisively, obviously wanting to make a good impression on all the newbie's with his ability to fix difficult situations.

Which means I'm going to have to go back to work after all, as there's only so long that the armored glass and reverse-threaded access panel screws are going to keep the maintenance guys at bay.

I grab a cab and slip into the building the back way, sneak out the freight elevator and end up behind the Boss and a set of like-minded technical in-breds whose combined IQ wouldn't even make a supermodel's waist measurement.

"Hi!" I blurt, thinking of the PR value of being nice to potential users.

"Where'd you come from?" the Boss asks, gesturing to the buildings bloke that he should keep on drilling now that he's about half an inch into the armored glass (only another inch to go).

"The computer room!" I cry. "I managed to get the back door open by swiping my card through it repeatedly - probably some read error, or something."

I make a big deal of blowing into the swipe reader, then try my card in the door. It opens, of course, and I surreptitiously reverse the lockout on the doors, then let the crowd into the computer room.

"This is the err..." the Boss starts, noticing that I've come along for the tour, too, and am looking extremely interested in what he's going to say. "Err...tell you what, why don't we let someone from the front line fill you in!"

Suffice to say my presentation was a resounding success - especially after the Boss demonstrated workplace danger by stepping onto one of the floor tiles we leave loosely supported (to stop maintenance contractors from straying) and plunging face first into a machine rack.

On the way out, one of the huggy-feelies from Human Resources meets me and gives me the boss's invite to the 'welcome to the company' drinks that afternoon, seeing how the Boss is probably not going to be able to attend...

And just when you think life can't get any better, the PFY rings to say he knows what happened and that he'll RELUCTANTLY keep his word - a bet's a bet - later that night.

Mental note number two is to swap drinks with him the moment his attention is diverted at the pub - the thought of a laxative overdose doesn't appeal at all.

BOFH '99. Private Health...

Out of the kindness of their cold hearts, company management have allowed us contractors to join waged and salaried staff in being eligible (at a reasonably hefty premium, of course) to join the company Health Care Plan.

Sod that. I should get a DISCOUNT for all the work I've put their way. If it wasn't for me, the company wouldn't HAVE a health plan - or at least not one with such a comprehensive Personal Accident Insurance section anyway...

"But it's dirt cheap!" the PFY claims, "and it's got personal accident cover which gives you unlimited time in a private hospital."

"Where no doubt they give you chili enemas until you manage to discharge yourself," I respond, all too familiar with how good 'good deals' really are.

"No, they've got pictures," he cries, completely taken in by the shiny brochures. "Just look!"

I have to admit the pictures do look impressive, with large stately hospital rooms, battalions of neatly uniformed staff and sumptuous TV-dinner banquets, but I've seen far too many computer brochures to be taken in by advertising.

"It's just advertising bumph," I remind the PFY. "None of it's true."

"It might be," he murmurs.

"It's one of the commandments of computing!" I cry. "Never trust the brochure until you've had the covers off!"

"But how can we see what it's like if we don't sign up?"

"Sign up?" the Boss cries, roaring into the room. "You mean the Health Plan? I've been a member for years."

"But what are the hospitals like - have you been to one?"

"Can't say I have," the Boss replies, bending down to pick up the 19-inch flat screen monitor I've indicated is his. "But when I do, you'll be the fir..."

Halfway through his lift, I pop the paper bag that I'd been holding. In shock, the boss shoots to attention a little quicker than he has for a while. "Agh!" he cries, dropping the monitor and clutching his stomach tightly.

Oops.

Of course, the PFY and I take some time off work to see the Boss as he recovers from his hernia op. And do a bit of shopping. OK, and have a few lagers as well. And a ride on the London tour bus - but after that, we went straight there.

At the hospital, we find that my suspicions are unfounded - the place is a state of the art set-up, with remote monitoring that would put our network topology to shame.

We brown-nose an administrative type to get a quick tour of the place, exhibiting a professional interest in their CCPMS (Centralized Comprehensive Patient Monitoring System).

"Basically," the admin-type burbles as we depart the Boss's room, "the system allows all patients to be monitored by a central computer which, in the event of any problem, dispatches a doctor or nurse from a localized aid station."

"I see," I respond. "And what happens if the doctor and nurse are elsewhere playing doctors and nurses?"

After a withering look, the admin-type continues. "The software is aware of staff positions at all times. I assure you that your manager is completely safe from mishaps."

Bugger. We were hoping for a hernia relapse (or five) to get us a couple more office-hours visits to the, er, hospital.

"We have thousands of cables from all over the hospital which terminate in the comms room," a furry-toothed geek from the monitoring room informs us. "The wires deliver all the patient data we need into the master computer and all patient details are available on our touch-screen here."

"Really?" I say, touching the box showing the Boss's name.

"As you can see," the geek continues, "these two windows are camera views of your manager's room, 22b. This box charts his temperature, pulse and respiration, this one his brain wave pattern - all are fed along the 22b cable sets to here, which saves us the tremendous outlay of having to buy individual monitoring units for each... Oh dear!"

The Boss's window has suddenly turned crimson with the words 'CARDIAC CALLOUT'. As the geek and I look on, a team arrives, strips the Boss down and gives him a couple of doses from the kickstart machine.

"Well," the geek adds, mopping his brow "as you can see, the efficiency of our team is second to none."

"Yeah," the PFY says, replacing a screwdriver, "but some of that termination in there is crap. Don't worry, I gave the Boss's cable set a seeing-to and reterminated it..."

The silence, as they say, was deafening. The geek now knows that the Boss got his batteries charged for no good reason, and that given an inquiry, the hospital - and his pet project - wouldn't fare well. He looks at us desperately.

"A tenner a piece should be sufficient for a couple of beers," I say.

"Per day," the PFY adds.

BOFH '99. The Company Newsletter

The boss's latest plan is that we're going to put out a news-letter (not electronic - that would be far too progressive and a paper version is much more useful as it can hang around for years, way after the information has passed its 'use by' date) to boost the department's standing...

The theory is that, by publishing a couple of pages of "The latest technology is...", "We've just bought..." and "What you should know about..." on a bi-monthly basis, the workers at the rock face aren't going to notice that we give all the really good kit to management, and palm off the slow and mutilated crap to them. A cover-up in other words...

A brown-nose type from PR is called in to help us create a marketable image, covering all bases from soft-focus photography (the boss does look like his face caught fire and someone tried to put it out with a potato masher) to non-threatening pseudo-computer vocab and pastel-tint papers.

He also excels in choosing topics as far off the issue of service level as possible: how many miles of Cat-5 (high-speed connection cable) there are in the building, how many support staff have been on training courses, the value of our central computing resource, technology we're investigating...And, of course, the boss wants a quick article from me on new kit we're looking at, when we expect it to be installed, and useful user info...in other words, write the whole bloody thing.

Now, I like giving out info to the users almost as much as MPs like talking to their constituents so, obviously, I'm really looking forward to this idea. Not.

What makes it worse is that my directive is to make it so simple that anyone in the building can understand it. I'm just hoping he's not including the security staff in that statement as I don't think our laser printers produce output in crayon.

Nevertheless, with the input of the PFY, we manage to get enough information to fill the required two pages and whip it off to the printers as a rush job, ASAP - after clearing it with the boss, of course. So I have to admit to being a bit dismayed, even gobsmacked, when the boss bursts into the office the next day in a mood that can only be described as 'fit to burst'.

"What the hell's this?" he asks, waving something ferociously.

"The newsletter," I cry, not to be confused by the obvious.

"I know that, but it's nothing like the one you gave me to proof-read yesterday!"

"No, I had to translate it from the technical jargon you read into something the users would understand."

"But it's a bloody nightmare!" he shouts. "They're confused."

"Well, I have to admit it's possible that the simplification of the text may have caused one or two technical inaccuracies, but the gist of the information is there."

1999-1

"TECHNICAL INACCURACIES?! You told them the toner cartridges are refilled with ink and that it's relatively simple."

"Well, I didn't think they'd grasp the idea of toner. And it is a simple job of drilling a hole in the cartridge and replacing the toner - if the drum and fuser are OK, of course."

"Yes, well, thanks to that article we've got a printer in the workshop that's only suitable for parts."

"Well, it's hardly a major problem is it?," the PFY chips in. "After all, they've got a projected lifetime of three years."

"That's not the point. Anyway, it wasn't just that article that was a problem - why did you tell people that they should wash their machines out if the network was going slow?"

"What?! Oh, you mean the analogy of a network connection being a pipe and that a bigger pipe lets more go through it?"

"Yes, but you said they should wash their machines out!"

"No, I simply said that, as an owner, you want as much water into your machine as possible, but I was talking about traffic."

"So, why tell them to connect a fire hose to their machine?"

"An analogy - big hose, lots of data. Surely no one would've actually connected a..."

"Security will require a whole new set of machines..."

"Oh. Well, it's hardly my fault. You'd think that even they wouldn't do something as blatantly stupid as that..."

"Yes, but what about something NOT as stupid? Why did you tell them to install 'Infector' on their machines?"

"Infector? No, I told them to install 'Detector'. You'd never want to install Infector - that's a virus detector test package, and would screw up all the files in your..."

"Would you like to recover the CEO secretary's hard drive?"

"I'll get the PFY right onto it!," I say, as the boss storms out.

"So, you won't be writing that again then?," the PFY asks.

"Highly unlikely," I chuckle.

"Bugger. I had this really cool idea for letting everyone access your network shares as a distributed storage pool."

"Much too technical; just change it to 'leave your machine unattended and logged in when you go home'. And it's never too late for an addendum..."

"I'll get right on to it!"

Good lad - always willing to go that extra mile for the client.

Faced with a bit of kit that the hosts of Antiques Roadshow would get orgasmic over, the Bastard finds a rubber mallet can achieve things an engineer's screwdriver can't...

It seems I'm in the turd and there's no simple way out. Foolishly, I tried to fix an ancient but crucial piece of kit - so old it had a grandmotherboard - which had thrown up several errors a day for weeks. Admittedly, they were just 'warning' messages and the machine was still working OK...

But that's all fixed now...And, as luck would have it, the unit is cram-packed with old, chunky proprietary hardware clinging to the last vestiges of life by virtue of a shielding layer of dust and fluff that's built up over the ages...But not anymore...

The boss is, of course, the soul of understanding, appreciating the mundane hassle of deleting swags of unnecessary warning email, while applauding the aggressive manner in which I track down and solve outstanding problems.

"If it wasn't really broken, why did you fix it?!" he gasps.

"It's a quality of service issue," I respond, getting the ball rolling nice and early in the conversation...

"What do you mean, quality of service? It was working before, and now it's not!"

"It was only partially working," I sigh, "but it could have packed out completely at any time".

"And now it has!" he cries.

"See what I mean?" I ask, sliding into confusing-logic mode.

"YOU BROKE IT!" he cried.

"Look," I kindly explain, "we get caned by the users for unscheduled downtime don't we?"

"Yes?"

"And we avoid this by scheduling downtimes don't we?"

"Yes?"

"So this is a scheduled maintenance and the users shouldn't be using the systems now, should they?"

"Uh...no?"

"So they don't have anything LEGITIMATE to moan about?"

"I guess not," he answers, sounding just a little unconvinced.

"So, while I'm talking to you, I'm not fixing this kit?"

"Uh...no..."

The boss takes his leave in the kind of casual double-time managers often use to disguise the fact that they've ever been somewhere in the first place. Usually only employed after they've broken something crucial, which brings us back to...

"What's the bloody huge thing there?" the PFY asks, indicating a full-height 20MB hard drive in the bowels of the frame, probably consuming as much power as half the lights in the computer room. You can't blame the lad of course; he's too young to have heard of MFM disks, reel-to-reel tapes or 8in floppies - outside the Reader's Letters section of adult magazines that is...

"That," I say, "is what we used to, in the old days, call a..."

"Hard drive!" the PFY cries, copping a view of the '20MB' written on the side in permanent marker.

"Close, but no banana! It is, in fact" - picking up my trusty rubber panel-beater's hammer - "a service call about to..."

BANG! BANG! BANG! SKEEEEEeeeeeeerrrrrrrrt!

"...happen."

"And what did that achieve?" the PFY sighs.

"Well, before that unit failed..."

"Before you bashed it with your rubber mallet you mean."

"A mallet that leaves no discernible marks," I add. "Before that, it was a software config and unknown hardware failure."

"And now the engineer will think he broke it."

"After he fixes the hard-drive..."

"Exactly!"

A service call is placed, and in less time that it takes to fly around the world by balloon with a millionaire pilot (including stops), an engineer arrives with kit in hand.

"What - it doesn't come in a sealed bag?" the PFY gasps.

"How do we know it's new?"

"The only thing they get in sealed bags is their bedtime reading," I comment. "Besides, there are probably only three drives like that in the world and they're no doubt fixed manually by Swiss nuns, judging by their non-maintenance price.

The engineer fixes the unit - after returning to the office three times to find a replacement for the failed mystery component that had to be soldered onto the grandmother board - and we chuck it back into service, much to the boss's relief. He's figured out the flaw in my logic, after verifying that my scheduled maintenance message was posted way after I'd broken the kit.

"So, it's all sorted out then?" he asks.

"Yep, back in service and working as per usual."

Satisfied that injustice has been done, he trundles back to his office to figure out a way of referring to this experience as 'good customer relations'. Meanwhile, I return to my desk and am about to start work when a mail message pops into my inbox with the subject of 'System Warning', from the machine of the moment. Sigh...if you're going to do something, do it right. I skip the rubber mallet this time and head for the metal version.

"Back in a minute," I tell the PFY. "Just got some 'alignment' to do." Maintenance really is an ongoing thing...

It's finally time for the BOFH's protégé to fly the nest and join the ranks of the 'one trouser leg higher than the other' Order of Bastards. And boy, has he been revising well...

It's a proud day for Bastards everywhere as the PFY prepares himself for admission to the Fraternal Order of Bastard Operators. Adjusting his black tie, he steps from the men's toilets into the back room of an all-night drinker.

A tear springs to my eye as he shakes hands with the four Charter members (of which I am one) and prepares to take his oral exam. "Who sponsors this bastard?" the Grand Bastard asks.

"I do."

"And you're satisfied that his thesis High Voltage and its Effect in Reducing Client Calls is an original work?"

"I am."

"Very well." He turns to the PFY. "All that remains now is for you to answer one question from each of the members."

A bit on the formal side, but rules are rules.

The PFY nods wordlessly.

"You've just started a new contract with a firm which pays well, but wants you to document the work you've done - obviously in the hopes of leeching your hard-earned skills. How do you keep the contract and your knowledge secure?"

First, the easy one.

"Ah, I would...claim that I was a devout member of the Church of the Unified Principle of Hermitism, and as such, am not permitted to pass on ideas to others."

"I see...based on the premise that your employer can't discriminate on the grounds of religion?"

"Yes."

"There is such a church?"

"Formed it two weeks ago - a registered charity. I donate all my worldly goods and income to it."

"Very altruistic," the second member comments. "But what about this? You notice that the internal phone directory of your workplace has a full color picture of the network topology as an appendix. How would you defuse this potential source of cowboy 'plug and pray' by the users?"

"I'd 'upgrade' some terminations to mains voltage and shuffle faceplate labels. Oh, and print an extra fifty copies."

"An extra fifty copies?"

"Yeah, I'd take them to Waterloo and sell them to French tourists as underground maps."

"Excellent," the third member smiles. "Your voicemail queue has overflowed, your helpdesk queue has escalated, and your boss enters your office to find you playing Quake II. What would you do?"

"Err...keep playing so that later I can claim I had post traumatic stress disorder from the game I started at lunch-time - then claim six weeks' compensation for work-induced stress if they threaten to dock my pay..."

"Yes...but I'm looking for a little more than that."

"Oh, you mean use the Application Download server to stick the game on everyone's desktop so I can claim they're all at it?"

"Yes, but I'm really looking for a..."

"OH OF COURSE! Patch the version of the one I download to the Boss's machine to use the Homoerotic-Theme Graphics, and have the game auto start every time his PC's microphone detects a different voice in the office."

"That will do nicely!"

Which just leaves my question. "Your tutor in bastardom has somehow found the wedge of cash you keep inside the supposedly sealed hard drive unit which lies supposedly inconspicuously inside an old AT, underneath your desk."

A sharp intake of breath lets me know that the PFY has just become aware of the practical section of this exam.

"THEORETICALLY, if this were to happen, and the tutor had spent this rather large amount of cash, what would you feel would be the most appropriate course of action?"

"Well, of course we're talking theoretically here," the PFY seethes, "so I suppose I would have to replace it with a similar amount of money from the CO2 extinguisher with the false bottom, which is bolted on to the wall-hook behind the tutor. Oh, did I say is? I meant was."

THE BASTARD!!

"Well," I cry happily, reaching for my briefcase and the electrical 'calibration' device therein. "I'm satisfied that his intentions are genuine, so if there's no objections, I think we should adjourn to the bar to cele..."

The human nervous system sends messages at speeds at several hundred miles per hour. Electricity, on the other hand, travels at about 800 times that speed. Per second.

And yet I still knew what was coming as my thumb touched the strangely rough surface of the keyhole on my briefc...

Later, in the bar, when I'd stopped dribbling and the world had dimmed from about 10,000 candlepower, I bought the PFY a quick drink to celebrate his graduation.

You win some, you lose some.

As the PFY speeds out of control, he gains some worthy respect from the Bastard. It seems birds of a feather will soon be flocking to the group therapy class...

So, the PFY gets in a little late (shame on him) and I have the sad task of informing him that the boss is keen to see him. Real keen.

"Why is that?" he asks, wondering why he's being graced with a private interview.

"Oh, some complaint," I respond.

"Complaint?"

"Yeah, the Linux-geek wannabe from R&D has complained about you."

"Which Linux geek wannabe?"

"You remember - the one you told to link /dev/null to his paging device."

"What happened?"

"Dunno, his machine mysteriously crashed about 10 seconds later..."

"But I didn't..."

"Of course you didn't - I did, but I said I was you."

"Oh."

"But what really surprised me was when you called back in the afternoon to fix his crashing problems, told him his CPU was hot swap-upgradable, and then sent him that replacement processor with a couple of its more vital legs missing. By the time he had got round to putting the old one back in, it was in the same state. Mysteriously..."

"I AM a bastard, aren't I?" the PFY gasps.

"Yes, I couldn't believe it myself," I concur.

"But why would I do such a thing?"

"I don't know," I reply. "It could be that he complained about your, I mean my, shoddy handling of a toner cartridge replacement last week. Or it could be that you were afraid of having to deal with Linux problems all the time. Or it could just be some manifestation of a deep-seated mental upset which you have."

"What mental upset?" asks the PFY.

"Far be it for me to go delving into your psyche, but you could be suffering from some base-level anti-sociopathic tendencies..."

"Sociopathic or anti-sociopathic?"

"Is there a difference?"

"I don't know..."

The discussion of the PFY's need to debase users with higher technical knowledge (and the reasons behind it) are cut off by the ring of the phone...

"Well, here's your chance to find out. That looks like your R&D guy ringing back to find out why ps and a whole other batch of utilities aren't working anymore."

"Why's that?"

"Well, I'd be guessing, but I think you might have advised him to unlink his /proc directory."

"But you can't do that?!" refutes the PFY.

"Not with conventional weapons, no. But with that quickly hacked-up program you sent him, it was a piece of cake."

"Oh, but I've got to go see the boss!"

"Yes, I think you should. And I'd take the approach that you're being framed."

"He'll never buy it," whimpers the PFY.

"Oh, I don't know - I think he might, after you put that line in the inetd.conf file, which causes any Telnet to port 187 on his machine to copy junk stdin to the kernel memory..."

"I'm out of control aren't I?"

"You are. You need help!"

"Where am I going to get it?"

"From a specialist. The company has a counselor for that sort of thing you know."

"Really?"

"Yes, you remember - the one that called us borderline megalomaniac Machiavellian types."

"Really?"

"Yes, shortly before you uploaded that virus to her machine under the guise of an email to make an appointment to see her..."

"So, when am I going?!"

"Looks like we both have to go to a group therapy thing tomorrow..."

"Can't wait."

"Ah well, health is health, and an ounce of prevention is worth three hours of holiday..."

The lights are on - all 2,996 of them - and no one's in. The boss's involvement in the hands-on scheme results in a fit of madness, a stretcher, straitjacket and a trip to hospital...

"Just dump it next to the other boxes." I cry over to the PFY as he brings up yet another box of comms gear. My attention was distracted because I foolishly picked up the phone and talked to a user. It was a straightforward wonky phone problem - nothing too difficult to deal with - particularly when the user has his hands on Network Tool #2, the wire cutter.

"Yes, that's right, put the clippers onto the wire, yes, and snap close." CLICK.

"Did you sort that user's phone out?" the PFY asks.

"I have now. Any more boxes?"

"No, that's the last one. What is all this junk?"

"Oh it's just a load of boxes with lights and beepers in them," I reply. "I'm going to put them in the boss's office."

"This wouldn't happen to be because he wants to increase his hands on?"

"Of course, if he wants to help monitor the network, who am I to stop him."

The boss beams with pride as the PFY and I install the last of the boxes, his rooms is now about to become ablaze with more than 3,000 flashing lights, all with corresponding beeps of various tones. "So this monitoring equipment is usually in the Comms cupboards then?" the boss asks.

"Sure," the PFY replies, screwing in the last LED, which is actually a fiber optic camera so we can see the effects of our experiment.

"Usually we check them for failures every couple of days, but with you on the case, we should be able to really cut down on network problems. It'll look great on the weekly reports."

"It looks very impressive, how do I know when they fail?"

"Oh one of the lights will go out. I'll check in later to make sure it's all running properly," I say as the PFY flicks the ON switch and the room explodes with the cacophony of beeps and the dazzle of lights.

As we leave the office I glance at the PFY. "So, ten quid says he won't last the day."

"You're on!" he replies, sensing quick money. He never learns.

Later in the day the boss's stress levels have obviously increased. He is storming around a lot more than usual and he's barking at everybody, except the PFY, and me. He doesn't want to admit he can't handle the monitoring equipment.

"So how are you getting on?" I ask as I cancel the entire fourth floor's network access, just when the boss is monitoring the equipment to catch it. A quick TCP message to the PFY primes him for a response.

"Oh fine." he replies. "So far I haven't noticed any problems."

Cue PFY. "Uh-oh, the fourth floor's down!" he shouts, furiously hammering irrelevant buttons on his keyboard.

The boss panics as I sigh discreetly. "We need to know what went down, can you go and see what lights went out?" I hand him a network resource chart. "This is a map of all 3,000 lights. Just tick off those which look like they're out," I add helpfully.

The boss is looking very worried now. If he packs in the hands-on scheme the CEO will surely notice and reprimand him for wasting time, so he trots off back to his office as I flick off the power remotely to four of the 3,000 lights and put most of the others on dim.

A few hours later still the PFY and I are standing outside his office as a user has been complaining that his power light is blinking. The result of boss's constant exposure to the monitoring equipment is satisfying to say the least. "WE'VE ALL GOT OUR LIGHTS TO DEAL WITH," he roars. "DOWN HERE I HAVE THOUSANDS OF BLINKING, FLASHING AND BEEPING LIGHTS, THEY BLINK AND FLASH AND BEEP. I CAN'T STAND IT ANYMORE, THE BEEPING AND FLASHING AND BLINKING!"

As the ex-boss is stretched away, writhing uncomfortably in his straitjacket, the PFY looks penitent. "Perhaps we were a little too hard on him. He was only trying to help."

It's a shame. After all this time, the PFY just doesn't understand that nobody should help a Bastard out in networking. Time for the cattle prod - and a strong laxative coffee later on.

BOFH '99. More Huggy Feely...

As a result of the PFY's evil machinations he and I are in one of those disgusting huggy-feely sessions where everyone tells everyone else how they feel about their place in the world. Or, in this case, the company. As if it isn't bad enough having to rub shoulders with users, we're supposed to share our thoughts with them.

And of course the tweed-suit who's chairing the session has loaded it with people who the boss feels are victims of the Systems and Networks 'aggressive policy of solving problems'. The theory is that the PFY and I will see the error of our ways when we come face to face with our former 'clients'.

"Now, who would like to start?" Tweedy smiles, looking around the group expectantly...

Ten minutes later, we're back in the office because no one had anything to say. Maybe the PFY's Dictaphone put them off - but he only had it because he wanted to reflect upon the users' feelings afterwards...

The boss, noticing our rapid return, forgoes the 'I hope you've learned your lesson' speech. And distressingly, there is still no promise of an Easter bonus.

Being the dedicated type, I decide to put the disappointment out of my mind and do some preventive maintenance on the beancounters' asset audit server machine. After all, they were the ones complaining about our level of service the loudest before the PFY and I walked into the room. (The old sub-miniature microphone in the RJ45 'terminator' trick never fails). Apparently the machine is running slowly.

Our telling them yesterday that they're using twice as many sessions as they'd specked the machine for wasn't seen as constructive criticism.

"Careful with the hammer," the PFY cries, ducking under the backswing of one of my more enthusiastic applications of maintenance.

"Whoopsy," I say guiltily, "got a bit carried away there."

"No harm done - to me anyway," he murmurs as he lifts up a floor tile and kicks the results of the 'maintenance' into the subfloor area.

"Takes a licking but keeps on ticking," I say, tapping the battle-scarred machine cage. And, inadvertently, pressing the power-off switch.

Bugger.

In my mind's eye I can already see the chief beancounter hitting the panic button to counter the potential threat to asset security. Not being a believer in coincidence, he's bound to think the outage is a deliberate (which - at least in this case - it isn't) effort to perform some non-audit trailed modifications to the fixed asset inventory.

Sigh.

Like we didn't do that a fortnight ago. During the day. Logged on as him so if the audit trail is ever investigated... However, this isn't going to help much when he sets eyes on the server that looks as though it's done several tours of duty in Beirut.

Sure enough, he's not at all happy when the boss drags him into the computer room to assuage his fears.

"What the hell happened to that?" he gasps, seeing the battle-scarred casing. "It's all bashed about!"

"Well, nothing lasts forever - wear and tear..."

"It's only two months old."

"Two months is a long time in computing," I chip in.

"Besides, it was pretty battered when the courier dropped it off," the PFY adds.

"Why did you sign for it then?"

"Well, it seemed to fire up OK," I said

"Good grief, it looks like it's been beaten with a hammer. Are you sure the couriers did all that?"

"Well, the couriers did some of it, but the cleaning staff probably helped."

"We don't allow cleaners in this room," the boss interjects.

"Yes I know," I say sadly, "That's why I have to do it."

"So you damaged our machine?"

"I'm afraid so," I sigh. "I'm a system administrator, not really a cleaner."

"And I'm a lover, not a fighter," the PFY adds, obviously having tipped a little too much tape-head cleaner on his Wheaties this morning.

The humor break is interrupted by the server plummeting to the floor, as the screws holding the shelf in place - loosened during maintenance - lose purchase on the rack.

The aftermath of this little accident doesn't bear thinking about, but, suffice to say, we're in huggy-feely central the next morning, and Tweedy and cohorts are in attendance.

"Now, who would like to start?" Tweedy asks benevolently.

"Ah, I would," I say. "I'd like to share my feelings."

Sigh...

BOFH '99. Barroom Blitz...

I stumble into work early (well, in time for morning tea) to find one of our boundary routers has crashed overnight, requiring the PFY to be called out to restart it. And, with the boss getting extremely tight on overtime, the PFY has been forced to take time in lieu for the late-night call-out, instead of being paid for it. At least, that's the official version.

The Bastard-interpreted version is that the PFY was out on night alcohol maneuvers (network people must network), forgot about the Tube times and had to get a cab home - only he'd spent all his pennies in the relentless pursuit of boozing. He would have jumped on the chance to get a work-paid ride back to his humble abode, with time off to heal his battle scars.

Plan 17B from the Big-Bastard Book of Bludges: toggle the power to an important unit, wait an hour, turn the kit back on, then grab a free cab home, with in-lieu recovery time to boot...

Checking the top drawer of the PFY's desk, in case he'd been forced to 'upload some data' during 'call-out', all seems well, so I settle down to read the paper. A few hours later, the PFY stumbles in, looking like his face has been used as a doorknocker.

I eventually get the PFY's story - he was at the local pub doing some late-night 'bird spotting' and followed a 'migration' to an after-hours cocktail drinker. Upset by the Tom Cruise wannabe behind the bar, he'd apparently flicked a lit match onto the spillage of spirits on the bar...not what the big bouncers would call acceptable behavior. You get that on the big jobs.

So, as expected, he's not feeling great, and wouldn't do our name any good if I sent him out with the Client Unserviceable Equipment list..."Ah, here's that Client Unserviceable Equipment I was talking about yesterday - if you could just visit them and check out what's wrong with their kit?"

What the hell. I'm sure he'll appreciate the chance to counsel a user on the correct approach to the contrast versus brightness dilemma on their monitor...I open a window to the CCTV in the fourth-floor cubicle farm, and crank up the inbuilt microphone to listen to the PFY's first mission...

"So your meetings always get scheduled an hour after everyone else's?"

"Yes. Do you think it's my clock setting?"

"Possibly," the PFY murmurs slowly. "But we should really seek out the root of the problem."

"Maybe it's daylight saving?" the user suggests, helpfully.

"No, that's just a complication. The real cause is most likely to be the inability to find the disk-based Time-Zone configs."

Ah, Find and Disk in the same sentence - he's going for the old F(ind)DISK approach.

"So it wouldn't be the RAM battery on the motherboard?"

"?" utters the PFY, recognizing a tinkerer and discarding the FDISK plan.

"You know, that keeps the clock ticking."

"Well, if it were that, your clock setting would reset every time you booted your machine," the PFY points out.

"Oh."

"Mind you, it could be a battery capacitance problem!"

"Battery capacitance?!"

"Yes, you know about NiCad Memory, also called internal resistance?" the PFY says, appealing to the geekal lobe of the user's brain.

"Uh, yes."

"Well, batteries also have a capacitance, storing a reverse charge, which, when a machine is off, reduces the battery voltage, causing a reduced junction voltage in the oscillator controlling time generation."

DUMMY MODE ON!

"Duh-huh."

"So, what do we do?"

"Well, it so happens that I have a booster capacitor kit in the office, which can remove any stray capacitance in the battery..."

Five minutes later..."Isn't that a strobe light with a lead coming from where the lamp should be?"

"Ha ha ha," chuckles the PFY. "No, I admit it looks like that, but that's just a...Capacitance Shield."

"Oh."

"Now, we just connect these leads up like so, plug her in, turn your machine on...stand back...and switch her..."

One small explosion later..."Lucky we found that dodgy nicad!" the PFY gasps. "That could have caused problems."

"But my machine's ruined!"

"No, it's not - look, that processor would make a lovely pendant! And those DIMM cards - they'd be great in a mobile!"

"B...B..."

"No, no, don't thank me - just think yourself lucky we caught it in time! Oh!" he adds, catching sight of a case on the desk. "Does your laptop have the same problem?"

"NO!" shouts the hapless user, clutching the machine to his chest.

"Well I'll be off then." Another dissatisfied customer...

BOFH '99. The cleaner connection....

So, I'm taking calls because the PFY's on holiday and I have no one to play Quake deathmatches against. It's the usual run-of-the-mill thing with several "power users" from PR ringing to find out why they can't print to the shared laser printer.

Being in a reasonably calm state of mind, I don't expose the callers to the verbal barrage of my thoughts on their inability to read the notices pinned on the notice boards, stuck to the printer in question and sent via email to them over the past month or so before the printer's retirement from service.

And still they call. Even though the printer has been gone for a week. Even though there's now a person occupying the cubicle where it was.. even though that person tells them that the two-page-per-minute power-sucking monster has gone.

I keep a tight rein on my temper, knowing full well that it really shouldn't bug me that much. My resolve is sorely tested however, when I get a call from the bastard (L)User from Hell. The word incompetent doesn't even begin to describe his technical inability -- he couldn't find his arse with a road map, a compass, mirror and torch. In fact, if his brain activity dipped any lower it would be legal to harvest his organs. And the boss has taken him under his wing in one of his goodwill-generating missions. So far this week he's rung three times because his machine's been hacked (the caps lock key was on when he typed in his password). He also rang to report that his computer had been infected with the "not a system disk, hit F1" virus, and to tell us that our time server was three seconds out from the speaking clock.

Still, the boss is keenly aware of any shortcomings in our service. The phone rings.

"My machine's locked me out again!" he blurts.

"Is your caps lock key on again?" I ask.

"Of course not!" he snaps.

"And what does it say when you get your password wrong?" "I don't get my password wrong! I always write it down on the bottom of my keyboard to be sure!"

"Of course you do," I respond, humbled by the lengths users will go to protect their work. "And what did the computer tell you when you got your password...er...right?"

"It didn't say anything!"

"I see. And did you check your password this morning?"

"Well, yes! I can't be expected to remember everything!"

"And you pulled your keyboard out of the socket in the back of your machine?"

Some fumbling noises follow, after which..."no, I didn't." The bullock-o-meter is registering "Liar, liar! Pants on fire!", so I can guess what's going to come next.

"Oh, it's come right now -- must have been a glitch or something..."

Sigh.

"...But I've noticed that the keyboard plug is a little loose."

Right! That's it! "Yes it's..." I quickly turn to my Excuse of the Day calendar. "...Oh! It's an carbon diooxidation problem."

"What?"

"The oxidation from carbon dioxide in the air makes the plastic shrink. That's why your monitor probably makes creaking noises."

"Oh."

"You can fix it, of course. Do you have a pot plant in your office?"

"Yes, I have a couple."

"Well, chuck one behind your machine and one on the top of the monitor -- they'll extract the carbon dioxide from the air.."

"Of course! Well, thank you for that at least."

"No problem. Now be sure to give them a really good watering so they can generate that oxygen. Lots of water."

Five minutes later the boss is in with the bad news about Mr. Incompetent. He survived. And he only lost a monitor and popped a circuit breaker. He couldn't even electrocute himself properly. So now I have to rush a replacement monitor to him.

I get back to my office after installing it to hear the phone ringing. He's upset because the screen colors are up the spout. I almost tell him about the two disk drive magnets I taped to the base of the unit, just to get him to leave me alone, but that's just giving in. And I'm no quitter. It's time to send in a cleaner.

Later on, the boss fills me in on the gory details. "...And, apparently, he tripped and dropped a large bucket of water on top of his machine," the boss burbles. "Which is a hell of a coincidence when you think about it"

"So he'll need another monitor?" I ask.

"Actually no. The cleaning guy was helping to mop up the mess and accidentally slammed Dave's hand in the drawer -- three times!"

"Oh. Well, all's well that ends well. Anyway, can't stop, I'm going for a drink with Mike."

"The cleaning guy?"

Some questions are best left unanswered..

BOFH '99. Banana Dictator?!?

It's a Tuesday morning and a new boss has started (the old having taken 'early retirement'). The office periscopes are up to see what the new one is going to be like. I bide my time, knowing that he's bound to show his face sooner or later.

There are a few potential types that seem likely - the 'hide-in-the-office-and-annoy-nobody' type, the 'tell-me-what-you-REALLY, HONESTLY think' huggy-feely type and, worst of all, the Banana Democracy Dictator type.

Hide-in-the-office appears to be on the cards as he hasn't shown his face to the troops yet...

A large box arrives in the office with my name on it.

I'm not expecting anything - except perhaps the small check from the management placement agency that I get whenever they supply us a new boss (about three times a year).

A quick recce of the box and its packing slip shows that it's about a company's-worth of client software for a database we don't have. Seconds later the courier arrives with another box, which I divine to be the missing server portion. Uh-oh.

Having not ordered it, I efficiently return it to sender.

Its origin becomes apparent when the new boss bowls up with instructions on how, where and when to install it.

"Oh, I sent that back because I hadn't ordered it," I cry.

"Ah yes. Well, I ordered it yesterday," he chips in quickly, "and I'll be ordering all hardware and software from now on."

BANANA DICTATOR ALERT!

"I see. And what was the software to be used for again?"

"I'm going to get our financial systems moved to alternative software that's far easier to learn and administer." (He's got a mate who works at a small financial systems company that he's letting get a foot in our company). I don't like it.

"I don't see how that would be an advantage given that all our current staff know the software we're using."

"Ah, but this is ISO98000 certified," he enthuses.

"98000?" the PFY cries. "But we're were only up to 9000."

"Well 98000 was a combination of ISO9000 certification and the lesser-known 8000 - which dealt with secure financial transactions," he burbles. "Now make sure this stuff gets uploaded for installation double time."

I smell a grey furry animal with a liking for food scraps.

Just to be sure, I run a quick scan of ISO titles. After having been woken for the third time (ISO stuff is notorious for its insomnia-curing ability), my suspicions are proved correct.

Then I start wondering...that voice is strangely familiar.

I examine the software in more detail. Inside the flashy CD covers are swags of hand-labeled write-once media. Curiouser and curiouser. And, the Web link to the site is a dead-end page with "Site being revamped" on it.

Hmmm... I decide to confront the boss.

"Yes, yes, they're a global company with blue-chip clients so they don't have enough time to install SSL-secured Web pages with Java-enhanced search algorithms," he responds.

Good answer. The sort of response you'd expect from a b...

"My machine's having problems," I mention to him in passing. "I think the floppy drive needs cleaning."

"Really?" he says. "It's probably...um...transient hysteresis loops in the head media."

"You're sure?" I ask, my suspicions confirmed.

"Positive. And you'll need to clear the hysteresis with a resonant magnetic distortion rectifier. Do you have one?"

"No."

"Well, I suppose you could use a hammer and a screwdriver at a pinch," he mutters. "You just slip the screwdriver into the drive until you feel a slight resistance..."

"...And bash the living crap out of it until you're down to the handle?" I ask.

"W-Yes, how do you know?"

"You're a bastard," I reply.

"No I'm not!"

"Yes you are. And you're unregistered..."

"No I'm not - I'm a MMBMFH," he says smugly. A Member of the Masonic Bastard Managers From Hell, no less!

"I see. How does it work then?"

"Well, you form a handful of 'manufacturing' companies, produce dodgy code, then get a job as a manager somewhere (using the references obtained from your companies), then buy up your code as the solution to everything at an artificially inflated price, then accept a rapid redundancy (with benefits) when the whole business slides down the toilet."

"Which only leaves me two questions," I say.

"What's in it for you, and when will the bomb drop? Let's see, A couple of grand 'external consultancy fees', and next Wednesday?"

"Next Wednesday?!"

"Yeah, I'm sure there's a virulent virus on the install media."

"I'll get right on to it!" I cry.

Always good to work with a pro.

BOFH '99. Creative Cooling...

So the boss has found out that I was using the four-way processor machine to keep my lunch warm, and isn't happy.

I would've got away with it, too, if I hadn't asked for extra brown sauce and it hadn't leaked from the brown paper bag onto the motherboard of the machine.

R&D aren't happy because they were using the machine for stress-loading some Web page software to see how the machines would handle stacks of connections.

I wasn't all that happy myself - not when I found out that the problem was actually caused by the processor's heat output burning a hole in the bag concerned. A definite mark-down of the hardware performance...

So now the boss is on the warpath, attempting to make sure that no other piece of kit is being used 'inappropriately'.

And wouldn't you know it, he manages to stumble - in his inept way - across the hose that connects the cooling inlet of the chunky old mainframes to the computer room's centralized vacuum-cleaning system.

"WHAT THE HELL IS THIS?!" he screams.

"Ah, it's a centralized vacuum-cleaning system."

"What's it connected to this machine for?"

"Well, you know how temperamental processors are with dust and stuff? I just run the vacuum system through it to make sure none collects inside the machine."

"But that's the machine's INLET!" he squeaks.

I decide to come clean. "Remember when I told you the centralized vacuum-cleaning system was packing up?"

"Yes. And?"

"Well, it did. And, by a one-in-a-million chance, the bag burst when I was there, which is when I noticed that the mainframe was an excellent source of suction."

"You're using the mainframe as a vacuum cleaner?!?" he screams again, worst fears realized.

"Well...yeah."

"Are you insane?! What about the fire risk?"

"No worries. We always empty the machine when dust starts coming out of the floppy drive. Besides, the boards are so sparse the processors rarely even get warm!"

"I don't believe this!" he murmurs sadly, shaking his head.

"So I suppose we shouldn't tell you about the air conditioning ducts then," the PFY mentions gently.

"The air conditioning ducts?" the boss cringes, not really wanting to know the full horror that might await his question, but unable to stop himself.

"Well, we're keeping a bit of kit in them - but only the stuff that runs really hot," the PFY concedes.

"I...", the boss mumbles, having a short out-of-mind experience. "Why?"

"Well it runs too hot for the computer room, so if we put it in the cooling ducts, it runs OK."

"And what happens in winter, when the air is hotter?"

"Oh, we thought we'd cross that bridge when we drive under it - as Teddy Kennedy would say."

Images of fires spreading through the building take their toll on the boss and he wanders off mumbling.

"Machines in the ducting? A little far-fetched isn't it?" I ask.

"Yeah, well, I was pushed for time. Besides, it was either make something up or tell him about us using the financial archive tapes for streamers at last year's Christmas party."

A gasp from the doorway indicates that the boss had returned to the land of the sentient. A quick glance at his face tells me he's going to take the harsh approach to solving this.

"Of course, I blame the management," I cry.

"Me too," the PFY comments, following the Bastard Book of Bludges: "Pass all criticism/responsibility up."

"Yes, I wouldn't like to be in management when the auditors find out we've destroyed our old financial records."

"Me neither," says the PFY. "It might look like the company was trying to hide something from the Inland Revenue."

"Haven't they got an anonymous tip-off line?" I ask.

"You don't scare me!" the boss cries. "I can't be held liable for anything that my predecessors should have known."

"Of course you can't!" I agree. "No, it'll be us for the high jump - followed a few days later by the collapse of the company's core computing because of ignorance on the part of the remaining IT staff. I'd hate to be the manager of that little mess."

"Well, it's the head of IT's fault for not paying more attention, then!" the boss cries.

"Yes," the PFY comments dryly. "I'm sure he's going to take the fall and not just palm the blame onto a subordinate."

"I'll just get my resignation done then," the boss sighs as he stumbles off, a broken man.

"Oh, and can you turn over the chicken and mushroom pie on the applications server for me?" the PFY calls. "I don't like them too crispy..."

The dastardly duo employs some very underhand tactics to weed out 'unsuitable' applicants for the boss's job. Let's hope they're wearing the right colored trousers...

So, in an effort to make the workers feel more involved (another brainwave from the huggy-feely crew) the PFY and I are asked to browse through the CVs of prospective bosses and give our comments.

"Let's see, under hobbies, he's got philately..." the PFY reads.

"...coin collecting, and, hey, train spotting. And he's previously worked in...a university and a...bank."

"I see. And does it mention his film career?"

"His film career?"

"Yes, he obviously starred in A Life More Ordinary."

"Mmmm?" the personnel droid mumbles.

"Nothing. Next please," I cry.

"Righto!" the PFY responds, shoving the CV into the shredder. "Next is a...guy from Leeds, whose hobbies are lard sandwich making and chicken worrying and whose musical taste runs to the Bavarian Burping Choir."

"I somehow doubt that your remarks are founded in fact," the droid comments witheringly.

"No," the PFY agrees. "It's actually lard and chip butties."

"That means he's upper-class Leeds."

"My WIFE's from Leeds!" the droid snaps nastily.

"Really," I cry, unable to stop myself, "What position did she play?"

"WHAT!?"

"Rugby! You know, only rugby players come from Leeds."

"I think you hit a nerve there," the PFY says after the droid storms out, slightly upset.

Quicker than you can say "fail over to the back-up", we have a replacement droid - the heavy-duty model they usually only send to tell you they'll be happy to accept your resignation.

"Right, let's have a look at these applicants then," he says, picking up the next one. "Let's see, 15 years in IT, management experience, Microsoft certification, several courses in network and systems management..."

"Sounds too technical to me," I mutter.

"How can a manager be TOO technical?!" he asks.

"If they're too technical, they end up interfering."

"I hardly think that's an excuse to..."

"...then they spend all their time repairing the balls-ups they caused, and NONE of their time preparing those full color 3D graphs on disk usage, cost benefits etc, which Upper Management gets all gooey over. So senior management start wondering who the HELL appointed this incompetent drone in the first place."

"Hmmm. You have a point," the HR-droid says, recognizing a threat to job security. "What do you suggest?"

"NEXT!" I cry, shoving the CV into the bin-based encryption device. "I'm sure there's SOMEONE with the right skills."

"OK," the PFY cries, holding up a photo. "Next is THIS gent."

"I SAY!" I blurt, unable to restrain myself. "LOOK AT THOSE SLACKS! What color is that, do you think? Dusky pink or rampant purple?"

"Looks rampant to me," the PFY says. "A left-handed golfer...?"

"You mean gay?" the HR-droid says. "What the hell does it matter if..."

"Well, it doesn't matter to us, but you know how homophobic our CEO is."

"I can't believe..." he responds, wondering which decade he's in - but then folding - "...I suppose you're right."

"That was a bit dodgy, wasn't it?" the PFY asks later.

"Dodgy isn't the word. For a start, I colored-in his outfit."

"You bastard!"

"And secondly, he's a mate of the CEO. I can't wait to mention that HR didn't want him because they thought he was gay."

The rest of the day progresses in a similar way, with us rejecting a stack of applicants including anyone who's attended more than one Microsoft training course (might be brainwashed), a bloke

who drives a Lada (low expectations), and lastly (I'm proud of this one) a man who lives in Balham (the boredom factor).

"All set for tomorrow?" I ask the PFY at the end of the day.

"Yeah, I've managed to bash out seven CVs that look good enough to pass muster."

"Did you slip them into the 'in' tray at HR?"

"Yeah, under your stack - was the self-confessed glue-sniffer one of yours?"

"Yep - I thought we'd be really positive about him so that it doesn't look like we're always vetoing people."

It's funny how, with a little effort, your outlook on your position can change.

BOFH '99. Interviewing for new bosses...

So after our stringent CV cull for a new boss we shortlist some potential bosses, one of whom doesn't in fact exist outside our fertile (or is that furtive?) imaginations...

Still, that leaves us with three possibles that the HR hardliner has lined up for interview.

First out of the pan and into the fire is an ex-technical manager whose 'technical' ability extends, with effort, to recognizing which way up his Tube pass goes.

We meet in an interview room in the Huggy Feely department and listen to the HR droid rabbit on about what the company does, how widespread it is, what it's worth...

The interviewee's eyes glaze over (after all, he hasn't got a cut-down shoot-em-up game loaded onto his personal disorganizer with which to play the PFY).

Noticing the sudden absence of monotone, I look up to find the HR droid staring at me expectantly.

"Hmmm," I say, feigning deep thought, "just one question - if you were appointed, where would you see your role in the purchasing of technology for use in the company?"

"Good question," he answers, almost succeeding in not sounding condescending. "I would obviously have a great deal to do with the analysis, installation and testing of new equipment. I know how you technical people like to remain focused on the job at hand -- sorting out user problems and that sort of thing - so I'd probably get my hands dirty on the technical side, leaving you free to pursue your helpdesk calls and user enquiries."

"I see," I comment ambivalently. "Well, that concludes my questions - perhaps you'd like to take a tour of our facilities."

"That would be excellent!" he cries happily, assuming that a guided tour means the job's as good as his.

"Fine," the HR droid responds. "I'm sure Simon's assistant would be more than happy to take care of you."

The PFY nods and leads contestant number one away.

Contestant number two arrives and he's much the same as the first, except probably not as technically competent - if that's humanly possible.

I settle down to listen to some more company history...

"I'M SORRY. I must have drifted off!!" I cry, jerking awake with a start. "I've been putting in some late nights on the...uh...high availability...er...tape racking system."

"Any questions for this candidate?" HR droid asks.

"Just the one," I murmur, repeating the question I asked of number one.

"Well I'd have to have a reasonable amount of input in the selection process - verifying that its value for money, what the company wants, that sort of thing. Outside of that I suppose it's up to you to determine what the users need."

Close, but no cigar.

"Perhaps you'd like a tour of the facilities," HR droid pre-empts. A nod to the PFY is as good as a wink and he's gone in a second.

The third candidate is cut from the same cloth as the first two. He leaves for his tour as the HR droid turns to the remaining applicant's CV. "I have to admit that this one does look impressive," he says, "but I think that if he's any good we probably need to get him and the first applicant back for a second interview."

"Oh, the first applicant won't be coming back," the PFY says casually.

"And why's that?"

"Well, you asked me to, you know - take care of them..."

"Yes - show them around!"

"Oh! I'm afraid I may have misinterpreted your intentions."

"You haven't tested the halon system with someone in the computer room again have you?"

"Uh..."

"My God!" the HR droid cries. "I can't believe this!"

"Neither can I!" I blurt. "Do you know how much halon costs? And what about the ozone layer?"

The HR droid looks like he's set to explode...which is why it's important not to tell him that the PFY just took the candidates out the back way and told them that we'd be in touch shortly after hell froze over.

"I can't believe you thought I meant..."

"That's what I thought you meant!" I cry.

"But we're a company, not some underworld money laundering operation!"

"But what about when the CEO..." the PFY gasps.

I shake my head quickly (as planned) and the PFY shuts up.

Two days later, the appointment has gone through and there's a code of silence between the three people on the appointments team.

He thinks we won't implicate him, and in return he selects, without interview, the candidate that we wanted... who doesn't really exist.

BOFH '99. The boss that wasn't....

It's a lovely day for computing, having -- as we do -- no boss, and the PFY and I are milking it for all it's worth.

Well, when I say no boss, I really mean no physical boss. The logical boss device has been installed and configured for use -- /dev/roger for short -- and /dev/rroger for when he tells dirty jokes).

He spent his entire first day "meeting the clients", then called in sick on his second day. I've bought about a week's delay before questions start being asked in earnest -- for example, if anyone's actually seen him about. Meantime, he "telecommutes" regularly with the PFY and me.

"Just got an email from him," I tell the PFY. "Looks like he's OK-ed my junket to the States to investigate some...I dunno. I'll make it up when I get back. Has he sent you any email yet?"

"I'm just working on it," the PFY responds. "Looks like I'll be spending a lot of time checking RJ45 sockets on floor-points around the DP pool. In the interests of connectivity."

"You sick perverted bastard!" I murmur enviously.

Our plans are interrupted by the chief accountant.

"Ah, have you seen Roger?" he asks, looking about.

"He's off sick," the PFY replies.

"On his second day?"

"Yeah, apparently he's caught one of those 48-hour viruses. But he's left his home number in case you need to contact him," I say, passing over a bit of paper with an outer London number scrawled on it.

He takes the paper, mentally weighing up the option of dropping the new boss a line, then wanders off.

"He's bound to ring," the PFY murmurs.

"Don't worry about it. I'm sure he'll have hours of meaningless conversation with the geek manager persona I've loaded into my PC's voice recog and response program."

"Your what?"

"Voice recog and response -- it's a program to listen and respond sort of like a human. Like a sophisticated version of those old Lisa and Psychiatrist packages."

"He'll smell a rat..."

"Not necessarily. The program's configured to confess that it's been taking a large amount of prescription pills to ward off its illness -- some of which might have an adverse effect on its thought processes"

"So it would be like talking to..."

"...Someone with little or no recall of events; a drunk, a druggie, a software vendor who gave you a cast-iron warranty."

"Hmmm..." the PFY murmurs, unconvinced.

I make a couple of quick calls to ensure my travel and accommodation is booked, confirmed and non-refundable in case the worst happens. And Roger's just suggested I upgrade to business class so that I'm rested and able to take in all the information presented to me when I get there.

But it was doomed to end. And this time it's at the hands of the head of IT, with only a small amount of notice for us to prepare for it. He didn't take too kindly to the boss's idea of users getting support only when they beat the PFY or me in a Quake II Deathmatch. Well, that and the deluge of purchases from the technical bookstore which previous bosses wouldn't buy just because they cost an arm and a leg.

"RIGHT!" the head of IT cries as he bursts in with an IT budget's-worth of literature invoices, "THIS IS THE END!"

"Yes," I sigh, slipping on a black armband. "It's terrible!"

"Cut down in his prime!" the PFY sniffs sympathetically.

"Why do the good ones always die young?" I wail.

"What the hell are you talking about?" the head snaps.

"Roger...!" I gasp, choking back the tears "...Gone!"

"Cut down in his prime!" the PFY repeats.

"What do you mean?" he asks, looking concerned.

I push over our special edition tabloid front page.

"'Computing Manager hit by Software Delivery Van'.

Oh dear...But this isn't the same paper I got this morning."

Bugger it!

"Ah...this is the new late-commuter edition," I respond, thinking faster than a clock-chipped heatsunk PIII, "with last-minute updates."

He peruses the article looking for some indication that it's not the case, while I make a mental note to throw in a couple of death notices into tomorrow's paper to make it look legit.

"Aren't you supposed to be in a taxi now?" the PFY asks, right on schedule.

"Oh, you're RIGHT! MY COURSE!"

"Your course?" the head of IT asks.

"Yes, yes, I'll be late for the plane -- the PFY will fill you in -- it's what Roger would have wanted!" I gasp.

"No, I think he would have wanted the van to miss him," the PFY mumbles in the distance.

The gentler arts have not escaped him.

I'm sure he'll do well in the next round of interviews.

BOFH '99. Serial Whiner Alert!

"Well, I don't know about YOU," the PFY comments smugly, as he returns to the office reasonably late in the afternoon, "but I've done a very profitable day's work!"

"So have I. Look, a prerelease of Quake III in full operational mode, even though my graphics card isn't supported on that platform!"

The sadness of what I have said stops me in my tracks and reminds me of the furry-toothed geeks who tell computing war stories up at the bar at conferences...I make a mental note to book myself in for some electro-convulsive therapy at a progressive club that I have occasion to visit when the mood grabs me.

"Anyway," I resume, "what are you crowing about?"

"I," the PFY chirps, swaggering like Paul Gascoigne exiting a late-night drinker, "have just recabled an entire floor's worth of machine-to-wall socket patch cables."

"Why?" I ask, innocently, already guessing the answer.

"Perhaps..." he responds, pausing for dramatic effect, "...it's because THESE cables aren't anywhere near Cat-5 spec."

He holds out some patch cables that, I have to admit, I DID get for a suspiciously low price many moons ago...

"Very proactive of you," I counter, admitting defeat on this occasion. "Just tell me it wasn't the third floor."

"Why? They're the ones who complained about the network problems in the first place."

Experience, as they say, is the best teacher, even if the tuition fees are rather high at times. He is young, but he will learn.

"Did you replace Maureen's cable?" I ask.

"Of course."

"Maureen, the serial whiner?"

"You're jok..."

The PFY's response is interrupted by the phone.

"That'll be Maureen," I say "You've broken all the programs on her computer."

"No I haven't!"

"£10 says you have."

"You're on," he replies, confidently.

"You've broken all the programs on my computer!" she whines, over hands-free.

I grab the tenner from the PFY, trying not to look smug.

"I only replaced your networking cable," the PFY replies.

"It must have broken my programs," she replies "They were working all right this morning."

"What's not working?" the PFY asks.

"All my programs. The machine won't let me in!"

"Have you got your screensaver password correct?"

"Yes."

"And the CAPS LOCK light isn't on?"

"N...yes. But it's always on!" she lies.

"Try pressing the caps lock key to turn it off, then try again."

"It's not going to work...Oh, the machine's fixed now"

"Now that your CAPS LOCK light is off?"

"Yes, but I gave the wire a wiggle before I tried again. It's probably the wire..."

She rings off and the PFY hangs up, shaking his head.

"Double or quits she rings back within 10 minutes?"

"OK!"

Ten minutes and another £10 later, the PFY is trying to help Maureen understand why the new cable could not have deleted all the files she was working on this morning. Another 10 minutes and £20 after that, the PFY is explaining to Maureen that a new cable can't break her e-mail, and the reason she has no e-mail is because no one's sending her any. The PFY promises to send her a test message.

Five minutes and £40 later the PFY says he's not playing double or quits any more, and is explaining that HE misspelled 'verification', and that it's not the cable introducing spelling mistakes into the network traffic.

"What the hell am I going to do?" the PFY asks, after the new boss comes in (very harassed) to ask what the hell the PFY has done to this woman's machine.

"What is your sin?" I ask.

"NOTHING! I just replaced her cable! If I'd known, I would've avoided her like the plague!"

"She'd have noticed that everyone else's machines have fewer problems than hers -- now that they have new cables..."

"Well how do we fix her problem?" the PFY pleads.

"We don't," I say, picking up the phone, "We relocate it."

I call the boss back in and tell him that we've just found out that some of the cables were faulty. Being green and keen, he offers to take her up a new one. The poor bastard. Later, as the PFY and I are leaving, we hear the boss helping Maureen through her caps lock login dilemma again...

"I s'pose I owe you a pint then?" the PFY asks.

"MANY pints!"

Experience -- a great teacher, but the tuition fees...

BOFH '99. Who's tucking who?

So I'm peering inside a PC at the PFY's request - apparently he's seen something he doesn't like. And if he doesn't like it, it must be in bad shape...

I proceed to check off everything in the diagnostic list. "Hard drive, check; P-II 300, check; 128 Meg Memory, check; 512K L2 Cache, che..."

I pause. What would appear, at first glance, to be an L2 cache module is, in fact, a plastic replica of the real thing. I test this observation by removing it from the running machine. I reboot, and get the same diagnostic report.

"We've been ripped off!" I gasp to the PFY, after noticing the company's inventory sticker on the side of the machine.

"Who'd you get these from?"

"I...", the PFY responds, "...didn't get them from anywhere."

"Well, I didn't order them, we're the only people cleared to purchase computing equip...THE BEANCOUNTERS!"

"You guessed it," the PFY commented. "They ordered the kit themselves because the stuff we buy is 'too expensive' -- they can get these £200 cheaper."

"And a few components shorter..."

"Then they whack an inventory sticker on it and put it in use. Only, these ones don't appear to be working so well..."

"Hangs, crashes, that sort of thing?"

"Uh-huh."

"It's clock chipped, isn't it?" I ask, knowing the answer.

"Yep - and they try to get away with it by running a six-volt cooling fan at about nine volts through a couple of resistors."

"Off the 12-volt line?"

"The 11.7-volt line on this model, yes."

Sigh.

"And, don't tell me, they want us to fix it now?"

The PFY gestures to a pile of machines in the corner.

"Stuff em!" I yell, making an executive decision that's bound to annoy some executives.

"What's all this?" the boss asks, right on time, having been wound up by one of the senior bean counters, who's come for immoral support.

"It's a non-approved computing purchase."

"Approved, non-approved; what's the difference? It needs a service!" he blurts.

"Approved equipment is equipment that we've checked, kit that's passed field and benchmark tests."

"My laptop hasn't passed your tests, and it's running OK!" the head beancounter chips in.
"Although the backlight's a bit dim."

I skip the obvious response - fish in a barrel and all that...

"It may well be OK but, unless it's passed our tests, we're not required to service it," I murmur, as the PFY pulls out the IT Departmental Policy Document, indicating the pertinent portion of text. The boss is powerless to counter that one.

Fifteen minutes later, the beancounter's dropped his machine off for testing. Fifteen minutes after that, we've dropped it from ceiling height onto a table.

"Did it leave a mark?" I ask.

"A small one," the PFY notes, looking at the testbench top.

"But you'd better test it again, to be sure..."

Sadly, the owner enters the room shortly thereafter, in time to witness us throwing darts at his machine.

"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?"

"Floating point tests," I murmur. "All that's left now is the Spec Int."

"Spec Int?" he asks, gazing at the dented remains of his machine.

"Yes, it's a benchmark rating."

"I KNOW WHAT IT IS!" he shouts.

"Well, we're just about to test it now."

"And HOW are you going to do that?"

"I'm going to see if INTegrates with another SPECies - namely, the dog from next door's building site."

"This is bloody ridiculous! Give me my machine!" he snaps. Which, incidentally, is exactly what the hinge at the back of the unit does as it plummets to the ground.

"IS there a floormark test?" the PFY asks. "That's a new one on me."

Surprisingly enough, the beancounter storms off without responding, destined, it appears, for the head of IT's office.

"OK: large pile of excrement in close proximity to wind movement device. We've got machines to test! Quickly now, pass them up to me, and make sure you note the benchmark each one leaves, and let's be thorough!"

"Quite right" the PFY concurs. "Wouldn't do to be unprofessional, would it?"

BOFH '99. Bored Once More...

Bored, bored, bored. I'm bored. The PFY's on holiday, and there's no-one in the building who's any match for him at Quake II. There's only one thing for it. I'm just going to have to make my own fun.

"They're bloody magic!" the head of security remarks joyfully, in response to my enquiry about our new proximity activated access cards. "The users don't have to ferret around in their wallets for their swipe cards, and we don't have problems with dirty swipe readers -- they're brilliant! And we can track people throughout the building. It's great!"

"And it's helpful to us too," the head of personnel blurts excitedly, "interfacing it to the phone system so that your phone automatically diverts to whichever room you're in at the moment is a godsend!"

"So I take it we're all happy and I should go ahead and pay the invoices from the telecoms and security people?"

The boss considers it for a slight moment, weighing up the trolleyload of brownie points he stands to gain from this decision before casting the deciding vote...

"The tracking WILL be used only by security, won't it?"

"OF COURSE!" I cry -- knowing that the vendor's product is no match for the tracking software we've been using for the last two years.

"There'll be only two viewing stations -- the Head of Security's office and the Ground Floor Security desk."

"In that case, where do I sign?" he asks, smiling.

Smiles break out all round as the boss slaps his OK on the bottom of the fairly modest invoices.

"What does 'TEST SITE' mean exactly?" he asks, slightly concerned at some fine print on the contract.

"It means we get the software at a discounted rate because we agree to notify them of any problems in the product."

"PROBLEMS with the product?" the boss asks warily.

"Yes, you know like we have with ALL the kit -- only this time the vendor WANTS us to tell them about it, and they'll fix them!"

"And they're giving us a DISCOUNT for this?!" he cries, not believing our good fortune. I reassure him, he seems satisfied.

Not wanting to waste any time, I grab the approved invoices and take them up to accounts.

The sad thing about systems like this is that they normally never reach their full potential until someone like me, with time on his hands, thinks outside the square, for the good of all. Well, for a bit of a laugh, anyway.

I wait a couple of tedium-filled days until security has collected the old access cards and decommissioned the swipe readers before putting my plan into action. First, modify the phone system's 'Follow Me' function to call the LAST room you were in, instead of the current one...

Next, vary the proximity on doors so that you have to be right on top of one before it releases.

The stage is set, the characters ready...

I choose the CCTV monitoring the door with the least proximity sense, which happens to be beside the coffee machine, slap a video into the recorder and wait for the boss.

Half an hour of impatience is rewarded when the boss wanders through the door, and makes himself a very hot black coffee. I crank the sensors depth to 0mm and the boss ploughs into the door with his steaming Styrofoam.

Beautiful!

I unlock the door to let him out, then phone him as he leaves the room -- he knows it's for him because he's reported the late 'follow me' to me twice already...and ploughs into the door again. I think I might be onto a 'Funniest Video' winner here.

A loud thud announces the boss's arrival at Mission Control along with a faint trickle of red on the glass at around nose height.

I hate myself, I really do.

It's not pretty. The boss is ranting at me, which upsets my concentration so much I overwrite the video I've just made. Bugger!

"AND ANOTHER THING! WHY THE HELL DOES MY PAGER GO OFF EXACTLY 30 SECONDS AFTER I ENTER THE BLOODY LOO!?" he snaps.

"I... it must be a bug," I respond, wondering if security is extracting a portion of urine from the boss as well...

"HAVE YOU NOTED IT?" he asks.

"Well, we usually let the user do that on the bugs noteboard"

"RIGHT! Where's that then?"

My conscience is making noises but, NO! I WANT THAT PRIZE!

"Ah, on the wall beside the coffee machine" I respond, rewinding the videotape"

One thud later he's gone.

Two thuds later, they take him away in a wraparound suit.

And the worst of it is, I'm still bored...

BOFH '99. A Mental Lapse...

"Are you bloody MAD?" the PFY asks as we return to the office after going a couple of rounds with a mixed bag of technical and non-technical staff who'd ambushed us outside the elevator on our way to lunch. "A bloody MEETING?!?"

"Yes," I murmur thoughtfully.

"You HATE meetings!" he blurts.

"Well, HATE is a strong word. INTENSE dislike is more accurate. But that's beside the point -- I saved us having to spend half an hour listening to their wandering thoughts on what should be in our LDAP directory."

Yes, it's true. Thanks to some remark about information publishing by the Head of IT, there are two parties lobbying for what'll end up in our new LDAP server. On the one hand we have the individuals who believe that even their office phone number is their own private info and not be published, while on the other we've got the 'privacy 'nudists' who want to bear all in the directory, listing home numbers, spouse's name, birth date, in an effort to make the world a happier place."

"OK, but still, it's not like you to call a meeting."

"In the past I've been reluctant to attend meetings; however, that's only because I didn't initiate the meeting concerned. THIS meeting, however, with a large number of disparate attendees, will be worth its weight in 128 Meg DIMMS."

"Come again?!?"

"Behold!" I cry, indicating on my desktop the windows of the three separate meeting scheduler programs in use in the company. "On the one hand we have the standalone meeting software, on another, scheduling software built into a mail server, and lastly, some fly-by-night product that Noah used which is so old it had a Y-ONE-K bug! And NONE of them interoperate well. The first two disagree by an hour thanks to daylight savings variations between the two machines, and the last one can handle hours, minutes, days and months, but sadly not years, which means the fly-by-night data import/export routine is bound to flag that the meeting time proposed is either a weekend, or has a meeting scheduled in it -- the legacy of a meeting in some former year!"

"It doesn't get cleaned out at the end of the year?"

"Nope!"

"OK, but this no-interoperation means what?"

"That after several abortive attempts, THREE separate meeting times are going to be set, which I will have to attend."

"But you HATE meetings!"

"Yes, but I LOVE watching movies on my portable DVD player which, once I slap on a keyboard, will look almost exactly like some cross between a palm and laptop! I'll be sure to 'type' something every time one of them sounds like they've come to the point once, or possibly twice per meeting. Meantime they'll be so busy 'discussing' their point of view with the other attendees that I'll never see what I'm up to."

"What if they come to a consensus?"

"Don't be silly -- these are users! Besides, if it looks dodgy I'll throw the idea of retina scans and bank account numbers onto the fire to keep things nice and hot."

"Sooner or later they'll agree!"

"Puleeeeze!" I cry. "I'm already running an LDAP to finger gateway, so when they eventually figure out what they do and don't want I'll just remove that data from the finger information data and we'll be back in business! After 'working solidly for a week to install the new software' of course."

...Three movies later...

"So no consensus reached then?" the boss asks, running a quick meeting post-mortem at mission control.

"Well, we almost reached one. But then someone suggested listing previous convictions and medical conditions."

"Why the hell would we want to do that?"

"Well, I believe the argument was that as that information was supplied in a person's CV it might belong to the company -- and someone might want to know if a co-worker had an alcohol problem before they invited them to an Xmas shout."

"That's just ridiculous!"

"That's what we decided in the end. Then the same person asked if next-of-kin, blood type, then HIV status should be listed for health and safety reasons..."

"They can't be serious!"

"Well as it happened, we decided against that eventually."

"Do you think the next meeting will iron out the wrinkles?"

"Bound to!"

...Later...

"So we're all agreed then?" I ask the final meeting.

Murmurs of assent all round. The PFY arrives with a parcel for me.

From the mail order DVD site.

"Excellent, so we'll just store name, room number, phone number, sexual preference, photo, nude photo and breast size?" I say, slapping "Enemy of the State" into my 'laptop'.

BOFH '99. Medical Matters.

"You look rough!" the PFY chirps as I drag myself into work, a mere 26 hours late.

"Yeah, out with a Slave Trader the night before last.

"And it was that bad you took a sickie?"

"No. I don't take 'sickies'. I was telecommuting."

"Yeah, right. Use the porcelain modem, did you?"

"That's quite enough of that," I interject, still a little queasy after the tube ride.

"So what transpired?" the PFY asks.

"I only had a few ales."

"A few?"

"Well, a few followed by a few. And then a few more. But it was the curry that did for me. I just can't do it anymore. I have to face facts about my body's ability to leech toxins from itself: I think I may be allergic to curry."

"Don't say that!" the PFY wails.

"It's no use fighting it," I respond, "a man can stand only so many chicken vindaloos."

"Are you sure it couldn't be the booze?"

"No - I can have a couple of lagers and wake up fine. But EVERY TIME I have a ruby, I feel ill in the morning."

"Could that be," the boss interjects as he rolls into the office under a full head of administrative steam, "because every time you have a curry you're plastered?"

"There's a certain amount of logic in that statement," I admit. "But the culprit has been identified..."

"As booze," he states firmly. "Anyway, you'll have a chance to put your theory to the test. We're all going to lunch with a supplier, who wants to sell us low-cost disk by the Terabyte."

Oh well. After all, a curry is a curry.

Our sales professional burbles at the boss while the PFY and I power through a plate of pakoras washed down with ginger beer.

"So you're selling SCSI," the PFY interjects.

"No, not SCSI. Our topology is based around a more robust..."

"Proprietary?" I ask, smelling blood in the water.

"Ah, it's proven technology..."

"DSSI!" I cry, going in for the kill.

The torpedo hits, leaving an 'uh'-shaped hole in his face.

"So, let's just recap what we're NOT talking about," I continue, reeling off technical twaddle until the boss wanders off to the little manager's room in despair.

"We're not buying," the PFY murmurs.

"No," I concur. "We've got all the old tech we need."

"Hmm..." The salesman has clearly faced this situation before. "Can I get you gentlemen anything?"

"Well, I'd like another ginger beer for starters," the PFY smirks, pouring the remains of his last glass down his gullet.

"Me too," I agree, "and hold the ginger."

TWO HOURS LATER...

"So, let's go over this one more time," the boss blurts. "We should buy a couple of Terabytes of this disk to put on our old Vax system? But no-one uses it, it doesn't make sense!"

"Yes it does; listen," I explain softly - trying not to breathe in the direction of the boss, in case he smells the evidence of the last 10 pints of my 'ginger' beer.

"There'll be fewer complaints if no-one uses them."

"Uh?"

Looks like I'm going to have to abandon logic and proceed direct to the jugular.

"Think 'Mean Time Between Failures'. Think 'Customer 'Uptime Expectation' and Delivery of Service'. 'Enhanced Modularity'. Think 'Vendor Independence' and 'Phased Installation'. Think 'Replacement Life Cycles'." I pray a silent prayer to the god of Management Buzzwords.

"Well, I suppose if you put it that way..."

His gracious defeat is interrupted by a heavy-handed tap on the shoulder from the PFY, who has all the symptoms of a bad case of liquor mortis. There's a steely look in his eye and, before I can lay hands on him, he's up and at 'em.

"Y'KNOW WHAT YUR PRBBLIM ISH?" he slurs, giving the ISO-approved employee/employer signal for 'Please disregard the following, I appear to be intoxicated'.

"Hey! Isn't that Pamela Anderson?" I cry, diverting everyone's attention while I kick the PFY's silence-knob. Well, it shuts him up anyway.

The next day dawns and I'm in a bad way. The PFY's in a bad way. Even the Boss is in a bad way (the sales bloke paid the waiters at the curry house to slip shots of their special Bolivian vodka (half Antifreeze) into the Boss' diet Tango).

"I take it back," the boss whispers quietly. "I think I might be allergic to curry too."

"Me too," the PFY agrees.

Next time we go to Luigi's. You can't go wrong with a nice bowl of pasta. And a couple of lagers to wash it down..

BOFH '99. Staff Induction?...

So the boss rolls in one morning with about 20 people in tow, bearing some 'good news' for us. The same good news that bosses bring EVERY six months...

"Simon," he burbles pleasantly (always a bad sign), "these are the new staff that we've acquired in the past six months. I'm just running them through the IT induction course."

"Course?" I ask. "As in, obstacle?"

The boss chuckles magnanimously. "Simon fancies himself as a bit of a joker, ladies and gentlemen."

"Yes," the PFY concurs, slipping in from behind the assembled crowd of inductees, "like that time he slipped the darkroom timer, some curly wires and a couple of distress flares into your briefcase before you flew to Dublin..."

The boss winces at the mention - and I could almost swear his buttocks clenched in nervous recollection.

"That wasn't very funny," he mutters.

"Well, it made me laugh," the PFY cries.

"Anyway," the boss continues, glaring at the PFY. "I'd like you to show the group around the computer room."

As a sign of good faith, he hands over one of his most cherished possessions, a penlight laser pointer. Weird - this is like Obi-Wan passing Darth his light saber "for cleaning".

Sadly, however, Obi-Wan's exit destroys the moment as he makes his way into the doorjamb, ricocheting into the corridor with all the panache of C3P0.

Still, there's trust being displayed here for some reason.

First, he gives me unsupervised access to a busload of newbies AND he's handed over something he values highly. Not that he doesn't value staff highly, of course, it's just that they're easier to replace. The laser pointer cost 30 quid of HIS money, which is why it's so disturbing to me when I accidentally - and I have witnesses to verify this - drop it down the gap between the lift door and the lift shaft. Sniffle.

Meanwhile, the sheep are following me, so I'd better put on a good show. "And this is our back-up system," I cry, indicating the monster robotic instrument as we move into the heart of the computer room, just to dispel any rumors that we don't perform this vital function.

"What was that bin under the back-up machine for?" a curious member of the audience asks once we leave the inner sanctum and return to mission control.

An interesting question - I had asked the PFY to stop back-ups so the users wouldn't witness tapes being 'exported' from the jukebox into the bin.

"Ah, that's to catch the tapes that are going to off-site storage," I ad lib. "We're waiting for the proper tape export cartridge, but in the interim..."

"Then why did that other guy just pour them all into the big bin?" he asks.

"Security reasons."

"SECURITY?!"

"Of course! If we shipped our tapes out in a tape box they'd be a sitting duck for theft!" I cry. "This way, no-one knows when the data's leaving the building."

"Well, it's just been tipped into a rubbish truck!" he responds, indicating a truck outside the window.

"It only looks like a rubbish truck," I sigh. "It wouldn't look at all convincing if a data storage company collected our rubbish now would it?"

"But they're collecting everybody's rubbish," he continues.

Funny how you go off people isn't it?

"Yes, yes, AGAIN, it would look suspicious. Quite a lot of things aren't what they seem. This handscanner, for example."

"That's not a hand scanner - it's a panini toaster!"

I sigh again, more deeply this time.

"LOOKS like a panini toaster. A volunteer from the audience please?" I ask.

Five seconds later...

"Ohmigoodness!" I cry (over the screams). "It's a real panini toaster! The PFY must have installed the scanner in the break room by mistake! And, oh no! The release catch is jammed!"

Ten minutes later, when waffle hand has been taken up to sick bay..."Any other questions?"

The silence is deafening, indicating another successful induction.

I take them back to the boss so he can give them the IT summarization speech, then wander back to mission control.

"Ah, just come to get my pointer," he says.

What the hell. "It's sitting on top of the back-up stacker in the computer room," I respond, tapping away at the console of the doors system.

"But my card's not working!" he cries.

"Oh yeah. Here, I'll let you access it via the hand scanner..."

BOFH '99. Arty Murray Arrives..

Here we go again....

I smell trouble as soon as I walk into the office.

It's 11:30 on the dot. Well, no-one could possibly expect me to get in early, given that I'd just come back from a trade show and that I'd had to go back home first to drop off my ill-gotten gains. Or, put more officially, the advanced, top-of-the-range kit that's going to be used as a testbed for advanced interactive digital multimedia (and any other buzzwords that spring to mind and sound appealing on investment proposals) services. Right now the test plan seems to involve rigging up the kit so that we can show the latest DVDs to selected chums (for a small fee, naturally) but that's the nature of draft plans.

On arrival, I'm gasping for a cup of coffee. I function only once I've had a shot of the strongest Java. The PFY keeps moaning that the amount of the stuff I drink is leaving me totally wired, although as far as I'm concerned, I'm completely 802.11 until I've had my first couple of shots of caffeine in the morning.

The PFY is looking worried as he meets me by the door of the office. "The boss wants to see you urgently," he says, jerking a none-too-clean thumb in the direction of our newly-appointed lord and master. "He's been yelling for you all morning."

That is a worrying sign. Our boss has been part of the merry fray for only a few weeks but there is every sign that he's boss type 37b (knows bugger all about technology and spends so much of his time crawling up to the chief executive and the head beancounter that he's forgotten how to do anything that actually resembles work).

His ignorance is staggering. I managed to spend several hours the other day playing Doom with the PFY because I persuaded him that he and I were testing the Dial-up Object Oriented Machine. And then there's the time that a contractor (who, by some amazing stroke of chance, bore a marked resemblance to my cousin) persuaded the boss that Arcnet was tomorrow's magic technology, and that he really should invest in some state-of-the-art kit that the contractor just happened to have in the back of his Escort. Personally, I can't wait for the audit this quarter, particularly when they find the e-mail that I "sent" to Mr. 37b warning him against the deal.

But that's something to look forward to in the future, I'm more concerned at the moment with what the boss is thinking of now. The PFY is right to look concerned; any meeting in the morning involves what we call a BLI (before lager intake) idea - the worst sort to have, as the thoughts simply don't flow so freely as PADOTF (pissed and dribbling on the floor) ones.

"Ah, Simon," beams 37b (a bad sign) when I eventually make my way into his oak-paneled domain. "I've been thinking" (a really bad sign). "The network's been running rather sluggishly lately and it needs a bit of a tweaking" (an extremely bad sign - you never want to hear the word 'tweaking' from someone who even has trouble changing the channel on the TV). "I think it might be an idea for someone to come into the office and have a look at ways in which we could improve the network". Yes, it's an idea, but I'm not entirely sure it's one I'd like to entertain or,

for that matter, one which is likely to prolong his status as a living, breathing carbon-based lifeform.

Anyway, of course the network's been a bit slow recently. Doesn't he realize just what demands real-time video has for networked bandwidth, even if you multicast it properly? (And anyway, those video pictures of the marketing director and his PA in the sickroom, after she was "taken ill" at a company bash, were well worth a few megabits per second down the backbone, so to speak). The last thing I need is some snotty-nosed, toad-faced consultant coming in here, taking a cursory look at our systems before filing a hastily-flung together report that completely rips off the company. That's my job.

I'm suddenly aware that the boss is still speaking.

"...and at the show I met this very interesting chap. Told me that he would be happy to take a look at the way our network was constructed, said that if he couldn't think of ways of saving money, we wouldn't have to pay him. I told him that we were future-proofing our network by using a new technology called Thinwire and his eyes lit up. I think he was impressed that we were so advanced - he even said that there wasn't much he could teach me."

This gets worse. And not just because the Boss *knows* the word thinwire - let alone thinks I'd let it in the place...

"So I've invited this guy over tomorrow to have a look at the way we do things. His name's Arty Murray and you should help him in any way you can."

ARTY MURRAY!!

The man of legend. It's the first time that I've come anywhere near an encounter with the Bastard Consultant from Hell, and it's not a prospect that I'm looking forward to.

It's time to formulate a plan.

To be continued...

BOFH '99. The End?.

It's with a heavy heart that I secure myself in the control room to write these lines. The reader will have to forgive my writing style as this is my first attempt at writing.

I have, for some time, been aware of my supervisor's habit of recounting our adventures to the readers of Network Week, and feel that it would be remiss of me, as his faithful assistant, not to recount this sorry tale.

It was a typical Friday morning. I was engaged in some user education in accordance with the Recommended Daily User Allowance of electricity. My 'tutorial' was interrupted by the cessation of mains supply to the desktop. Freed from the grip of electricity, the user escaped past the Bastard, who had his finger on the now-open circuit breaker.

"Much work on?" he asked, somewhat distracted.

"Nothing," I respond, indicating the recently departed user.

"Then it makes it all the easier for me to propose you sneak away for a couple of days."

"This isn't that camping holiday joke again, is it?"

"Afraid not. Ever heard the name Arty Murray?"

"No...Hang on - isn't he the guy who calls himself a 'network artist'?"

"Piss artist more like. He slimes in on a boss or two at a trade show then, with their permission, does remote probes of WANs and LANs (as an 'independent security consultant') then combines this information with stuff sneaked to him by the management contact concerned."

"And...?"

"And, inevitably, he fabricates some security vulnerability and recommends outsourcing ALL IT operations to some crap start-up company that he's associated with that couldn't ping localhost and get a response. THEN, when that company goes belly-up, snakes the job for himself. Thing is, you might never know your job was at risk! If I could beat that man, if I could free computing society of him, I'd be prepared to turn to some more placid line in life - user support, helpdesk manning, morris dancing at televised events."

"Surely not!"

"Nah, just taking the piss. But he's a menace, and he's been HERE. I've tracked him over the past few days. We've had our run-ins, and now he's coming for me and mine. It's personal!"

"What are you going to do?" I asked.

"Do? Elementary, my dear PFY! We're going to leave the place unattended for a couple of days until he reveals himself. He won't be able to resist the chance of playing with the kit."

And so we did. Booking two tickets to the Third World (Luton), we made to absent ourselves from the office. Instead we snuck back and fired up the Emergency Operations Centre on the 6th floor, passing the time aiming our disused sat dishes at our rival's receivers and sending high-gain bursts at them.

"Jeez!" the Bastard cried on the second day, halfway through our Indian takeaway. "LOOK!" he cried, pointing to a flashing red icon on the building monitor. "It's him, in the ROB faller!"

"ROB faller? What's a faller?"

"It's the opposite of a riser," the Bastard snaps. "Where the waste water and sewage go. To stop people going in there I break one of the sewer seals every year. That, combined with the lack of floor grilles, provides a treacherous drop, which is usually enough to stop even the most curious in their tracks."

"Why?"

"'Cos that's where I keep my stash of liberated kit and non-petty cash. You know I don't trust banks with ill-gotten gains."

"ROB faller?"

"There's four fallers in the building, Left-In-Front, Right-In-Front, Left-Out-Back, Right-Out-Back."

"So what's in the Right Out Back Faller?"

"Dosh. All my dosh. Years of it. Stuffed into what, to all intents and purposes, looks like a large sewer line."

"Arty Murray's found it?" I gasped.

"It would appear so. I'd best investigate!"

"I'll come with you."

"No, you stay here. I don't want anyone thinking that both of us have left the office." With that the Bastard, armed with his torch-shaped cattle prod and a set of jump leads, strode out.

I waited for some time. I fired up the CCTV monitors to follow his progress - to no avail. The CCTV circuits were dead.

Sprinting to the corner of the building with only a battery-powered stapler for protection, I found a half-open door, marked "Reichenbach - Buildings Maintenance", obviously some form of pun.

Opening the door fully, I saw evidence of a struggle, a splintered rail here, a drop of blood there.

There was worse to come. A floor and a half below, caught on a pipe fitting, I saw a strip of cloth that could only have come from the Bastard's T-shirt.

I gazed into the black abyss and shouted his name. My voice echoed back at me, but no-one answered.

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BOFH returns from the dead

BOFH 2000 Episode 1

Published Tuesday 9th May 2000 14:40 GMT

The Bastard Operator from Hell has returned from the tomb with the boss and PFY (Pimple-Faced Youth) in tow. BOFH newbies can tune into previous episodes [here](#). So let's get cracking.

It's still dark as I let myself back into my soon-to-be-EX workplace with a spare "backup" access card and stroll into the office after a short break of feigned death...

There's nothing like a quick fatality to put the life back into you..

Slipping into Mission Control quietly, I notice the PFY, bless him, has a tear or two in his eye as he reaches into my filing cabinet to put my belongings into a plain cardboard box... and a couple more when I slam the drawer on his hand.

"Now what have I told you about fingering my possessions?" I ask.

"B.. but.. you're... you're.. " he blurts, extricating his fingers gingerly.

".. Alive and well?" I finish.

"But.. what about..."

"Arty Murray?" I interject again. "Last I saw of him, he'd just plummeted through the shoddily thin sub-basement floor into the building's stormwater outfall pipe and was probably being washed toward the Thames.. Messy business.."

"How did you..?"

"Escape Unscathed? By a one in a hundred chance, a loop of thickwire Ethernet cable (which I'm sure I told you to remove from a cabling riser over a YEAR ago) was mysteriously stuffed in the faller ducting instead .. where I theoretically wouldn't find it.."

The PFY looks away guiltily as I continue...

".. Which hooked round one of my legs on the way down. Causing me considerable personal injury less than a yard of drop later. But don't worry, my extended absence (for recuperation) will of course be charged back to the company, as will the extensive medical bills from Doctors J Beam and Daniels. "

"OhI'mSoPleasedYou'reBack!" the PFY gushes with all the self-control of a Microsoft Fan in the Master Bedroom of Gatesland. "Things have been terrible!"

"Terrible?" I require.

"Everyone at IT's been reshuffled, they're going to put us under the Beancounters, and there's been a freeze on spending."

"So, business as per usual then?"

"I DON'T THINK SO!" The boss cries triumphantly, entering the office with all the grace and poise of a large tusk-bearing animal. After 10 buckets of lager.

"Why's that?" I ask politely.

"Because you don't **WORK** here any more!," he cries happily, pointing out the unexplained absence clause in my contract.

"Of course I don't work here any more - it was touch and go when I **WAS** working here. No, I have my sites set on greener pastures. By the way, any Y2K problems?"

"It's a nightmare!," the PFY admits. "You name it, it's failing - even the stuff that's only about six months old."

"Excellent, so my work wasn't in vain then!"

"You sabotaged our systems!," the boss burbles.

"Of course not. You said you wanted all our systems Y2K complaint ready."

"I said compl-IA-nt!"

"No, you distinctly said **COMPLAINT**. I know, I kept a copy."

"W... " the boss burbles, nudging his vocab up a fraction.

"Mine not to reason why! And if you think it's bad **NOW**, wait till Feb 29 - some of that microcode is almost viral!"

"You'll have to fix it!" the boss cries.

"I don't work here any more."

"Yes you do!"

"I can't, I'm dead - just like that email you sent to Salaries a couple of months back."

"How did..." the boss starts, answering his own question - obviously been around a bit too long, although that's bound to be sorted out by Feb 29 too.

Suffice to say, the conversation went downhill from there, with security helping me find my way back to the street and relieving me of my access card on the way. (Only three more left, which'll be worth gold after the card readers slip into erase-mode for leap day.)

So I enter the job market, and find a suitable position within a couple of hours. A couple of hours later I break out my suit from long-term storage and attend an interview.

It went fairly well as interviews go - I told them what they wanted to hear, laughed at their IT jokes that were so old they were printed in braille on the back of the UNIVAC, and generally impressed them with my computing worldiness.

Sickening, I agree.

"Just one question" I chime in: "How aggressively do you persue new technology?"

"We believe in growth, and now we've got you, we can go 'leading edge'. Sure, it'll cost a bit more, and involve a bit of travel to track down the right solution, but we think it's just the price you have to pay to get ahead of the competition."

"Dosh and Travel, my favourite twinset... Quicker than you can say "I'm on the team!" I'm on the team.

...

"And here's your workstation - it cost a bomb, and it's the latest and fastest, I believe."

"It's a Digital VT1000 'X' terminal! They don't even make them any more."

"Yes, refurbished to top-of-the-line our consultant told us."

"It's Mono!"

"Too fast for colour, he said."

A quick scan of the computer room (full of VAXes, Sparc-1s and a couple of NEXTs for show) and facts-of-life talk later appraises him of the shafting that they've been getting.

"What should we do?"

"Well there's a lot of work, I won't be able to do it on my own. We'll need an IT manager too..."

...

"Yep?" the PFY answers shirtily (I'm so proud - taught him everything you know).

"Hi, it's Opportunity - knocking. And give the boss a yell too - I hear there's a vacancy he might be interested in before the end of February."

Just like old times - back in the driver's seat once more...

Wanted: Bastard Operators to man helldesk

BOFH 2000 Episode 2

Published Tuesday 9th May 2000 14:38 GMT

So the PFY has joined me at my new workplace after being "let go" on the grounds of "technical differences". Apparently, he thought the CEO's laptop would survive the drop from the boardroom window, and everyone else didn't.

True, he was correct... thanks to the "freak" appearance of one of the more annoying security guards, scanning window ledges in response to an anonymous tip-off about a potential jumper.

So we're now stuck at a Meet-the-troops meeting where we get introduced to all our new cow-workers.

And what a bunch they are. There's a couple of ancient code-hacks who look like they were on the design team for the atom, a screwdriver jockey who seen more accidental volts than a deathrow successful candidate, and three creepy types who just **HAVE** to be consultants.

"Where's the helpdesk people?" I feel obliged to ask, once the meeting looks like it's underway, and I've laid on some side bets with the PFY about who's who.

"Oh there's no Helpdesk as **SUCH**," Consultant Type No.1 responds. "There's us three Apps Integrators," (the PFY hands over five quid), "Hardware support," (and another five quid as Voltman is identified), "and our Coding Engineers," (10 quid for the hat-trick). "And anything **WE** can't handle, we pass on to the Systems Guy. Guys. You!"

So it looks like we'll be expecting lots of calls about shoelaces, On/Off switches and life in general.

"So there's no helpdesk?"

"No. People call you. We've always found it works well," our new Head of Dept. replies, entering the room fashionably late, personnel disorganiser in hand.

"Well we'll need phones then."

"There are phones in your office."

"No, there's nothing there, just some tables and desks," I respond.

"And Workstations," the Head replies, obviously referring to the Anchor Substitutes the PFY and I had tossed into the skip on the building site across the road early in the morning.

After the phones...

"Workstations?" the PFY asks innocently.

"Yes, top of the line kit we got from the Vendor just last year. Plugged into the UPS units beside your desk."

"UPS Units?" I add, with a similar angelic disposition.

"Are you sure you got the right office?" one of the Consultants asks, attempting to resolve the situation.

"Positive, my name's on the door!" I respond.

Ten minutes (and one mass exodus from the meeting to our office) later, it's official. We've been robbed!!!

Apparently, thieves slipped past security, stole some shonky old hardware, the phones and some very heavy UPS units (So heavy we had to stop twice for rests) and the Visitors log.

Would you believe it.

"The Bastards!" the PFY cries, pathetically trying to make some mileage out of the tragedy. "They stole my Walkman."

"I shouldn't worry," the Head comments. "Company Insurance covers any loss of personal ite..."

"Good Lord I hope they didn't take my... Portable DVD player with a selection of New Release movies!!!" I cry, seeing the open gate... "Oh NO!"

A pair of dubious eyes are cast my way, but by this time I'm ready with the excuse. "I thought I'd treat myself as a celebration for the new job!"

The PFY's disgusted (that he didn't go higher... it looks too suspicious now) but it looks like my blatant fabrication has been accep...

"Did you keep the Receipts?" our helpful Consultant-Type No.1 chirps, shortly before a full-height hard drive (precariously balanced on the edge of a table -- as all full-height hard drives should be) falls on his foot.

And wouldn't you know it, the PFY accidentally knocks over a bookshelf, in his scramble to render aid, rendering unconsciousness instead.

"Oh dear," the PFY mutters apologetically.

Consultant Types No.2 and No 3. offer useful first aid suggestions about Shock, etc... this comes in very handy when Consultant Type No.2 comes into contact with a paper clip which had managed somehow to get wedged into the phase pin of a wall socket...

...Doubly so when the Consultant Type No.3 misdiagnosed the rigor as Parkinson's and tried to help him to a chair...

Not a bad haul for the first day of work...

Everyone survived (sadly)... except for an ancient code hack sitting quietly in the corner... or to be more precise being dead quietly... it's not easy to tell the difference with these guys...

The ancient code hack wasn't even one of our troops... he had booked in the room for an earlier meeting, died in his chair, and never booked out.

And so it is a couple of days later, with a great technical manpower shortage, we're interviewing for Helldesk Operators...

"And any experience with Windows...?" I ask

"3.1 yes. And I've used 95 once or twice"

NEXT!

"A user has a browser problem. What's the first thing you'd ask them?" the PFY asks.

"What magazine they reading?"

NEXT!

"A user has just changed their NT password and is now unable to login with it. Will it be because they set their password with the Caps key down?" I ask, hinting helpfully.

"No, it's probably because their system has been hacked. No, it's probably got a virus."

....

"So how did it go?" the Head asks, at the end of the day.

"Well, they're all so.... equal," the PFY replies.

"So what did you do?"

"What we always do in these situations."

"Not the one with the biggest..."

"No, we just drew names out of a hat. They start next week."

And so does the war...

BOFH unmask the Printer Smasher

BOFH 2000 Episode 3

Published Tuesday 9th May 2000 14:36 GMT

So I'm into the swing of things at the new workplace and everything seems to be running as bad as expected. The company's computing and networking is so old it qualifies for a pension (and disability too).

The new helldesk people are everything we hoped for and less, as is continually proven by their penchant for handing any call with a computing buzzword onto us.

Some form of re-education is needed. Meantime, there are phones to answer.

"Hello, is that the operators?!" a voice demands.

"Yes it is, how can I help you?" I ask, pleasant as can be.

"The bloody printer in the 3rd floor documents room has gone off again."

"By 'off' you mean?"

"It's not printing. It's **NEVER** bloody printing! You guys fix it, then an hour later it breaks again!"

"I see. Which printer is it?"

"The grey one."

"Yes, but which printer is that?"

"The one by the window."

"Ok, pretend I just started here and have **NO** idea what you're talking about. Do you know what the queue name is, or what the printer is called?"

"A Laserwriter II"

>Rocket Scientist Alert<</p>

"No, I mean what... It doesn't matter. Does it break down all the time?"

"Yeah, it's **ALWAYS** being fixed."

"Right. In that case, go into the documents room and push it off the table onto the floor."

"Pardon?"

"Push it onto the floor. Actually, it's based on a Canon engine and they're fairly robust. Best thing to do would be to stand on the table and throw it on the floor. Two or three times should be enough. Then say it fell or something."

"You can't be serious!"

"Look, it's probably done 5 squillion pages and got electric arthritis. It won't be replaced till it's completely stuffed, and if I fix the paper jam it's most probably got, it's only going to break again in a week or so, isn't it?"

"I suppose you're..."

"Or course I'm right, I'm the bloody operator. **BUT**, if you give it a bit of gravity maintenance it'll be ruined beyond fixing, and you'll get a nice new printer - possibly a colour one so you'll get to see Miss Kornikova in all.."

"How did you know a.." he gasps.

(complete newbie)

"..her natural beauty and it'll print so fast you won't have to wait until out-of-work hours to queue them!"

"I..."

"See my point? Of course you do."

"But they'll.."

"Do nothing. Just say you the printer wasn't on the table squarely. Of course, as a cover story you'd want to mention to a couple of workmates beforehand that you have a slight obsessive-compulsive orderly nature - nothing over-the-top, and you're home and hosed!"

"But they'll know I did it on purpose!"

"Puleeeeze! Who'd believe you actually did it on purpose? You'd have to be a loony to do that. The odd person might wonder about it, but like I said, only a loony would do it. But remember to mention the tidying thing or it'll look a bit strange that you wanted to move the printer..."

"You think it'll work?"

"I ***KNOW*** it'll work!"

"Why don't you do it then?"

"I've already got a colour printer. And it prints glossy pictures too. Why, with that and the laminator on the 4th floor you could have yourself a waterproof piccy that you could take int.."

"I'll do it!"

"Excellent - And remember the orderly thing."

"Yep!"

I ring off and call security - just like old times.

"Hello."

"Hi," I blurt, "Simon, Operations - I think I found the guy who's been smashing up all the printers around the building -- he rang me up bragging about it. I traced the call to the 3rd floor, I think he's planning to do over one of the printers up there!"

"I'll get right onto it!" the guard blurts, slamming the phone and no doubt waddling to the lift at full speed.

I get there in time to witness the grand finale where my caller gets a truncheon in the groin and a quick trip to the Security office.

"He's been very upset with the printer lately," the kindly old wrinkle at reception tells me, "but I never thought it would come to this. He's obsessive-compulsive, you know!"

"Sad isn't it?" I respond, sympathetically flashing my ID Swipe card. "Which was his desk? - I'd better make sure he's logged out."

She points me to a cubicle and I kill a little time dragging his files into the trash. Except the Kornikova snaps of course - they go straight into the OPS share with all the other good stuff. For a couple of further nails into the old coffin, I delete anything he's got access to on his departmental share, then shut the machine down.

...

"Sounds to me like the typical 'workplace disenfranchised user complex' - we see it all the time." I say, consoling the boss over the phone, "One day, out of nowhere, they just crack and try to subvert the system from within."

"Terrible," the boss agrees, "But it's an isolated occurrence?"

"Hard to tell" I murmur, slapping some heat-sensitive glue onto the back of another blank sheet of A4 and picking a company printer at random, "Hard to tell.."

BOFH goes to Hollywood

BOFH 2000 Episode 4

Published Tuesday 9th May 2000 14:34 GMT

So I'm not in a particularly good mood - but what's new?

I go to sign up for a First Aid refresher course (in my business it pays to be on the safe side -- you never know when something might go right). Only to find out that I'm not permitted to go because the ratio of First Aid people to staff is already excessive.

So I'm going to have to wait until one of the current First Aid certificate holders leaves the organisation before I can spend two days at the pub in work time - I mean, uh, refresh my first aid skills... of course.

Ah well, patience is a virtue, and all good things come to those who wait. **AND**, you win some and lose some, which is what I say to the PFY when we draw straws to see who's going to shut their hand in the door, so we can find out who the current certificate holders are...

"Bastard!" the PFY comments - the sore loser, while I palm the bits of broken off straw into the bin where he can't find them. Serves him right for not being professional enough to cheat.

And then I spot the other bits of broken off straw in the bin...

I'm just about to berate him for bad sportsmanship when the boss rolls in at top speed (ten feet a fortnight) to discuss a printout he's found on the printer.

And then I remember that only this morning I was working on the screenplay for a Bastard movie called *A Few Good Simms*, to star Jack Nicholson as me, Demi Moore as the unrequited love interest and Tom Hanks as the Boss. (I would have used Tom Cruise, but that's just cliché)

"What's this?" the boss asks, handing over a wadge of pages. I flip to the end to my favourite part...

...

Bastard: *"You want answers?"*

Boss: "I think I'm entitled to them!"

Bastard: **"YOU WANT ANSWERS?"**

Boss: "I want the truth!"

Bastard: **YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH!**

Son, processes live on a system that has finite resource. Resources guarded by people with System Admin experience! Who's going to look after that system? You? The support guy who drools so much he has a drip tray?

I have a greater responsibility than you can possibly fathom.

You weep for lost sessions and curse system admins - you have that luxury! You have the luxury of not knowing what I know - that session killing, while tragic, saves resource - And my existence, while incomprehensible and expensive to you - saves resource!"

You don't want the truth because deep down, in places you don't like to talk about at user group meetings, **WANT** me on the system - you **NEED** me on the system!"

We use words like "I/O wait", "Pagefaults", and "CPUtime", as a backbone of a life spent sorting out user-caused problems. You use them as a cop-out for downtime at Management meetings.

I have neither the time nor the inclination to explain myself to a person who connects and disconnects under the very blanket of the very performance I provide, then **QUESTIONS** the manner in which I provide it. I'd rather you left a nice message with helldesk.

Or read a linux admin manual and checked out the performance monitors. Either way, I don't give a **DAMN** what you think you are entitled to!"

Boss: "Did you kill -9 the Database Server?"

Bastard: "I did my job - I kept the system running!"

Boss: "Did you kill -9 the Database Server?!"

Bastard: "YOU'RE GODDAM RIGHT I DID!"

...

Having looked over the page, I give the boss his answer

"It's a printout of that movie - whatever it is - one of the staff must have printed it"

I slap it into the recycling bin before he thinks of grabbing it back, then go on the offensive.

"Was that all you came in for?"

"No, no, Apparently someone's complained that they gave you a tape of data to load onto the system and you erased it - claiming it was virus protection an-"

"So did we find a virus on the tape?"

"Of course not - it was erased!"

"Sounds like a good protection mechanism to me!"

"You can't bloody erase people's data when- "

"We didn't erase their data, the tape was blank when it got here," I say, nipping his indignation off in the bud.

"And what about their second tape, which they had verified before they had it sent?"

"There was no sec..." I start, then notice the PFY doing a very thorough job of examining the ceiling tiles for signs of stress.

"..ondary data on those tapes. Just the labels and that was it."

"I'll show you!" the PFY chimes, entering the conversation at long last, dragging the boss into the computer room to gaze upon the tape stackers.

Barely a minute later he's back... alone.

"Ohmigoodness," he gasps, "there's been a terrible accident! A tape library's tipped over onto the boss's foot and he's trapped!"

Mission Accomplished.

Scant seconds later we have all the department First Aiders in the computer room discussing the best way to treat a crushed foot.

. . .

"Strange that the Halon system activated," the PFY says later, down at the pub, discussing the recent resignation of two of our first aiders.

"Yeah. Hey - wanna do a first aid certificate?"

"What does it involve?"

"Another pint for me to start with..."

BOFH specs the Quake Box From Heaven

BOFH 2000 Episode 5

Published Monday 12th June 2000 15:48 GMT

So I'm trialling Quake III on my new (i.e. The Boss's hand-me-down) machine and the lag on it's so bad I'm in serious danger of getting refresh fatigue. Or disconnecting the CPU fan and letting it die as nature intended.

Of course, it is a fairly reasonable desktop machine (a couple of months old, but an out-of-vogue colour), so I can't really complain.

"It's the worst piece of crap I've ever worked on!" I complain to The Boss. "The graphics are shocking!"

"You're in Systems Management - what would you need good graphics for, anyway," he asks, in what could be construed as a surly manner.

"The SNMP monitor for a start. Why, just recently I rebooted two database servers, because I thought their Icon colour had changed from orange to brown!"

"When was that?!" The Boss asks, no doubt worried about the swathe of complaints that'll be waiting for him on his voicemail.

"Soon as I get back to my office. Probably..."

"Is that a threat?!?"

"Of course not, we don't make threats! Promises yes, threats, no."

Seeing where this conversation is going, The Boss switches to bargain mode...

"So what would it take to keep you happy?"

"A couple of 3D graphics cards would be a scorcher," I say, pointing out a couple of 32 meg babies that are just **GAGGING** for a bit of wholesale slaughter onscreen.

"Hmm. I suppose so. Get me a purchase order and I'll sign it."

...

The old seventh sense (Junket Detection) is flagging an NMI in the grey matter. He obviously wants me out of his hair for some reason. Time to go on the offensive.

"Well that's the problem. The cards aren't compatible with the ASIEMU technology that the machine's based on."

"ASIJMU?"

"Asymmetric Synchronisat..."

DUMMY MODE ON

"What will it cost?" he asks, interrupting before I can think up an acronym better than "Standard I Just Made Up".

"For a machine that's compatible? Should be around a couple of Grand."

"TWO THOUSAND POUNDS!" he gasps.

"It **IS** future-proof equipment!" I cry defensively, "and besides, I can give my old box to the PFY, which should keep him happy..."

In the end, The Boss folds, and not just because he's scared that I'll come around his side of the desk and see all the browser windows that the porno site he's visiting has thrown up on his screen. (Reflection in the spectacles.)

"So, do you have a Requisition form?" I ask, knowing full well that if I leave his office without a signed order, he'll clear his machine and rescind his goodwill quicker than OS2 goes down.

"No, but there's one in the secretaries' office."

A good volley, but not good enough. Time to crank up the heat...

"How about you print one to your printer - before you forget," I respond, moving towards his screen **AND** a printer with rather a lot of pages that look to be recently printed.

"AH! I know," he blurts, reaching for his top drawer, "I keep one here."

He waits impatiently while I fill in a form so vaguely that I could buy a TV set and still be within spec.

Once I've got his signature, I'm off!

So I call up one of the bits-and-bobs vendors which always hang around like vultures on a Western movie and tell them what we want.

And then it starts. The Car Sales-like pitch...

"What would you be wanting to use it for?"

Step One of how to **REALLY** get on my tits: when your Sales Assistant - who's been in the job since his voice broke three weeks back - decides he's going to ignore the spec you've given him, and designs his own, using the tiny amount of experience gleaned since his nappies were changed...

"DHCP server," I cry, pulling an App out of the air. (But still not sad enough to say "Exchange Server" to get the sympathy vote.)

"But you don't need the graphics card you've specced for that!"

"Yes I do! Digital High Convergence Peripherals are heavily dependent on graphical representation," I ad lib, cranking up creativity a notch or two.

"Digital High Convergence Peripherals? I thought you meant Dynamic Hos..."

"Old Hat. This is the new juice."

"So you won't be wanting much disk then?"

"Yes I will."

"Well do you really need low profile - what about a desk side tower unit - only 20 quid more and you have all this space to slap extra drives in."

"Don't need extra drives, just the two 72 Gigs I asked for"

"What about a dual processor - got a great deal going with thes..."

"Don't need a dual processor."

"What about a RAID card -- protect your data with one o..."

"If I'd wanted a RAID card it'd be on the spec. Remember the spec?"

And so it goes, till we eventually settle on the spec I'd faxed him in the beginning...

...

So two weeks later I get the kit, a Tower with three extra disks, a RAID card and a price tag to match. I ring the vendor back and he agrees, after a due amount of lying (i.e. "We sent you the wrong order - but you could still change your mind," etc.), to send the machine we'd configured.

Two days later my kit arrives - around the same time the Sales guy rings me to find out where all the internals of the machine he sent me have got to.

"Had the box been opened?" I ask.

"No, it was still factory sealed," he admits.

"So it must have been mis-shipped."

"Yes, I suppose you're right..."

"Of course I am! Now, can you do me a favour?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Can you tell me where I'd get drivers for a RAID card like the ones you guys ship in Tower Units?"

Experience - a great teacher.

Like me.

BOFH masters the art of creative accounting

BOFH 2000 Episode 6

Published Wednesday 3rd May 2000 11:56 GMT

So we've got a visitor in at Mission Control for the next couple of days who's going to upgrade the main financial software package that the company uses.

And wouldn't you know it, his hourly rate (I happen to notice, when his briefcase accidentally falls open after I trip and insert a paperclip into its lock) is such that it brings a tear to even **MY** trained eye -- and I, not being unversed in the arts of extortion and general larceny -- am fairly hard to surprise.

Of course, his disguising it as a **DAILY RATE** gives the impression, to naive types (The Boss, The H.O.D and Technical Contracts Group), that you're getting a lot more for your money than 7.5 hours. Well, 4.5 if we're to be completely honest and subtract food/beverage and newspaper breaks.

However, as they say, you're paid for what you know, not what you do...

"So what you're saying is that he's extremely overpaid?" the PFY asks when I explain these facts to him.

"Why do you say that?"

"Cos he knows bugger all!"

"Well he won't be a computing jack-of-all-trades like us -- his forte is no doubt the accounting application and its installation."

"So why's he reading the upgrade documentation?"

"A lot of this stuff is highly complex, with hundreds of pre-upgrade procedures to be carried out," I remind him. "So he's probably performing the checklists. What section is he reading at the moment?"

"The introduction -- entitled 'How to use this documentation'."

"Well, he's probably..."

"He's been reading it for an hour now.."

"Ah"

"Ah?"

"Ah. Meaning, it sounds like we've got a suck-it-and-see upgrader."

"Suck it and see?"

"The old-fashioned way of checking if mains cable was live"

"You'd suck a cable?"

"Don't be silly -- that's dangerous! You'd get an apprentice to do it!"

"Oh. So what does it mean now?"

"It means I think he'll skim the upgrade text, ensure we have a complete backup of the system, then rush blindly into the upgrade, accepting all defaults -- **KNOWING** that he can recover the data if needed.

"Ah."

"Precisely. And if it works, he comes out looking smokingly good at his job, if not there's 'some incompatibility with our software or with the upgrade pack' and we roll back."

"Rollback?"

"Yes, it's a nice way of saying that you've made a pig's breakfast of the whole thing and want the evidence erased by a recovery."

"Has anyone ever called you cynical?"

"They may have, but they're just bitter.."

Our conversation ends seconds later with the reappearance of the person concerned, complete with upgrade manual and highlighter pen.

"Ah, just checking that you've taken a full system backup before I start."

"Sure have!" I lie, nudging the snapshot tapes into the bin as he leaves the room.

...Several Hours later...

"I'm afraid we'll need to rollback the upgrade"

"Oh, why's that?"

"Looks like there's an incompatibility between your revision of the Database code and the version the upgrader expects" he murmurs.

The needle on my desktop Bollockometer wanders off-scale for a moment or ten.

"Sure," I cry, grabbing a tape from the pile of read-errored duds on my desk.

..10 Minutes Later...

"I'm afraid the tape we wrote has read errors and is unrecoverable," I report.

"I..." he gasps. "Didn't you read it to verify it?"

"Of course" I respond, ignoring the ticking sound as the Bollockometer clocks itself "but my guess is that the read pass must have been the straw that broke the camel's back -- media-wise!"

"Can't you recover **ANY** of the data?"

"Nope, the error's at the beginning of the tape -- as you'd expect of the most used area of magnetic media," I burble.

"Oh dear," he says, only minorly apologetic. "Our statement of indemnity clearly states that we're not responsi.."

"Statement of indemnity?"

"Yes, as a matter of course we get a signatory from our clients to indemnify us if there are problems as a result of the upgrade. I have it with me in my brie.. ..Hmm, it's in here somewhe..."

"Oh dear. Don't tell me you've forgotten to get an indemnity form signed. And I just **BET** you're a private contractor who signed an indemnity form with your agency indemnifying **THEM** ?"

"I..."

"Which means it'll be you *personally* that our company will be pursuing for damages..."

"I..."

"Unless, of course... But then..."

"Unless what?!?!?"

"Well unless of course you re-enter all the data from the ruined tables into the database before the beancounters get in the morning..."

"But the corrupt table's got about 200,000 rows!"

"Yep, it'd take ages to re-enter. Unless you somehow managed to bribe all the women in our D.P. Pool to do it for you..."

"**COULD I?!?!?**" he gasps.

"I dunno -- sounds a bit pricey to me!" the PFY chirps, right on time "You'd be lookingat, I dunno, a couple of grand."

"I can manage two thousand pounds!" he blurts.

"Ah, that would be **THREE** thousand pounds -- by the time my assistant, myself, and the Head of DP are taken into account."

"Would you take a ch.."

"**CASH**. If you hurry you could get it before the banks close and the DP staff leave."

It takes about 10 minutes for him to rocket out of the building and collect the wherewithal to make the transaction. I assure him the DP people will work till it's done, or take the blame themselves for the error -- which appeases his distress largely.

As soon as he's gone, I slip the PFY his share (500 quid) ignoring his protestations.

"Was it **YOU** who split the disk mirror this very morning?" I ask whilst invalidating the data on the upgrade disk with a few well-placed keystrokes and bringing the old version Online with only a few more. "Was it **YOU** who stole the indemnity form from his briefcase? I think not! You got paid for your two parts in this -- your estimate of the DP Pool cost at the right moment.."

"And?"

"Those pints you're about to buy me!"

"Of course!"

BOFH: agony uncle and bastard

BOFH 2000 Episode 7

Published Friday 19th May 2000 16:51 GMT

"Hold on while I pull the answer to that question out of my **ARSE!**" the PFY spits down the phone to some poor, unsuspecting user...

...who, admittedly, deserves it.

Nonetheless, the PFY's attitude is a little more abrasive than usual, so I feel it's best to defuse the situation by taking the "Softly Softly" approach and finding out what's up.

"You're running hotter than a 486 DX-1 Million with no water cooling -- what's getting on your tits then?" I cry, as soon as he's slammed down the receiver.

(Softly Softly means you've got to be cruel to be kind.)

Sure enough, as expected, (and yet again), the lad's been unlucky in love. Seems his latest dream date prefers the company of other blokes. Not **LOTS** of other blokes, thank goodness, just one other bloke...

In our building...

"Well, you know what I always say..." I respond when the sordid story is at last recounted to me.

"Kill -9 needs no justification?"

"Yes, but **NO**, that wasn't what I was thi.."

"A fool and his password are soon parted?"

"Ah No, was thinking more along the lines of.."

"An outage in time saves backup tapes?"

"**NO!** I always say 'Forgive and Forget!'"

"No you don't!! You've **NEVER** said that!"

"Haven't I? I'm sure I have! What about that time that bean counter pushed in front of me at the lunch queue?"

"The guy you tripped and subsequently face-planted the very hot beef curry?"

"An accident which meant noth..."

"And who got back to his workplace to find his machine on fire..."

"A Cooling Fan problem, completely unrelated to anyth..."

"..His gas-operated chair discharged..."

"Normal gaseous loss from a pneumatic device..."

"..And his family portrait hideously disfigured."

"Now **WAIT JUST A MINUTE!** It was hideously disfigured before I got there. True, that's what his family looks like, but at least my modifications made it look a bit less like a group photo from the Gorilla house."

"And that's forgiving and forgetting is it?"

"Of course. He's forgiven now - and I'd forgotten all about it until you brought it all back up again."

"I don't think that's what people mean by forgive and forget."

"But revenge is an integral part of forgiving and forgetting! How can you forgive if you carry a grudge? That bean counter now has a clean slate with me - we've got a normal User/System Manager relationship now!"

"So why did you delete his file share yesterday?"

"Because we have a normal User/System Manager relationship! Anyway, he rang to complain about his share quota, which is just **GAGGING** for it!"

The PFY can see this conversation is going nowhere fast, and opts out with a small sigh and a forlorn look.

"So what does this bloke **DO** here?"

"He's something in marketing - don't know much more than that."

"His Name perhaps?" I ask, prompting as much as possible.

"'Dave' is all I know."

"Right, well let's just abuse the privacy of the corporate Database and see who he is... >clickety click<. So, there's **THREE** Davids in marketing - which is at the far end of the bellcurve if you ask me - And >clickety< **TWO** of them are over 50, which I'm assuming puts them out of your beloved's perfect match criteria, which leaves us wanting to check out the contents of the local email of machine PCMKT14 >clickety<, which for some reason doesn't allow Domain Admin access. So next up we check out the voicemail on..."

"It'll never work!" the PFY cries. "Voicemail is Pin Code protected and only the telecoms engineer can bypass it! It's foolproof!"

We laugh, grab the audio file from the voicemail server, and play it. I leave the pointer poised over the STOP button in case it gets a little hairy. So to speak. Everything is however fairly run-of-the-mill and work related.

"Right!" I cry, grabbing a large black box with an RJ45 connector, "Time for a flyby. Patch this into his Network line in Comm Room 4, Port uh.. >Clickety< E31./"

"What is it?"

"It's a, uh... network card.. tester.... ***OH***, if it gets wet don't try and pick it up!"

A quarter of an hour later we get a call about a machine with a burning smell...we decide to be proactive and visit the user.

"It just made this very high pitched squeal for about 20 seconds and stopped," Dave informs us.

"Really? Probably some intermodulation distortion with the carrier wave peak."

*****DUMMY MODE ON*****

"Duh-huh. Is it broken?"

"Very, we're going to need to take it away."

"Oh. For how long?"

"Oh, only a couple of... I say, I'd get your chair seen to - it looks like it's lost all its gas - you'd want to.. **MY GOODNESS**, that's not your **FAMILY** is it?"

"W-WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU DONE TO MY PHOTOS!"

"Done to your photos?" the PFY asks, "I'm holding a PC, I can't do anything to anything! Next you'll be blaming me for urinating in your pot plant while you were disconnecting the cables under the desk!"

"Don't be ridiculous! The plant people have obviously been!"

"Oh, my mistake. Still, at least you've got a coffee to keep you going while we look at your machine -- drink up.."

It's a bit obvious, however, that Dave fails to notice the warning signs (the PFY's keenness, the overfull mug) and quaffs deeply...

Later, at Mission Control, after we've dissected the contents of his hard drive to no avail and drop-tested his machine a dozen times, the PFY makes some calls...

"Uh..." he says, popping back to the service desk.

"MMMmmm.."

"It was, ah, **DOUG**, not **DAVE**..." he murmurs sheepishly.

"Oh dear... Still - you've got to laugh! Anyway," I cry, handing him the network card tester again. "Best test Doug's card then!"

BOFH 1: TWAT O

BOFH 2000 Episode 8

Published Friday 19th May 2000 15:08 GMT

And what is this supposed to achieve?" the PFY asks, dubiously looking over a project proposal the boss has handed out with no small amount of gusto and enthusiasm.

"The plan is to lighten the administrative load on us and the new Helldesk types by training up the most proficient computer user in each area to act as a first-line-of-defence type, who can eliminate all the simple day-to-day problems that plague us so much."

"You think it'll work?"

"About as likely as an un plagiarised Look-and-Feel interface."

"So you don't think the candidates are the full quid?"

"48p at best."

"Well I spo.."

"They couldn't retain **WATER** without studying first.."

"Yes, but..."

"They think firewalls are used in chimneys!"

"Yes, and you'l..."

"That only Jenny Craig makes thin clients..."

"U.."

"The only hardware they've ever handled's in the bedroom - and even that was bug-ridden. They think that Linux is a character from Charlie Brown.. That >**BZZERT**<"

The PFY, spotting a potential re-entrant mental loop, resets me with the help of his trusty cattle-prod connectivity tester. (Which he'll regret later)

"So, what'll we teach them?" he asks thoughtfully..

"The very basics - how to put the lid back on a PC, get the **CAPS LOCK** key off, where the Power switch is, what a network cable looks like - that sort of thing."

"I see," he says, looking as doubtful as I feel.

...

"Now can anyone tell me the most important thing about computing safety?" I ask, looking around the audience to see if any of the assembled people has any answers. And of course **WHENEVER** you have one of these sessions there's always some complete **TWAT** (pardon my Russian) in the audience who was programming an Apple][E in his nappies who has a thousand and one pointless, irrelevant and meandering stories to tell you about the foibles of the 6502 instruction set. And when he's not doing that, he's correcting your monologue with snippets from the *'Pedant's Guide to Computing Knowledge'*."

Ok, so I'm just slightly bitter.

"Bound to be the power supply!" today's installation of **TWAT** informs us. "Lots of voltage in a switched mode power supply, stacked up in a electrolytic capacitor and able to be discharged up to an hour after a device is unplugged from the wall."

See what I mean?

"No!" I cry, "But we'll come back to that later. For now, we'll talk about the **SECOND** most important thing about computing safety, which is to secure your machine from unwanted accesses. Remember, a secure machine is a safe machine! Now how would we choose a good password?"

"A pseudo random string of alphanumeric and symbols with mixed case," **TWAT** blurts, before anyone's had a chance to take in the question.

Because of the technical nature of the response, a couple of the onlookers are fooled into nodding their head in agreement.

"NO!" I cry enthusiastically, adding a hint of conspiracy into the pot. "That's just what they'd be expecting you to do!"

"What who'd be expec..?" my Royal pain asks.

"Industrial Spies!" I comment, lowering my voice "Believe it or not, industrial espionage exists - even at our paltry level of commerce. Sometimes it's just information they want - sometimes they want to disrupt our processes!

Why just last week three people in accounting came to work to find their hard disks completely erased and all the DIMM chips removed from their machines!"

A gasp of horror flows around the room, even though 98% of them wouldn't know a DIMM if the found one in their coffee.

"But they'd have to get in the building to steal DIMMs, so your password wouldn't matter," **TWAT** comments "They could take your harddrive away and just examine the contents. With the new magnetic aura detection they could read the files that you'd previously erased, even if you used an aggressive overwriting packa.."

RIGHT! I've had enough!

"You're right, of course," I cry, pandering to the whole self-worth experiment underway in front of me,"which is why I've asked for a massive increase in the security budget! Anyway, that's enough about security, now onto hardware. Memory Errors! Can anyone tell me the recommended way to reseal the DIMMs in this box here?"

No prizes for guessing who's up, complete with wrist strap (which he brought with him - sadder still) before I can finish the sentence.

"Well on this one you turn the power off at that wall >CLICK< then flip the key to the unlock position like so >SNICK< push the two buttons at the back like this >CLICK< then lift the cover up and towards you, and Bob's your second cousin."

"Right, and now the reseating?"

"Simple, these are the DIMMs here, and you reseal them by taking them out like so
>**ZZZZZZ**zzzzzzzzzzzz...</p>

"Now what has he done wrong here?" I ask the fireworks spectators.

>**ZzzzzzZzZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ**</p>

"That's right, he's forgotten to check for a UPS unit in this cardboard box marked 'Printer Paper'!"

>***ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ***eeeeeerrrrrrrrrrrrr... </p>

"And he failed to notice that someone's dropped an unfolded paper clip into the machine which has, by a one-in-a-million chance got connected between the Phase line in the power supply and the DIMM chip!"

• • •

Of course I switch the UPS off, eventually... ..and he's still bloody going!!

"I can't believe that UPS unit isn't isolated from ground!" he gasps "It must be faulty - someone should fill out a >**ZZZZZZZZZZEEERRRT!**</p>

"Woopsy," I cry, as my little helper plops to the ground in a daze. "Now, can anyone tell me the most important thing about Computing Safety?" I ask.

"Not to piss you off?" someone murmurs from the back.

And who says you can't teach people things?

BOFH tracks down Arsonist

BOFH 2000 Episode 9

Published Friday 19th May 2000 15:08 GMT

"I'm sorry, but I find this a little hard to believe," I say, shaking my head in a manner backing my implied convictions.

"That's what they said you'd say," The Personnel Droid says, waving a piece of paper containing some evidence of the latest complaint against the PFY and my good self.

"Well, I'm simply flabbergasted."

"Yes, they said you'd say something like that as well," he replies.

"Who's 'They'?" I ask.

"Accounts."

"Who in Accounts?" I ask, not really knowing where this is heading.

"Everyone."

"Everyone?! How can everyone in accounts have a complaint against me!?" I cry, still no nearer knowing what exactly is going on.

"They say that you deliberately triggered the sprinkler system in their office to annoy them."

"That's preposterous - we don't have any control over the fire system whatsoever - it's completely remotely managed," I cry, whilst simultaneously wondering just how the PFY must have done it.

"I'm well aware of that!" our accuser snaps. "However, the Fire Inspector believes the optical sensors responded to the smoke that billowed out of a machine that had recently been serviced. A machine which was found to be stuffed with oil-soaked newspaper!"

Problem solved. You've got to hand it to the PFY, he has a way with combustibles. Not my chosen method of giving a good soaking, but still, worth a couple of brownie points for effort.

"I'm sorry," I respond, doing my bit to cover for the PFY, "but I still can't see what that's got to do with us, as we don't actually service desktop machines any longer. As anyone in accounts will tell you, the service contracts for machines were outsourced, for a hefty sum I might add, to a third party."

"Yes, we've spoken to them, and they say the machine was working perfectly when it left their office."

The Buck Stops There

"Well of course they'd say that! What engineer would ever say it was so bugged they sent it back? The thing could be **ON FIRE IN THE COMPUTER ROOM** and they'd say it was just performing self tests. Engineers **LIE** - that's the first thing they teach them!"

"And what about this then?" my accuser asks, presenting the piece of paper to me.

Hmmm. Something is rotten in the state of Denmark, and I'm not talking about French Tourist's breath... The delivery docket for the courier from the service people bears the PFY's signature. Which is ridiculous - the PFY would never use his own signature - he'd either uses someone else's (Typically The Boss's) or slap on a wiggly line that looks like Charles Manson's polygraph.

"It's obviously a fake," I respond, having my doubts nonetheless.

"Well it just so happens that I have a specimen signature - supplied **BY** Accounts - for a purchase order he recently filled out. And would you look at that - it's a perfect match."

"Yes, thanks Cilla," I respond, comparing the two signatures, "but doesn't it strike you as odd that the signatures **ARE** a perfect match?"

"Not at all, it just proves he's not very careful!"

A small amount of haggling later the Personnel bloke is forced to accept that the PFY's signature counts for nothing - anyone could have tampered with the parcel between delivery and desktop. Though he wants to speak with the PFY alone about it.

"I'll see what he's doing today", double clicking on the "Calendar" icon on the PFY's desktop.

Unbeknown to all, an SMS message immediately rockets thru to the PFY's cellphone to indicate he should go into hiding. Useful things those desktop calendars.

"Oh, look at that!" I cry, pointing at the error message on the screen "His calendar is corrupt."

"Wasn't it corrupt the other day when I was looking for him?" the boss asks, smelling a medium-sized rodent.

"Yes," I respond, "I blame large software houses with poor quality control!"

Eventually, The Boss and The Personnel Droid get sick of waiting and disappear to greener pastures after extracting a promise from me to let them know the **MOMENT** the PFY shows up. I while away the time by examining the evidence; I make couple of phone calls and reach my conclusion.

Later that afternoon, I meet the PFY in the lift and I spend some quality "Emergency Stop" time filling him in on the details. A blip on my pager tells me that my quarry has just swiped itself out of the office and into the lift area.

"Going down?" I ask pleasantly, as the beancounter concerned looks up, startled.

Half a floor later we stop for some more quality time.

"So why'd you set your machine on fire?" I ask.

"I didn't set my mach..."

"Don't lie to me. I know you picked up the machine from the couriers, I know you faked my assistant's signature from the copy of the order you were processing, and I know the paper inside the machine was the *Financial Times* - which, because of the lack of breasts and sport, has only two readers in the building - the CEO and you.

AND, you were absent when the excreta hit the airconditioning..."

"I..." he starts

"Did it?" the PFY suggests

"I..."

"Why?" I ask, intrigued.

"BECAUSE I CAN'T STAND THEM!" he blurts, **"ALWAYS BLOODY ASKING ME INANE BLOODY QUESTIONS!!!!** 'What does this message mean?'; 'Where's the **ANY** key?', 'How do I get out of this program?', 'What's a good password?' **I HATE IT, THEY CAN'T LEAVE ME ALONE!"**

Suddenly it all becomes clear. Ever since last week's tutorial session, departments are annoying their own people instead of us!

"I can... Empathise with you," the PFY says, switching the Emergency Stop button off. "Now you know what we feel like some days. But using my signature..."

After his profuse apology we let him go and get back to Mission Control. I have to admit that it's good to have a kindred spirit in Accounts. Someone who we can see eye to eye with. Someone who understands the idiots we have to deal with. Someone who's going to get blamed for all the oil-soaked newspaper that the PFY and I are going to be stuffing into machines tonight.

Yes, it sure is good...

BOFH plays with Maggot

BOFH 2000 Episode 10

Published Friday 19th May 2000 15:08 GMT

"But my password **CAN'T** have expired," the user whines down the line at me "I only updated it this morning!"

"If by **UPDATED** you mean changed it from 'maggot21' to 'maggot22', you're out of luck I'm afraid, the new password system won't permit you to do that any longer."

"But I like the word Maggot!"

"And I like the words Grievous Bodily Harm, but I don't use them as a password. Not any more, anyway. "

"But I've never had these problems before!" he wheedles.

"That's right - the password change checker we had in place before today would have let you change your password to anything - even a single letter."

"Really?" the user gasps, obviously thinking about how much time they might have saved in logins..

"Yes really. But luckily for us it's been replaced with a far more secure option."

"I still liked Maggot," he cries, "Why can't it let me use Maggot again? Could you change it so it forgets about my old passwords."

"I could, but I'm not going to - that's just insecure. And besides we..." >click< Our verbal exchange gets abruptly cut short when I hang up the phone on myself.

"What'd you do that for?" the PFY asks.

"It's the first rule of hanging up on people - **ALWAYS** do it when *you're* talking. That way they don't believe you'd hang up on them!"

"Hello?" I respond.

"We must have got disconnected!" The user says, "the phone just went dead!"

"Yeah, we've been having problems with crossed exchange trunks here, I think BT's switching us around the city as we keep getting mix.." >Click<</p>

The PFY smiles knowingly, the penny finally dropping.

The phone rings again, and Caller-ID Indicates it's our whiney user again...

"Hello Israeli Embassy, how may I help you please?" the PFY cries, complete with very poor imitation of his impression of an Israeli accent. . .

..and again..

"Australian Embassy Mate, what can I do you for?"

...and so it goes...

"LOOK I KNOW IT'S THE BLOODY OPERATORS, IT SAYS SO ON THIS PHONE!"
the user cries angrily.

"That's no way to talk to an Ambassador!" I say, grabbing the handset from the PFY.

"Look, I want my bloody password set back to what it was!"

"Well I'll see what I ca..." >click<</p>

>ring<</p>

"Why're you hanging up on me?!"

"We're no.." >click<</p>

>ring<</p>

"Networks and Systems, Hel.." >click<</p>

>ring<</p>

"Ne..." >click<</p>

>ring<</p>

>click<</p>

So now the PFY and I have to hide in the tape safe room, while The Boss performs his rampage around the office routine, involving lots of stamping around the department looking for us. All good fun really - just a pity the pubs aren't open. The PFY and I have a bet about how many circuits of the floor The Boss'll do before he gives up - just to pass the time.

"Boss is a bit energetic today," I comment, handing over five quid after he exceeds his personal record of three circuits.

"He's been taking Vitamin Capsules," the PFY comments, "I saw them on his desk."

"No, actually he's been taking hormone replacement tables **INSIDE** vitamin capsules," I respond, with just a hint of smugness.

"You complete bastard!"

"Nah, I'm not really. Next week, when I swap them for diuretics, or slow-acting laxative -- I haven't quite decided -- **THEN** I'm a complete bastard."

"You locking the toilet doors again?"

"All but the one with the bowl that isn't screwed down properly, yes."

"You complete bastard!"

"Yeah, I spose you're right.."

Sneaking out of the tape room after a supposedly safe period, we run straight into The Boss.

"Which of you bastards expired my bloody password!" he cries, entering the room.

"Bastards?" I ask in a shocked and slightly hurt manner.

"I know you had something to do with it!"

"I just installed some new software, but that was all. What was your password?"

"A"

"As in the letter?"

"Yes, I don't have time to waste typing all those letters. Anyway, who would guess I had a one letter password?!"

"Good point! And you have electronic authorisation of purchases up to **WHAT** amount again?"

"That's irrelevant, there's been no problems before!"

"Yes, Pity. Anyway, there's nothing we can do about it, it's state of the art software which the company needs."

"The company didn't need it before - where the hell did it come from?!"

"Oh, I saw it on TV once and remembered it when I saw an ad in a magazine."

"**ON TV?!!** You bought something you saw on TV!?" he gasps in mock horror, obviously thinking infomercials.

"Well yes. I was only watching *Beyond 2000* to see the advances in superconductors and I..."

"Beyond 2000!" The Boss cries in reverend tones, rapid about-face in progress. "Oh, I didn't know. Ah well, I suppose a six letter password is OK then."

"An eight-letter password, one of which has to be non-alphabetic, yes."

"I... Yes, it's probably wise," he comments, making his exit

"Uh, what just happened there?" the PFY asks.

"The old '*Beyond 2000*' ploy -- mention you **MIGHT** have seen something on 'Beyond 2000' and the credibility of the product goes up tenfold. Course, you might have seen it on the coffee table while you were watching -- so it's not strictly porkies, and would pass a polygraph if necessary."

"You're joking!"

"Not a bit of it! So long as you don't overuse it, you could tell a lotech that you saw an article on B2K saying that Electricity helped typing speed and you'd have people

shoving paperclips in line cords in no time!"

"Crap!"

"It's true, it's just an extension of the ***DUMMY* *MODE*** principle."

Our conversation is interrupted again by our whiner.

"About my password.." he starts.

"It's some new software I saw when I was watching Beyond 2000!" the PFY cries.

"**REALLY?**" the user cries excitedly, to the PFY's disgust "Well, in that case I guess.."

"You'll change your password?" I prompt.

"I guess so.

"Well, it's an eight-character minimum, one of which cannot be a letter."

"You're joking!"

"No, but if it's the extra typing you're worried about, I saw this other thing while watching *Beyond 2000*...."

Like shooting fish in a barrel..

BOFH discovers Voice Recognition

BOFH 2000 Chapter 11

Published Friday 19th May 2000 15:07 GMT

"Look at this baby," I say to the PFY, with more than a little bit of pride, indicating a PC with an afro of wires and parts spewing from its open lid.

"Yep, you've stuffed that one up alright - they won't be using **THAT** machine for a long time!" the PFY agrees cheerily.

"What?!"

"That PC - You've rooted it up completely!"

"It's not rooted, it's ready for work!"

"Anchor work? Doorstop work?" the PFY asks unkindly.

"**NO**, it can do our **JOB** for us!"

"Bollocks!" the PFY responds, as well he should, from past experience with rash statements like this.

"Five quid says it will!"

"Ten says it won't!"

"You're on! Phone this number," I respond, pointing to a label on the internals of a phone in the heart of the tangle.

The PFY dutifully phones and a ring sound emerges from the heart of the machine.

"Hello, Networks and Systems, how may I help?" the PFY's voice asks.

"Hello?" the PFY responds.

"Networks and Systems, how may I help?" the PFY's voice again asks.

A penny drops in the PFY's brain. "You've put me into a **Speech Recog IVR System!**" he gasps.

"I'm sorry, I'm not quite sure what you mean, could you rephrase that please?" the PFY's voice continues.

"Uh, I've got a problem with my system."

"You have a problem with your system?"

"Yes it's not booting properly."

"You say it's not booting properly?"

"It's an Eliza program!" the PFY gasps.

"You have a problem with your Eliza Programme?"

"No, it's my hard disk!"

"It's your hard disk?"

"Yes, it's making funny noises"

"Your hard disk is making funny noises?"

"Hey!" the PFY comments, covering the mouthpiece. "This thing has history!"

"Of course!" I respond, "But even the simplest Eliza's had that!"

"It'll get a bit tedious if it only asks questions. The callers are bound to figure it out..."

"Don't be silly - there's more to it than that, just continue - before it times out."

"Yes, my hard disk is making funny noises!"

"How long has this been happening?"

"Phase Two," I murmur, "Information gathering. Currently there's only three possible questions: 'How long has this been happening?'; 'Has anyone else had this problem?'; and 'Is it your floor that has the Gas Leak?'"

"Gas Leak?"

"Yeah, I couldn't think of a third question, but I figured that that would end the call quickly."

"A couple of hours," the PFY says.

"It's been happening a couple of hours? Hmmm. Was there any diagnostic message?"

"No" the PFY comments.

"Well it **SOUNDS** like a hard disk problem..."

"Duh.." the PFY comments, rolling his eyes.

"Which is probably caused by...."

The sounds of hefty random-access disk activity clatter come from the internals of the machine.

"...Resonant Harmonic Distortion."

The Machine leaves a decent interval for **DUMMY MODE** to engage before continuing.

"...Although it's difficult to tell for certain in these cases."

"RESONANT HARMONIC DISTORTION! WHAT A LOAD OF BOLLOCKS!"

"Woopsy!" I cry "Bollocks is a Mode-Change Trigger Phrase"

"It's not uncommon to find Harmonic Resonance causing... >clatter< ...electronic distortion in Data Transfers..."

"Mode Change?" the PFY asks, mouthpiece covered.

"..although it could be a network file share giving spurious errors. What was your username, and I'll check those out?"

"AH! Aggression mode-change. Like I'd give it my username!" the PFY murmurs.

"You'd better, or it'll use the username of the owner of the phone line."

"This thing's got access to Caller ID as well?" the PFY cries, impressed.

"Caller ID is the tip of the iceberg! It's got your HR records, your car park number, your voicemail box, and your browsing history. Mention 'You Wankers' or some other trigger phrase one more time and it'll send a list of your top 10 web pages to your boss - if they're in the 'dodgy list'. Mention it twice, it schedules a job for a random number of minutes after 2am, then orders Pizzas and Minicabs round to your home address!"

"So if it's got access to that, why does it ask for a username?"

"Just being thorough. And for historic reasons of course."

The PFY gives the username of some soon-to-be poor bastard in accounts and mentions a couple of trigger phrases for good measure.

"Just stress-testing the application," he murmurs.

"That's another thing I almost - Voice stress detection!"

"Voice stress, **AND** a pretty good Recog. How does it work?"

"Well the Speech Recog's a piece of turd, but luckily the technical vocab required is fairly small, so it's pretty accurate. And the reason people call us is always fairly much the same, so it works out pretty well. The Stress detection is used to see how quickly you get wound up and stashes it, along with the conversation, for our future reference..."

"Ok" the machine responds "I think we may have sorted this problem out..."

"I.e. deleted all your shared files, changed your password to **WONKER** and arranged to have your car towed," I comment.

"...although it may take an hour or so for the System synchronisations to get propagated to your desktop."

"And there's the sign-off. So, what do you think?"

"It doesn't sound very dynamic."

"Dynamism - if it's a real word - is overrated," I respond. "Anyway, successful demo complete, time for my lunch!"

...

Seconds later, I'm wandering past The Boss' office when he calls me in.

"My Application's frozen!" he sniffs.

"Oh, I'm actually on my way out, but... you can get the PFY on.... >scribble< ..this number."

"Right."

"Oh, and and could you tell him those passwords he was looking for were: >scribble< Yew Anchors, >scribble< Ute Ossers, and >scribe-scribe< Far Queue. If you could just pass that on..."

BONUS!

BOFH moonlights CRAP SOFTWARE

BOFH 2000 Chapter 12

Published Wednesday 3rd May 2000 10:03 GMT

Some mornings, you just **KNOW** that someone up there is working against you. (Fifth floor, not God, obviously.)

And so it is that an internal mail envelope negotiates it's way to The Boss's desk, into his bin, out of his bin, over to the coffee station, to the toilets, back to his desk, gets opened, stared at blankly for 10 minutes, gets a couple of the larger words within it looked up in the dictionary, has a few scrawly notes taken from it, gets taken back to the coffee station, back to the toilet, back to the coffee station, then to my office.

I assume...

"Just take a look at this, will you?" the boss mumbles as he slaps over a mass of glossy brochures designed to impress the mentally feeble.

"It's a bit of bog paper," I comment.

"What?! Oh, yes, how did that get there. No, not that, this!" he responds, shaking the offending scrap of double ply tissue free.

"What is it precisely?" I ask.

"Ah, it's some new software to make our business run smoother," he chirps, hurriedly.

"Really? I don't suppose there'd be much of a market for any other kind of software," I respond drily, "Unless of course OS2 makes a comeback.."

"Yes, yes, of course" he mutters to himself, obviously sidetracked with the weighty task of wondering what's on the lunch menu. "But give this a quick shufti and tell me what you think."

"Righto," I concede. "It's a set of colourful brochures, printed on.. 100 gsm paper, using a dithering process not unlike what you'd get in any glo..."

"THE SOFTWARE IN THE BROCHURES!" he snaps.

"Oh, the software! Well, lets have a look then."

My first estimations are correct. The **"THE SOFTWARE YOUR BUSINESS *CANNOT* TO IGNORE!!!"** banner is a dead giveaway. **"TEN YEARS IN DEVELOPMENT!"** just reinforces it.

"It's a piece of crap!"

"How can you say that - you haven't even looked inside!"

"I don't need to look inside, these brochures are all the same. Inside the cover will be some bulletpointed stats supporting whatever they're trying to hawk, a small picture of a weedy guy in glasses with a Phd in Computer Science who loves it, and names of companies sad enough to have bought a copy of it. On the back page is the **SPECIAL, ONE TIME OFFER.**"

"I hardly think that..." he falters, as he opens the document to discover I was right. "Well, I'm sure that it's well-researched."

"Well-plagiarised, more likely."

"But it's developed by seasoned professionals who understand business orientation - a fact which helped it rapidly become the... uh... undisputed market leader in... Message Protocol Middleware!" he blurts, partially from memory, partially relying upon the front page of the top brochure.

"RAPIDLY BECOME THE UNDISPUTED MARKET LEADER IN.." I remark, "In other words: 'We've just thought up a new way of doing the same old thing, slapped a buzz-phrase on it and are the market leader because no-one else has heard of it!'"

"I hardly think..."

Oh Look!" I cry, pointing to the PFY, "Here comes the person who rapidly became the undisputed leader in carrying cable from the storeroom. Or, as we call it 'Physical Data-Carrier Warehousing Management'."

"Yes, yes, very funny, but I think.."

"Hang on, I'm just getting a call on what has rapidly become the undisputed leader in Technical Communications protocol," I cry, answering my phone, "Do you think it might be the person who has rapidly become the market leader in Nutrition-Based Vending Feedback - asking if I want mustard on my lunch?"

"You're a very cynical person," The Boss sighs sadly, shaking his head as he makes towards the door.

"CYNICAL!" I cry, trying - and failing - to keep a grip. "That's Computer Sales - an industry created to give used car dealers a second career option!"

But it's too late, The Boss has gone.

"What was that about?" the PFY asks.

"Crap software alert."

"Undisputed Market Leader in Message Protocol Middleware?" the PFY asks.

"Yes - how did you know?"

"Saw it days ago - I chucked your copy in the bin, though."

"Thanks. So what was the Message Protocol Middleware software anyway?"

"A patch of a public domain email package with your company's logo in the startup banner."

"Smooth. How come you know so much about it?"

"It's my brochure!" the PFY admits smugly.

"YOU'RE MOONLIGHTING CRAP SOFTWARE!?!?" I cry, mildly disappointed in the lack of the PFY's character, "Without cutting me in!?"

"Nah, you're the second brochure - 'Undisputed Leader in Platform Independent Data Transferral'..."

"?"

"FTP. With your Company's banner, etc."

"What's it wholesaling at?"

"The whole package - four quid per licensed user."

"Bugger."

"Too expensive?" the PFY asks.

"No, I just bagged it in front of The Boss. Now he'll need more convincing."

"Damn. We could fake a Press Release from Gartner?"

"Too obscure for him - he doesn't even know who they are!"

"Photoshop-enhanced photo of Gates holding a copy of the software?"

"Warmer, but we really need something with credibility.."

"Fake cover of a Computer Rag!"

"A SCORCHER!" I cry.

...

Half a day and one more glossy page later, the boss is sold and the orders are coming in. As an added bonus, he's told one of his mates in another company about it and he's keen too...

Integrity is the key. Once you can fake that...

The BOFH interpretation skills test. Try it if you DARE

BOFH 2000 Episode 13 Chapter 13 (THAT's unlucky...)

Published Monday 12th June 2000 15:47 GMT

The Bastard wants to know: how're your interpretation skills?

Interpret the following:

1. You get called by the most recent in a loooooong line of saleswomen for a large software company. Judging from past experience, she'll be absolutely gorgeous and know as much about computing as Sonny Bono did about skiing through trees. She proceeds to tell you that the product she's just received, which, believe it or not, is the best thing that she's ever seen. You know immediately:

- A. It's an excellent and well-researched product
- B. It's probably a fairly good product
- C. It's crap
- D. There is no product, they're selling vaporware, but you're going to buy one anyway.

2. An Engineer visits your site and, after setting a new speed record for ripping the guts out of your kit and stuffing most of it back in the box, pronounces it fixed and ready for action. This means:

- A. It'll work till he gets back to the office
- B. It'll work till he gets to his car
- C. It'll work till he gets in the lift
- D. He's turned it off at the wall so that it won't catch fire till he's out of the building

3. One of your users calls up to see what sort of back-ups you keep. He assures you that he has NOT deleted any files at all, and his system is sound. This means:

- A. He's just checking on back-up policy out of interest
- B. He's deleted a file that it would take a small amount of time to recreate

- C. He's deleted a file that it would take a large amount of time to recreate
- D. He's deleted someone ELSE's file, and now knows not to own up to it

4. The beancounters deep-six one of your equipment purchase orders because they say it's too expensive. What they REALLY mean is:

- A. It's too expensive
- B. It's slightly expensive, and more research might find a less expensive option.
- C. They say that to anything over 50 quid.
- D. They want a morning of power surges and file share outages.

5. Your Boss rolls into your office with a fist full of Purchase orders that haven't yet been signed. He tells you that he's going to need justification documents for the kit you've proposed to buy. He obviously means:

- A. He has to answer to the Head of Department like everyone else
- B. He has to justify expenditure like everyone else
- C. He's not sure what the kit IS, but doesn't want to look stupid.
- D. He's got his eyes set on a new laptop+desktop combo, which your purchases are going to put the kybosh on.

6. Security sends a memo around informing everyone that they'll be running their usual site-safety workplace/office check in the next few days. What they really mean is:

- A. Office safety is paramount and they're concerned about accidents
- B. Office security is paramount and they're concerned about break-ins
- C. They've noticed the similarity between the marks on the door of the vending machines and the pry bar that you keep for "floor tile removal"
- D. The head of security wants his safe back.

7. You're reading a trade mag which tells you that a certain popular operating system of the 80s is making a comeback. In plain terms this means:

- A. Serious development has produced results at OS/2 central
- B. Serious money has produced results at VMS central
- C. Guru Meditation has produced results at Amiga central
- D. Alcohol has produced results at the editorial office

8. You're looking for new staff when a slave trader rings you with a fantastic person to join your team. From your experience with slave traders, you know:

- A. The applicant will be perfect for your needs
- B. The applicant will probably be OK
- C. The applicant will probably recognise a computer if they see one
- D. The applicant won't find their way to your office

9. You're at a trade show where the latest and greatest hardware is available for perusal. The demonstrator of the kit in front of you (which looks EXACTLY like the kit the boss bought last year) tells you that their product is the new version with twice the performance for half the cost!!! You realise:

- A. The kit is AMAZING!
- B. The kit sounds amazing
- C. The boss would think it was amazing
- D. It's amazing they had the balls to turn up at the show!

How did you do?

Mostly A

You are green aren't you? Are you sure you're not Management reading forbidden literature? Meantime I have an attractive land package in Leeds known for it's tourist draw-card mini-putt course...

Mostly B

Or maybe YOU'RE the Manager in the pie. I know there's one in here somewhere, sniffing about.

Mostly C

That's more like it. The tinge of cynicism and worldly experience. With a little bit of practice you could become an asset to society.

Mostly D

COME ON DOWN! We have a winner! You're not fooled by the thin veil of lies used so often by other parties to obscure their real purpose (trying to take you for a ride). Congratulations. Now, about that Leeds investment...

BOFH signs up for M\$ soap slush fund

BOFH 2000 Episode 14

Published Wednesday 3rd May 2000 10:02 GMT

So the PFY and I are having a chuckle at Microsoft's Anti-Piracy Message in Popular Soap Opera Initiative when we see a disturbing sight. No, not a development license for OS2 software signed by The Boss, Even worse...

"Who's that then?" the PFY asks, indicating a young suited lad industriously engaged in checking the speed setting of his naso-anal interface with The Boss.

"Looks disgustingly like one of the 'new breed' of techos," I respond, "judging by the well pressed suit, the belt that matches the shoes, **AND** the ostentatiously silk tie.."

"What's he want?"

"**MY** guess is he's some protg of The Boss's - mowed his lawns as a kid or something - who's worked his way through college and considers himself a dab hand at computing. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that The Boss is grooming him for the vacancy in IT."

"There's no vacancy in IT!"

"Oh, didn't I tell you?" I comment. "You're about to be let go. Something to do with unprofessional conduct."

"What?"

"Yes, apparently they think that you throwing that Beancounter's monitor out the window was a little over the top."

"I was degaussing it by moving it through a static magnetic field."

"Static Magnetic field?"

"The *Earth's* Magnetic field!"

"Of course. However, I think the bit they objected to was that it was tied to the beancounter concerned."

"It got caught on his clothing!"

"Caught with a double reef knot?"

"I don't know anything about that" he lies unconvincingly. "Anyway, how do **YOU** know about it?"

"I happened to receive a piece of misaddressed email on the subject."

"Misaddressed to whom?"

"The CEO."

"And how's that misaddressed?"

"In the manner that anything you want kept secret shouldn't be addressed to the CEO."

"Ah. So what's it to be?"

"High Jump for you, I'm afraid - Not quite as high as The Beancounter's was mind - and you won't be landing heavily amongst monitor parts on the top of a heavy freight vehicle - but a high jump nonetheless. And then I'll have the pleasure of the new guy's company till he decides to further his career elsewhere."

"So I should reapply for the contract in two weeks?"

"One week should be sufficient."

So sure enough, it happens - the PFY gets to go to an **INTERVIEW** from which he doesn't return. And in his place I get a kid so shiny and new he almost smells of furniture polish. And dead keen to make an impression - and not on the footpath outside, sadly.

"Hi, I'm David - I've just finished a degree in Computing and Networking and am really keen to put it into practice!" he chirps, grasping me enthusiastically by the hand.

"I know you guys have been at the Rock Face for ages, but hopefully I can bring you up to speed with the fantastic advances in technology in the ten or so years since you last visited the industry."

I stifle the feelings of nausea and ill-will and indicate that he should follow me to visit a few clients - that should put the fear of God into him. First stop, the Serial Whiner, to break his spirit. I mention he should make a minor alteration to her machine, (ie. move the mouse), which'll mean the next 1000 problems she has will be his fault.

Phase Two is to get him some unsolvable technical problem which will stress him out majorly.

"...and it just crashes all the time!" the user burbles.

"Well it's funny you should mention that, because a *Windows Professional* magazine that I was reading just yesterday says that the leading cause of crashes is installation of pirated software. You don't insta..

WE INTERRUPT THIS EPISODE FOR A SUBLIMINAL MESSAGE FROM PARTS OF THE SOFTWARE VENDING COMMUNITY.

PFY: Gosh, I think Software Piracy is bad, and would not like to think that someone who pirates software would associate themselves with my fictitious character. Especially Microsoft Products. That will be 1000 quid please.

Bastard: Me too

Boss: Me too

PFY: Who cares what you think? You're an extra that needs replacing. Get us a coffee and be snappy about it!

WE NOW RETURN YOU TO THE STORYLINE IN A MANNER THAT OBSCURES THE SUBLIMINAL MESSAGE TO YOUR CONSCIOUS MIND, WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY BRINGING IT TO THE FOREFRONT OF YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS (BUY COKE!) THOUGHTS

..ll Pirated software?"

"No," the user lies.

"Change any of your system settings?"

"Never!" he continues, pinocchioing away

"Well, quite frankly I'm stumped then. It could be a bad application, but in my final year I did a paper of software testing standards, and I can assure you very little is released in the market that hasn't undergone stringent testing."

The nausea I was feeling before increases somewhat. He's so green he needs pruning!

Even worse, he's conscientious and punctual and my best efforts at dissuading him from staying with the company appear to be ineffectual - he's completely devoted to the intricacies of solving computing problems. My main concern now is that the users are going to expect the same service level from me - wandering up to their office every time they've stuffed about with their monitor settings or changed their default paper type.

It's not going to happen! Even accidentally trapping his tie in the door so that his arm was just out of reach of the swipe card reader doesn't work. Still cheery, still happy to meet any technical problem head-on. **HAS THIS MAN NO ACHILLES HE..**

Of course! Why I never thought of it before is beyond me!

"So," I murmur, sidling up to him in Mission Control and introduce a topic close to his heart if my observations are correct, "making a ***VERRRRY*** good impression on the secretary, I see."

"Really? She told me to stop pissing around with her printer."

"Smokescreen. She knows what workplace gossip is like and wants to throw us off the scent - surely you noticed?"

"I..."

Two days later...

"So how **DID** you get him to email nudey snaps of himself to her?" the PFY asks.

"Just told him that as an artist she appreciates the male form and mentioned she'd probably be quite impressed with someone who could scan such stuff. As expected, like most of these Nuevo-techs who spend most of their lives inside computing labs and outside of the real world, he had absolutely no idea of the fine line between tasteful and tacky."

"So he's gone then - dismissed?"

"Even better, awaiting trial for exposing himself in a RailTrack Photobooth."

"What?"

"Yeah well, I told him that the first set were probably not 'gritty' and raw enough for her."

"You bastard!"

"Don't you forget it!"

BOFH dreams of justifiable user homicide

BOFH 2000 Episode 15

Published Wednesday 3rd May 2000 10:00 GMT

So it's 3:17am and I'm safely asleep in my bed, dreaming of a world where "dumbness" is grounds for justifiable user homicide, when the phone rings.

"Hello, I know it's late..." the voice starts.

"It's not late, it's early..."

"Yeah well, I had to call because it's an emergency!"

"Uh-huh. And how did you get my number?"

"It was in the After Hours Contact List, under 'Pakistani Embassy' - your Boss told me where to find it."

Of course the question has to be asked as to **HOW** the Boss found out that it was my home number as, to my knowledge, the only person with that Information is the person who's going to be vacuuming the subfloor of the computer room with a keyboard vacuum cleaner for the next few weeks...

"Anyway, I was calling because the laser printer in room 440 is running low on one of its toners and it's probably going to run out before we finish printing the interim customer survey results for tomorrow's, well -**TODAY'S** - strategic alliance direction meeting with the US company."

"Why not just print them on a different printer?" I sigh, trying to be helpful.

I must still be half awake...

"We **CAN'T**, there's special paper loaded into this one!"

"Special in what way?"

"It's got the word **DRAFT** printed in red in the background!"

"Of course - and you couldn't move the paper to another printer, nor use one of those expensive colour printers scattered around the building which could just print **DRAFT** on a page as a red background layer..."

"Ah... Yes, point taken."

I'm barely back to sleep when the phone rings again.

"Hi, it's me again!" my least favourite user chirps happily - and the thing that gets on my tits is that we're now like old friends because we've shared a printer moment in the pas...

"Of course - The Paper goes in face up."

"Oh."

"You know, like it was when you took it out of the other printer..."

"Oh. Of course. It's just that I don't want to stuff this up.."

"This" being the operative term of course. If by "This" means "The report" then he's probably on fairly solid ground. However if by "This" he means "My Career", "My chances of an Xmas Bonus" or "My prospects of getting out of the department toilet cubicle without a freak electrical spike causing a sewerage backflush", it's far too late already.

That's fate for you.

Fate intrudes again at 4:16am when he calls to ask what the printer name is for the printer in the plot room on the 4th floor is.

"I don't know, what does the white label on the side say?"

"Uh... A4PS04331."

"As in A4 Postscript Level 4, Room 33, Printer 1?" I ask testily.

"Is A4PS04331 the printer name then?"

"No it's just some numbers and letters we slap on the side of printers to make them more interesting," I snap.

"Oh. Well what's the printer name then?"

Sigh.

4:47am sees me plotting manslaughter after being asked how to change a toner cartridge...

5:02am...

"It's not printing, **BLANK PAPER IS COMING OUT!!!!**" he gasps.

"Did you pull the toner separator out like it says on the instructions before you put it in the printer?"

"OF COURSE I DID!"

"And what did it look like?"

"A piece of black plastic!"

"No strip of transparent plastic attached to it then?"

"**NO!**"

"Then the separator strip is still in there."

"What do I do?"

I count slowly to 10.

Sigh.

"Well as you can't get the strip out because you've broken the tab off it, you're going to have to dissolve it. Do you have some aromatic contact adhesive solvent?"

"Duh-no?"

"What about in your stationary cupboard?"

"I don't think so!"

"Well check. If there's none there you're going to have to get some from a service centre. No, wait, they won't be open now. Tell you what, just grab some petrol. Half a gallon should be enough..."

Later that morning...

"And the printer just **BURST** into flames!!!" my user gasps to some new blood from security as I sneak past the remnants of room 443.

"And you say he told you to just pour petrol into it?!" The security guy asks.

"Yes to melt the glue! It's just lucky I switched it off beforehand or I might have been standing right beside it when it went up!!!"

"Yes, very lucky indeed" security nods gravely. "Well, if you'll come down to the office we'll fill out an incident report and notify the authorities."

"I'll call the lift," the user smirks.

"Are you sure you want to use the lifts?" security asks, looking around carefully, "there's been... rumours about how they run a bit strange..."

"Good point - we'll take the stairs!"

...

"And he unfortunately slipped and fell down the stairs," security recounts later to the boss

"Fell down a flight of stairs!" the boss gasps, echoing sympathy.

"Two flights of stairs actually - breaking his left leg and his right wrist!" security murmurs to the boss.

"Obviously we checked the stairwell carefully, but nothing seemed to be amiss. Naturally, we'll follow up on the initial complaint when he recovers, but for now we're not pursuing the matter..."

Strange. Stranger still when I ask the PFY and he denies all knowledge.

Not so strange later on in the day when a familiar blue-suited figure joins the PFY and I at the table with a cassette which looks all too much like a 24-channel voice recorder tape.

"Hey!" the PFY starts "aren't you..."

"Your new silent partner?" security asks. "In the flesh, on a stool, and waiting for a pint!"

BOFH meets the Bitch Operator – match made in Hell

BOFH 2000 Episode 16

Published Monday 12th June 2000 15:46 GMT

So I'm working on a piece of kit when my nose picks up a smell that can only mean one thing - the PFY's been cranking up the supply current to some of our more sensitive equipment.

Only the PFY's on holiday for a week, - I'm genuinely mystified. It can't be a fault?! Not in my kit.

But it appears to be so. Following my nose to an area where the smell is strongest I notice a rather old disk unit with a heat-marked label on its front panel. It doesn't look good.

I check out our maintenance schedule, and of course, it's been discontinued as the boss's thinking in this manner is "If it hasn't misbehaved in the past it's unlikely to fail in the future" - The Yorkie Terrier rule of maintenance.

So it's stuffed, and - being ancient - the replacement cost of the full height disk is the same price you'd expect to pay for an entire desktop computer with 10 times the Processor Power and Disk Space. Only then you'd still only be talking a P75 with a 2gig disk in it, so multiply that figure by 10 too.

While you're at it, add the non-customer callout fee of 200 quid (for the Zone 1&2 travel pass), plus 150 quid an hour, and we're starting to talk a lucrative business that I really should be thinking about getting into.

I'm fairly surprised at the technician who presents herself to my office. She's interesting on several accounts, not the least of which is that she doesn't look in any way stupid, nor the sort of ugly that parents use to frighten their children when they play with matches. In fact, I would go so far as to say that she was rather attr..

"So where's this disk drive then?" she asks.

"In the computer room."

"Have you got a maintenance access card for me?"

"Yes, but we have to oversee all work in the computer room - sensitive data and all that," I adlib.
"So I'll just let you in."

She follows me into the computer room and shows no hesitation in shutting the machine down in an orderly manner by flicking off the power switch.

I like it.

In double quick time the disk is replaced and the machine is back in business.

"Coffee before you go?" I offer.

"Go on then," she says, after consulting her watch and message pager.

I whip out of the office and return in double quick time with a coffee made to what I'm sure are her exacting standards.

"Can't I'm afraid, just been paged across town and it's just about lunchtime rush, wouldn't want to put a dent in the P76!"

A P76 Leyland, the epitome of offensive driving. A veritable land canoe! **CAN THIS WOMAN DO NO WRONG!?!**

It's only when she's gone I notice that my wallet is too. And there's a 8mm tape drive missing from the PFY's desk...

THIS COULD BE LOVE!

...

So she's back in the office a day later to fix a server which accidentally fell out of a rack three times (at a maintenance cost that was so excessive I think the Boss lost control of his bladder when he read the quote). This time I'm not stupid and make sure I keep an eye on the contents of our desks, and have my wallet in the safe.

And the funny thing is I never even noticed the gaping hole in the beancounter server where their 4 x 50 Gig spool disks used to be until about 2 hours after she'd left...

The beancounters, on the other hand, knew quite some time before that.

Ah well.

Not wanting to draw any more attention to the situation, I slap in some replacement disks from the surplus spares pool that the PFY and I keep on hand for... uh.. installing licensed software onto, (and definitely **NOT** MP3 downloads) and claim it was caused by a the area being set to RAID level **MINUS 1**, doesn't store the data at all. They buy it, which only goes to show...

Something has to be done, if only because the PFY will be back next week and is bound to ridicule my inattention.

...

So after she comes in to fix the console keyboard which bears all the hallmarks of having been hit with a large blunt instrument, but which in fact is just suffering from wear and tear, I slip five brand spanking new drives into her toolbox when she's not looking, and leave her to her thoughts.

Thoughts which I cannot begin to fathom when I find the five drives later that afternoon, sitting on top of a machine in the computer room. Where a tape stacker used to be.

Something has to be done.

I call her company immediately, and ask to be put through to her. Eventually, she answers and it's time to sort things out once and for all.

"So, how about a quick drink after work?"

She accepts and we agree to meet at a nice place out of the city later in the evening.

Later arrives. We make small talk, till get down to business and ask her why she's such a klepto.

"Oh, I'm not a klepto, it's just boring doing the same old thing day after day. So I distract myself relieve the boredom."

"Which explains why you took the stacker and left the drives."

"The stacker, 4 of your pens, your coffee mug and the book you used as a backing to sign the Work Done form."

"The visitors book?!?" I gasp.

"I spose so, I didn't look. The more blatant the theft, the more interesting it is. I suppose you didn't notice that your office is down by two wheelie chairs then?"

Yes, it could be love.

To cut a long story short, we have a great evening, ending with me walking her to the tube station **AND** staying with her till her tube arrives.

And stealing her wallet - lets face it, you can't let a catch like that get away...

BOFH and The Mahariji

BOFH 2000 Episode 17

Published Monday 8th May 2000 11:24 GMT

"You're **LOSING IT!**" The PFY cries, in a manner that could be construed only as unkind.

"I think you're..." I respond, defensively, being cut off mid sentence by the PFY's next outburst.

"**YOU ARE!** Look, you're even filling in Job Sheets! 'Reset user's password'. Helped a user with a Microsoft Office install."

"Just noting work done to aid the service process."

"You **HATE** job forms - You used to steal them from the helpdesk just to prevent them getting work bonuses! You said it was Virtual Brownnosing."

"I said it was **VIRTUALLY** Brownnosing. Virtual Brownnosing's where you get one of those greeting card places to send your boss a birthday card every year. In any case, that's a very negative point of view."

The PFY's next diatribe is pre-empted by the rapid arrival of The Boss.

"Just wanted to thank you for the help with my home machine; it's running much faster now!"

...

"You helped **THE BOSS**, with a **HOME** machine!!? You **HAVE** lost it! It's not going to affect next week's Contract Renegotiation any!"

"Contract Renegotiation? I have transcended the need for wealth and power by donating my savings to the Mahariji's trust and don't feel the need to encourage favour with my superiors."

SUPERIOR!!! You've gone **SOFT!**" the PFY cries disgustedly. "I **KNEW** something was up when you let that Security Guy get the better of you. The **OLD** Bastard would never have let that happen!"

"The **OLD** Bastard was a relic. Not at all in tune with his aura."

"His Aura?"

"Yes, the mantra of his personal consciousness."

"Personal Consciousness?! It's that Engineer, isn't it! She's got you wrapped around her finger!"

"I have to admit that our relationship was sweet, but the Mahariji showed me that it was simply a manifestation of my own deep-seated needs. The relationship ended and I am a fuller person now because of it."

"You're a fuller Nutter now!"

"I'm sure the **OLD** Bastard would have responded to that statement with negativity - probably manufacturing some cataclysmic sequence of events for which you would be blamed... But I will not. The Mahariji has shown me that helping others is the only path to true aura maintenance."

Nutter!" the PFY repeats.

"The Mahariji says that namecalling is a manifestation of sadness. The Shiny Aura is rewarded by happiness."

"Fifty quid says I'll be the happier person at the end of the day."

"A wager? I do not need money!"

"One hundred quid!" he cries.

"I don't rea.."

"FIVE HUNDRED QUID!"

"Please stop!", I cry. "This is unseemly! I will take your wager on the condition that you pay my winnings - if it happens - to the Mahariji!"

"Done!"

The deal is struck once my assistant has added a side wager that the loser has to buy the entire IT department drinks on Friday night - **AND** listen to their complaints about service. Not something that even an enlightened individual would look forward to..

We've barely shaken on it when we're summoned to The Boss's office - no doubt to receive more thanks for problems solved...

"Ah... I've just had a complaint about some of the service the users have been receiving!" The Boss mutters sternly, looking in the PFY's direction.

The PFY, as expected, looks away with an expression of innocence...

Sigh.

"I must apologise for my assistant's youth," I interrupt. "He's young and impulsive and sometimes doesn't give the client the benefit of the doubt, but I'm sure that with a little..."

"Enough!" The Boss snaps. "Changing a user's password to a disgusting word repeated three times isn't what I'd call impulsive - it's a calculated act!"

"?" the PFY responds, before I can step in for his defence. "Probably some form of misunderstanding on my assistants part," I add. "He may have thought that the user had **REQUESTED** that password - some of them have a history of using fairly colourful language when a problem occurs. It may be that he thought that they were supplying that word as a password - it has happened."

"Oh yes? And what about telling a user that Microsoft Office installs faster if you hammer all the developer CDs into the drive at once?"

"I... I..," I murmur, looking at the PFY in horror.

Which, as it happens, is the same way he's looking at me. Of course he's thinking of my new credibility as opposed to his (should he claim it was me) and the 500 quid down the gurgler **PLUS** eight or so hours of people whining about how the systems used to run faster back when, and how they like one letter passwords... Not to mention his chances come Contract Renegotiation time...

"Leave it with me," I murmur to The Boss. "I'll have a little word with him..."

...

"You bastard!" the PFY shouts when we get back to Mission Control. "This Mahariji stuff's a load of crap! Well laugh again. The deal was 500 quid to the Mahariji, so the cheques going there."

"Excellent!" I cry. "Would you like me to send you one of our pamphlets as well - I've just finished one on the Divine Shiny Aura."

"You're the Mahariji?"

"You betcha! I bought up the office of this New Age fruit- eating commune after they had a bad batch of apples or something and closed down - and now have an iron-clad tax haven. For a couple of years anyway! Absolutely brilliant. So all I have to do is print a couple of pamphlets a year, advertise dull meditation courses in some well-known magazines, publish a massive yearly loss and I'm in the clear! Unless of course the Beatles reform.."

"So who should I make the cheque out to?" the PFY asks, sighing heavily.

"The Divine Aura of Tfosorcim Society."

"Tfosorcim? Microsoft spelt backwards?"

"Like it? - you know, like Inverse Evil."

"I hate you!"

"Now, now, that's not helping your Aura!!!"

IHATEYOU Virus sweeps through BOFH Land

BOFH 2000 Episode 18

Published Tuesday 9th May 2000 10:01 GMT

It's not even midday when the boss trundles into the office when I'm barely into my morning paper. True, I'm a bit behind - having taken a reasonable amount of time out to examine the exceptional colour rendition that can be achieved these days on low grade paper.

"This page three girl is so lifelike you almost think she's real!" I comment to the PFY, who looks up from his financial broadsheet (the sad bastard) with a measure of distaste.

"Yes yes, you say that most days," he responds, tucking his gaze back into who's screwing who pages of the drier of the morning's reading.

"But look at that high quality dithering!" I cry.

"Um" the boss interrupts - while we're on the topic of dithering - "If you're not busy..."

His trepidation is well-placed, as history has proven that I'm not at my most congenial before my quadruple espresso breakfast.

"Yes?" I ask pleasantly, breaking the habit of a lifetime and trying the passive approach.

"It's about this **ILOVEYOU** thing."

"Don't be disgusting - you're not my type. You're not even the right sex!"

"No, the Virus."

"HIV? Well, I applaud your honesty in these trying times, but..."

"Not me, the email virus, **ILOVEYOU!**"

"Oh that"

"Yes! What are we going to do about it?"

"Well the PFY and I have been discussing this at length and we believe that we will trust our users to follow the simple instructions that we've given them time and time again - which is 'Don't open attachments from people you don't know'"

"That's all very well, but someone's bound to do it," he adds worriedly.

"So you've infected your desktop?" I sigh.

"Uh, no - the secretary's. She asked me to see if it was the Virus."

"So you opened it to check?"

"Ah.. well.."

"Well indeed. Looks like our Windows 2000 project has a pilot victim. I mean test subject."

"Is there nothing we can do?"

"Apart from not opening attachments that is?"

"Uh, yes"

"Not really - a reinstall is far easier, just to be sure."

"Oh, well could you prepare some documentation about this for noticeboards and the like?"

"I suppose we could, but we're really a bit more concerned about the '**IHATEYOU**' virus and what will happen if **THAT** gets here."

"The **IHATEYOU** virus? What's that?" he gasps horrified.

"Well it's a derivative of the **ILOVEYOU** virus, only it's effects are far more damaging"

"**ARE THEY?**" he gasps

"Oh yes. It looks like a Notepad document, but in fact does all the usual stuff plus more. From memory, it scrambles your NT Registry - admittedly, Microsoft did get there ahead of time; randomly reschedules any netmeetings you have... **EVERY** time you login; uh, sends the entire contents of your "Sent Items" and "InBox" folders to everyone in your address book - which, I might add, is especially bad if you've got any personal correspondence that you haven't clea...

The Boss gasps perceptibly at that one.

"...ned up; and, um, prints every jpeg in the cache folders of your browser to every defined printer - which can also be bad if you've been to any porn sites in the last two mo..."

The boss rockets out of the room at top speed, no doubt with an unplugging mission in mind.

"I take it you sent him a message with **IHATEYOU**, in the Subject?" the PFY asks.

"**THREE** messages to be precise. With an attachment Notepad document entitled '10 reasons why I hate you'."

"What was in it?"

"Just 'Because you're a plonker' 10 times over.."

"No virus?"

"Nah, too much effort. It's far better this way. Though it's a pity he ran off so quickly as I was just about to mention that it responds to all new mail with 'Sod off you pretentious tosser'!"

"Save it for later?"

"You betcha! Now all we've got to do is forward the contents of those folders from his backup share to everyone in the building and print a load of porn about the place"

"So I should just slap a couple of dozen images from the smut archive off to some printers randomly?"

"Yeah... **NO!** No, go to the Web and get a swag of gay stuff. That way when they start printing we can act like we always knew he was like that after his professions of love earlier in the day"

"He'll deny it came from his machine!"

"Sure he will. As an excuse I don't think "I only browse straight porn" is going to cut much with the higher echelons."

...

"Honestly, it has **NOTHING** to do with me!" the boss pleads, as the PFY and I look on suspiciously.

"Of course it wasn't," I respond kindly. "Now are you sure there isn't something you'd like to tell us?"

"Those **AREN'T** my pictures!"

"No, that wasn't what I was hoping you'd tell us."

"What were you hoping I'd tell you?" he asks, confused.

"Well, I was **HOPING** that you'd tell us that you were very sorry for disturbing our morning paper and that it won't happen again."

"I..." he starts, as it sinks in "**YOU** did this!?"

"All water under the bridge now!" I cry. "And unless you want the printing logs from this morning - with **YOUR** machine name ALL OVER them - finding their way into the Head of IT's hot little public-enquiry orientated grasp..."

"Yes!" he gasps, thinking of his job prospects if the Old Boy's network gets a hold of a rumour like that.

"You'll be off down to Caffe Uno for a quadruple espresso, and a double for the assistant."

"All right," he sighs, resignedly.

"..for the next fortnight."

"Yes..."

It's a dirty job, but someone's got to do it...

BOFH for hire on Starship Enterprise

BOFH 2000 Episode 19 (THE EPISODE YOU NEVER SAW)

Published Wednesday 24th May 2000 12:11 GMT

"Captain's Log, Start Date Twenty Nine point two point thirty six, twenty four, thirty six, Mmmm Mmm. Following some problems with the ship's computer we've travelled back in time and space to the planet Earth during the early 21st century and beamed aboard an expert who may be able to help us with our problems."

- - - - -

So I wake up on the Enterprise, and it's so obviously a dream I don't even bother thinking of something so horrible (i.e. a career in Telemarketing) that it'll force me awake. I decide to run with it for a bit and see how it goes. I do, however, pause to see if I'm wearing skintight mustard and black fatigues - in case it's a nightmare.

Luckily, no.

"Welcome aboard," Kirk smiles, walking up to the transporter and extending his hand.

"Thanks, Captain," I reply, slipping off his space age watch mid-shake, "and I'd just like to say how much I like those uniforms."

"Really?" Kirk responds happily.

"Yes, not very much at all. Now what seems to be the problem?"

"Well it's something to do with the guidance systems - Every time we go into orbit around a planet the ship seems to veer off on a tangent."

"Like your show, you mean?"

"Hunh?"

"Nothing. So it's a guidance system problem?"

"Yes. I expect it's a loose wire or something"

"Get a lot of that do you?"

"Not really, come to think of it..." Kirk responds

"And it's not something trivial like Spock spilling a cup of Bovril down the back of his console, or someone pressing a lot of the wrong buttons when they're thrown around during a mid-space battle?"

"No, we checked all that."

"Ok. And no one's performed any upgrades on anything?"

"No"

"So what's Spock doing with that box of floppies?"

"I was attempting to install a vendor certified diagnostic package designed to determine the true cause of the malfunction by a process of strategic elimi.." Spock burbles, before I cut him off mid-stream.

"If that's Service Pack 6 I'm leaving right now!"

After a few mumbled denials I agree to give the ship the old technical fish eye...

"Uh, That's the coffee maker."

"Of course it is, but I prefer the holistic approach to computer maintenance - every part being interconnected, and therefore reflecting on the whole. Besides, I always think better after an Espresso."

"Espresso? Uh, we only have instant!.."

Perhaps it's a nightmare after all.

"..and what were you saying about Holistics?"

"Well, take this coffee maker for instance. See the brown sludge collecting in the drain tray and the way the steamer looks really clogged?"

"Yes"

"Well it's quite possible that your crucial guidance systems are clogged in much the same manner"

"By coffee?"

"No, but by leftovers from poorly executed maintenance."

"I hardly think..."

"Look at the grime on those dilithium crystals!"

"They're not dilithium crystals, that's our dinner - it's just not been hydrated!"

"If you tell me that's a kebab with a side of chips and I'm going to puke!"

. . . six hours later. . .

"Ok, I'll need a RAM Removal tool, an Earthing Strap, a sonic screwdriver, a .."

"A sonic screwdriver?"

"My mistake, wrong programme - a demagnetised head flat blade screwdriver with internal AC detecting Neon"

"Sorry, we don't have one of those" Scotty murmurs, rolling up with toolkit in hand.

"What about Swiss Army knife and Panelbeating hammer?"

"Can do!"

. . . Ten Minutes Later . . .

"Right, that should about do her," I cry slamming the cover of one of the nastiest jobs I've done since I used an orbital sander to clean some tape heads.

"So what now?" Kirk asks.

"Well, run her up and see how she performs."

. . . Another 10 minutes later . . .

"Well she seems to be taking the orbit ok now," Scotty murmurs, looking up from his instruments "...although I AM getting a overtemperature reading from the navigation motherboard."

"Oh, that'll just be the duck tape holding the fan giving way. She should be ok so long as we don't run into a..."

"METEOR SHOWER, ship taking autopilot evasive action" Spock cries.

"... ah, well, there you go then. If you could just teleport me back down to earth ASAP, that would be Sterling Moss."

"No can do," Kirk yells "Scotty, get us out of here, full power reverse!! "

"IF I GIVE HER ANY MORE SHE'S GOING TO BLOW!" Scotty yells excitedly.

"No, I think she's going to blow anyway!" I cry stepping into the transporter and pressing the "Reverse Co-ordinates" button...

. . .

What a strange dream.

Still, at least I have this cool space age watch...

BOFH skills test: How are you with Marketing Blurb?

BOFH 2000 Episode 20

Published Monday 12th June 2000 15:27 GMT

We've all seen it, and, some of us have even read it. Sadly, though, with the advent of gas-fired barbecues not many of us get to use it any more.. But today The Bastard would like ask some questions about your interpretation of their propaganda.

1. Reading the Advertising blurb for a product which may suit your needs, you notice the phrase: "Runs on most PC Compatibles". This means

- A. Any X86 box will run it
- B. Most X86 boxes will run it
- C. Runs on DOS boxes
- D. Doesn't run on DOS boxes
- E. Doesn't run

2. In the same blurb you see: "Developed by a highly skilled team of programmers"

- A. It was developed by a crew of like-minded supergeeks who we managed to lure away from the space program with large salaries
- B. It was developed by a team of grad students working for us nights and weekends
- C. It was developed by two grad students as a thesis paper, and we stole it.
- D. It was developed by two high school students learning Visual Basic
- E. The skills we were talking about were Juggling and Morris Dancing

3. You also notice that it claims to be "fully compatible with international standards". This means

- A. It adheres to current industry standards

- B. It adheres to ad hoc industry standards
- C. It adheres to the new standard that they've just made up (See Microsoft Standards)
- D. They'll stick to their story about standards, even under interrogation
- E. The wrapper will adhere to your foot if you stand on it

4.Finally the brochure mentions "Fully Manned Personal Worldwide Support", which really means:

- A. There's a support team in every country for 24hr support
- B. There's a support team in one country, with 24hr support
- C. They've hired one full man for Worldwide Support
- D...and by "full" they mean drunk
- E...and he only speaks Hindi

5.The accompanying Company Propaganda claims that they are experts in the "Fully Fault Tolerant" field. That means:

- A. They have a large amount of experience in delivering 24x7 applications
- B. They have a large amount of experience in using 24x7 applications
- C. They know there's 24x7 hours in the week
- D.. They know about Full Fault conditions
- E... and they tolerate them in their software.

6.The Company Profile also mentions that they're "Firmly based in Silicon Valley", i.e.

- A. They're based in the heart of the Computer world
- B. They read Computer World
- C. They've heard there's Computers in the World
- D. It was a typo which was supposed to read **DEATH** Valley

E. Nope the typo was supposed to read Silicon "Alley" - they back on to a TV Repair shop

7. Good Lord! It says down the bottom of the page in Huge, emboldened letters, that the software is Completely Free! This can only mean

A. It won't cost you a penny

B. It's crippleware

C. It's crippleware that also has a service connection charge

D. Did they mention you have to sign up for 24 months.

E. PANTS DOWN and BEND OVER, HERE COMES THE RED HOT SPIKE!!

8. "Contact us now and we'll get someone to call you". This means

A. They'll only call you if you respond

B. They'll only call you if they think you didn't get the blurb (i.e. don't respond)

C. They call on you regardless

D. They'll add you to their mailing list if you don't respond, hoping to wear you down

E. They know your name, they know where you work and live, and they're calling Readers Digest!!!

9. "Can your business afford to pass up this Opportunity?"

A. No

B. Don't know

C. Yes

D. To do them in to Readers Digest? I think not.

E. To ring the Armed Response Unit to inform them that a man wearing a "I hate Western Civilisation" badge, and carrying a large ticking parcel, mumbling to himself that "The Capitalist Pig Dogs will never take me alive", etc. No.

10. "For More information Please put your name and address here". This means

- A. They will keep you informed of items relevant to your business
- B. They will keep you informed of items relevant to **THEIR** business
- C. Both A and B, long after you've left the company, the country, your partner and threatening messages on their answerphone
- D. The guy in the next cubicle's going to be getting a lot of mail soon
- E. But not as much as every single beancounter will be getting once you make some calls...

How do you work out your score?

I know what you mean - some answers seem so... equal don't they? If so, that's -10 for a start!

Other than that, it's 0 points for every A (and - another 10 points if you think that's harsh), 2 for every B . . . 8 for every E.

-20-20 You don't deserve a Computer. In fact, it's surprising you can read.

But I do have some Leading edge 1 Meg SIMMs that you could buy at 20 quid a pop

20-40 About those leading edge 4 Meg SIMMs at 50 quid a pop... Not buying?

Worth a crack, though. Still, you need more work.

40-60 Yes, that's more like it. You're unlikely to be taken for a ride so easily.

Well done - though you're still giving them the benefit of the doubt.

60-80 Yes, you're right, the only benefit they deserve is a sickness benefit.

And to qualify for that, they're going to have to have had a nasty accident of some kind....

80-100 You cheating bastard! Take another 20 points for trying it on.

100-120 My Hero

BOFH: What the Microsoft break-up really means

BOFH 2000 Episode 21

Published Sunday 25th June 2000 12:17 GMT

So I'm doing some equipment audits, which basically means wandering around peoples' desktops while they're away and making sure that what the service database says they have, and what they **REALLY** have, correspond with each other.

Not a challenging task by any stretch of the imagination...

And as per usual, it has to be done early in the morning so that I don't get exposed to the mindless questions of the using masses. (There's only **SO** many times you can be asked how to change the desktop wallpaper, a password, or tweak the screen brightness before you feel like stuffing the person's pay-cheque into the shredder)

I'm just finishing stuffing someone's pay-cheque into the shredder (pre-emptive strike - the best defence being a good offence and all that) when an early rising user walks in, wondering why their desktop machine has its cover off.

"Just taking an inventory of the hardware your system's configured with," I respond to their inquiry.

"But you already did that last year!" he blurts. "We do it every year," I reply, "so we can keep track of all the upgrades that have occurred and equipment that's been added."

"Well I hope it goes smoother than last year - I'm sure that my machine ran a lot slower after you'd run that hardware checking program on it."

Sigh.

"Sometimes the cataloguing program notes systems anomalies like overclocked CPUs or misconfigured memory configurations, which will eventually lead to Access Violation problems and frequent Bug Checks," I respond, "so we rectify them."

DUMMY MODE ON!

Of course, I could tell him the real reason - that the cataloguing software noted that the system concerned **REALLY DID** have a serious memory anomaly - it had 64 Meg when 32 would do. No sooner noted than rectified with the aid of a common household DIMM removal tool. (I could be Father Theresa, my life is so devoted to helping people).

"Oh. Ok. Well how long will it be till you're done?"

"Oh, I'm finished now," I cry happily, suppressing a momentary feeling of guilt as the last of his pay packet disappears into the slot of death. "I'll just pop the cover back on your box and you'll be back in business!"

"Actually, while you're here, do you mind if I ask you a question?"

"By all means!"

"Well I've been reading about this break-up of Microsoft - will any of my programs be affected by it?"

"You mean will the change in the corporate structure of company affect the software made by that company and currently installed on your machine?"

"Yes."

My feelings of remorse disappear quicker than a hardware warranty after clock-chipping and I'm back to normal self.

"Well, it's hard to say. You see, what the ruling in effect means is that Microsoft has become far too powerful and has begun monopolising the market – it's the US government's form of a practical joke really."

"Huh?"

"Well they encourage people to build a big company and pay huge amounts of tax, and yet when they do so, they say it's bad and tell you that you have to break it up to be less competitive"

"But weren't they using unfair business tactics?"

"The term 'business' makes the term 'unfair' redundant in that sentence."

"You sound like you **AGREE** with them!"

"Can't stand them, to be honest, but that's hardly the point. Now back to your question - will it affect your desktop?"

"Yes"

"Unfortunately it probably will. Because of the split up, you'll probably have limitations on the size of documents created with the applications. It shouldn't affect you a lot - as long as you don't have any documents over 20k in size"

"But **MOST** of my documents are over 20k in size - I do the employment contracts."

"Really?" (This just gets better and better.) "Well what will happen is that they'll probably set a limit on the amount of pages of data you can edit at one time. Probably one."

"**ONE PAGE!** All of my documents are longer than that. How do I get around it?"

"Well.. I don't know if I should tell you this..."

"Oh please, it'll kill me to have to split all my documents up."

"Well.... ..Ok, I spose I can tell you. You have to **DELIMIT** the documents"

"How?"

"Just go into DOS, and type DEL *.*"

"**HEY!** Doesn't that Delete them?"

"No, the Delete command is REM - They changed all that years ago - you've been using Windows too long."

"Oh."

"And while you're at it you'll probably want to delimit everyone else's files too, plus all the ones on the server -I think the delimit command gets replaced with the new Operating System we're installing later today."

"Oh, Ok, I'll get right onto it."

"Good. And while you're at it, you probably want to delimit the NTLDR, the boot.ini, and everything in the Profiles directory on the disks too - just to be on the safe side in case they want to split out the Multination Characterisation of the Interface to the Base Operating System."

*****DUMMY MODE IRREVOCABLY ON*****

"Du-Ok."

Like shooting fish in a barrel.

BOFH gets Blood on His Hands

BOFH 2000 Episode 22

Published Sunday 25th June 2000 12:17 GMT

So, as part of the Company-wide lip service to Health and Safety, anyone in an area deemed potentially dangerous has to go on a First Aid refresher course. And wouldn't you know it, because of a minor statistical anomaly in the workplace accident figures, the Computer Room is found to be the most dangerous place in the Building.

As it should be.

Still, The PFY and I are **REQUIRED** to attend the course, which isn't so bad when you consider the company's picking up the Tab for a day off work.

And we do get a shiny first aider badge.

To wear to the pub.

At our respective wakes.

"Yes, that **IS** the correct way to use a defibrillator," our instructor informs The PFY calmly. "However it's not generally the recommended method for treating a broken arm, which is what we're looking at currently."

With a sigh The PFY puts down the paddles of the unit, which is no doubt suffering from a seriously depleted battery and leaves the resuscitation manikin to smoulder out.

"Now back to broken arms; what's the best treatment for them?"

"It depends on how they were broken.." The PFY answers, beating everyone in the assembled group for our tutor's attention, like the closet brownnoser he is.

"Yes, true," she responds. "If the fracture is what we call an 'Open' fracture, we would want to treat it differently than a normal 'Closed' fracture."

"Oh. I was thinking more along the lines of 'did I slam their arm in a door, and should I give it a twist to make my point - for luck'. Sort of thing."

"Yessss.." she replies, clearly deciding not to dig any deeper into that particular quagmire. "Anyway, what we're looking at is whether there is bleeding associated with the injury or not, and whether there's a necessity to treat that first."

The Boss, meantime (here because he too values the idea of a day out of the office) is looking just a tad queasy - obviously not too keen on the blood idea..

Best go easy on him.

"Blood you say," I cry loudly, "Would that be like a **LOT** of blood?"

"Well it depends really on the organs involved, and how they're affected."

"So the blood could just **GUSH** out, **ALL OVER** everything, or it could just **OOOOOZE**?"

The Boss is now looking like a Procol Harum song and starting to waver in his chair, which is the perfect time for an interlude...

"I think we need to get him some fresh air," I cry, pointing out The Boss to the instructor.

"Yes, yes, very good idea."

"I'll bring the shock machine!" The PFY cries, leaping toward the device in question.

"That won't be necessary" she responds, "All he needs is a little lie down in some cool air for a minute or two."

The PFY barely hides his disappointment, but rallies -- by snaffling The Boss's wallet and standing on his personnel disorganiser -- while helping him to the window. A gust of fresh diesel fumes to the nostrils and The Boss is back in the Land of the Living.

"Where's my wallet!?! " he cries, performing his Power on Self Test true to form.

"Here it is," The PFY offers, "Just looking after it."

The Boss scrabbles through it, but everything seems to be intact.

Ten minutes later we've all seen a sling in action and managed to pair up to give it a try ourselves. I, sadly didn't quite get the hang of it, so to speak, and mistakenly wrapped the noose - I mean bandage - around The Boss's neck. And it's true what they say about a well-tied reef knot - it doesn't slip.

After The Boss has his second bout of fresh air, we begin again, pausing during the bleeding stage for The Boss to recover yet again. Sigh.

The next day we're all back on fine form and I'm showing The Boss some of the sights of the computer room. He wants to go through every **SINGLE** bloody accident that's ever happened in the place and see if our course has covered it - before he pays this invoice. Sigh.

...

"And this is where that engineer slipped and tripped down the raised floor tile - breaking his arm - which incidentally that accident happened the very day after he told us that we didn't have 24 hour response.."

"Yes, yes," The Boss murmurs, ticking off something on his clipboard. "We'll have to put up warning signs on the walls about that."

"..Oh! And this is where we had that mild electric shock when wear and tear on the power cable accidentally connected phase to this cabinet. Nasty burn and a bit of hysteria there."

"Yes, perhaps we should make it a rule that everyone entering the room has to use insulated gloves," he burbles.

"Ah" The PFY cries, "This is where that consultant who was always complaining about not having access to the computer room accidentally climbed on top of the machine. And this is where he broke off one of the smoke detectors with his head - causing the halon to be released."

"Really - he broke it off with his head?"

"Near as we can tell - he quit after the accident, so we didn't have a chance to ask him about it."

"Yes. Those consultants all have First Aid certificates, don't they? I know, I've got an idea! Why not let them all have access to the computer room - which should increase the safety of the area many times over!"

!!!

"Let them into my computer room?" I ask.

"Yes," The Boss replies happily.

"Well I suppose so," I respond, ignoring The PFY's look of horror. "They certainly would have come in handy that time I cut my finger on the sharp edge of the inside of this cabin... oh look, I've done it again!"

I pull my arm out of the cabinet and sure enough there's a large cut along it with a generous amount of blood on it.

"And this," I say, indicating a stretch of floor tile to The PFY, "is where The Boss fainted that time and **>KATHUD< broke >STOMP his index finger."**

Desperate times, desperate measures.

You'll get access to my computer room right after you pry the Halon test key out of my cold, lifeless hands.

BOFH: Bad Hair Day

BOFH 2000 Episode 23

Published Monday 26th June 2000 22:44 GMT

I think I'm going to have a seizure. I've tried to calm down, I've counted to 10, I've even played a couple of games of sneaky-cheat Quake II against a couple of feebs from marketing who can't figure out why they kept exploding when I shot them with an ordinary looking pistol.

But it's not working. I've had enough. The week has gone on one day too long and they've finally got to me. The users, The Boss - even the PFY is getting on my tits....

..It all started this morning when I had to put a simple proposal in for the purchase of a swag of new disks to replace the old crap that sits in a standalone cabinet hanging off a SCSI-1 chain on one of the larger Database machines. Disk that's so old it's got marks from Noah's screwdriver on the side. And he wasn't much of an installer if the cabling's anything to go by...

Be that as it may, I slap together a quick document and push it over to The Boss.

"There's no competing quote for the equipment," he says, skimming down the page.

"Company policy is that a competing quote isn't necessary when the purchase is under 2000 quid," I respond.

"Yes, but there's several disks here, which, with VAT, totals... 2014 pounds," he replies, after bashing some numbers into his desktop calculator and – finally - managing to get them in the right order.

So 10 minutes later I'm back in his office with **TWO** orders for two sets of half as many disks.

And he signs them off. Well, wanders off to the secretary to borrow her dictionary to see just whether Disc or Disk is the preferred spelling.

"I can't believe you did two orders to avoid getting a competing quote," he says smugly as he returns, just letting me know that I can't put one over on him.

I've no doubt his smugness will last well up to the time he discovers the wallet on his desk strangely empty, his coffee cup strangely full, and his voicemail diverted to a phone sex line.

I take the order up to Beancounter Central, only to find the beancounters won't be processing it today. (It's Accounts policy to send out all orders in the morning mail. And by now it's past 11am.)

My offers to type it myself are rejected. There are no exceptions. Rules are rules.

But that's OK, I can put up with *that*. Then I get back to Mission Control and the PFY's having a deep and meaningless with the latest woman of his dreams...

"I ***SO*** agree" he gushes, gesturing to a console message warning of a tape drive needing a cleaning cartridge.

Being the benevolent type, I slap the tape in the drive and pop down to an early lunch.

And wouldn't you know it, I'm just getting my second pint in when a group of furry-teethed geeks from the electronics company down the road bowl in.

"And I said to him: 'you can't port Debian to a car computer - **IT'S NOT AN OPEN SYSTEM**' - **WAAAAA HA HA HA!**" one of them cries, setting the rest of them off in a fit of laughter.

...

I make a break back to work only to find The PFY on the phone, the Tape warnings still unresolved, a consultant wanting someone to help him with his computing problem (which he no doubt caused), and a couple of users stacked up on hold because all the helldesk people have gone to lunch at the same time...

Something has to be done.

I get rid of the users in record time with a two-word solution involving sex and travel (disguising my phone line as a helldesk extension in case any of the callers has a digital phone), and then decide to tackle the PFY problem.

I indicate the tape warnings that he's been ignoring for the last hour or two then show him the plug of death, which to all intents and purposes looks like a plug with a single throw heavy duty switch where the cable should be. Not knowing what it is, the PFY seems unfazed.

Which incidentally is what his desk and phone are when I plug in then push the button, grounding the live wire and popping the circuit breaker.

"What the hell di..," The PFY starts, stopping abruptly when he sees me passing a small parcel to him. He knows two things: (1) the mailroom only delivers parcels at 10 and 3, and (2) most parcels don't have highly conductive tin foil on them. "I'll just get those tapes then.."

Problem solved, it remains only for the attack of the killer consultant with his problem of doom. Sure enough, seeing me alone in the office, separated from the herd as it were, he decides to strike.

"I've been having a few problems installing NT," he burbles, wandering over and showing me a piece of paper with the "error text" written on it. "There's no floppy in the drive," I murmur.

"No, there **ISN'T** a floppy in the drive!" he cries triumphantly.

Sigh

"The machine doesn't recognise the CD drive and **NEEDS** a boot floppy to load the NT disk," I respond.

"No it doesn't! It's never needed one before."

Double sigh

"It does. It's uncommon, but it happens."

"Look, I should know, I install these things all the time!"

"Uh-huh." I sigh yet again, then have a minor brainstorm. "**OH**, Actually! What service pack is the CD you're using."

"Six."

"Ah, use Seven, it has the CD drivers built right into the CD."

"But how does that work?"

"You've heard of data readahead?"

"No?"

"Well this is the same thing, it's an enhanced readahead which allows the system to cache the driver for the CD."

The glazed expression tells me all I need to know about the credibility of that particular lie.

"DuhOK."

"Help yourself, they're in that silver package over there..."

One high-pitched scream later, a small battery powered inverter kit drops to the floor. The Boss, ever on the alert for something to make his day pass quicker, investigates.

"What's going on here?" he asks ignoring the doubly glazed expression on the consultant sitting in a courier basket.

"Oh he's just pleased because the latest enhancement to Solitaire arrived today."

"**YOU'VE GOT A BETTER SOLITAIRE!**" the boss gasps, his day peaking.

"Yeah, the install disks are in the shiny parcel on the floor - haven't had a chance to.."

>**EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE**<

Ah, maybe it isn't such a bad day after all.

BOFH wants to know: how dangerous are your users?

BOFH 2000 Episode 24 (Quiz no.3)

Published Monday 10th July 2000 12:17 GMT

Sure, they look about as likely to rebel as the pack of mindless sheep that they are - but can they be trusted?

- Are your users reading forbidden literature?
- Are they trying to climb the technical greasy pole behind your back?
- How will you know?
- Can the cattle prod be trusted to solicit the truth?

It's time to put it to the test!

Put yourself in your users' place and answer these simple questions to see if things are going according to plan at **YOUR** workplace.

1. A MAC Address is:

- a. A place you get Quarter Pounders
- b. A street address in Scotland?
- c. Something Technical
- d. A Hardware Address in Networking
- e. Something technical a system administrator changes to cause the Boss's machine to lose network connection.

2. You ring your Systems and Network people because the server has just gone down and you want to know when it will be up again. You expect them to tell you:

- a. A number of minutes
- b. A number of days

- c. To sod off
- d. The incriminating evidence they found in your email folder
- e. The incriminating evidence they just **placed** in your email folder

3. The low-power components in your laptop are optimised to run at what voltage?

- a. DC?
- b. AC?
- c. Whatever the adapter says
- d. Just under 3 volts
- e. 240 volts AC, and not a volt less!

4. You bring a box of 9 track tapes of your life's work to the operators to read in so that you can download them to your PC. The operator tells you it should be there in an hour. This means:

- a. It will be loaded into your home share in an hour.
- b. It will be loaded into your home share today sometime
- c. It will be loaded into your home share this week sometime
- d. It will be loaded into your home share when hell freezes over
- e. The Operator's bin has recently become full

5. You smell smoke in the building. You know immediately that:

- a. You should sound the alarm
- b. You should make your way quickly to the exit, notifying staff as you go
- c. You should turn your machine off in case the sprinklers activate
- d. The System Administrator is interviewing consultants again.
- e. The operator's bin doesn't need emptying any more.

6. The faultiest piece of crap in the building is:

- a. Sitting in the bin outside the head of IT's office
- b. Sitting on the floor outside the head of IT's office
- c. Sitting on the floor inside the head of IT's office
- d. Sitting on the desk inside the head of IT's office
- e. Sitting on the chair behind the Head of IT's desk, talking on the phone.

7. The best place to backup your files is:

- a. To your Home Share, just like the System Admin said
- b. To the TEMP directory, just like the System Admin said
- c. To ZIP disk
- d. (c) to Several Zip disks, and possibly CD-ROM
- e. To the Recycle bin, to save the System Admin the trouble.

8. The danger of leaving your machine switched on is:

- a. It could catch fire
- b. It could become a security risk
- c. The disk could crash
- d. It wastes lots of power
- e. The processor might burn the System Administrators hand when he replaces it with a... faster one... late at night.

9. The security and integrity of your email is protected by:

- a. Your password
- b. Company Policy

- c. PGP Encryption
- d. Microsoft's pursuit of excellence. Waaaaaa ha ha ha!
- e. Two pints for the System Administrator every Friday night

10. A System Administrator slaps a piece of paper down in front of you with lots of large technical words on it... which don't mean anything to you. He also indicates a line, with a large X beside it. You:

- a. Sign on the line
- b. Sign on the line
- c. Sign on the line
- d. Sign on the line
- e. Refuse to sign on the line then check on your life Insurance Payments.

How did your users do?

Mostly A

Nothing to worry about here. Your users are so feeble minded you're lucky they can manage a keyboard without filling it with dribble.

Mostly B

As with A, you're pretty much in the green here. You might want to cancel any geek magazine subscriptions just in case someone's found the bin you're dumping them into.

Mostly C

Still not **TOO** much to worry about, but you probably want to check offices for books entitled anything "for Dummies" (after cancelling the above mentioned magazine subscriptions).

Mostly D

This looks serious. It would somehow seem that someone technical has slipped through the resume screening process (i.e. the shredder). Did someone say Inquisition?

Mostly E

No no no, you're supposed to pretend to be one of your **USERS!** Not yourself! What were you thinking? Advance to go and try again!

Lies, Damn Lies and BOFH Statistics

BOFH 2000 Episode 25

Published Thursday 6th July 2000 12:01 GMT

So I get this tape in from the courier and it's marked - **AS PER USUAL** - "Ultra Urgent". Which means that The Boss is going to be in any time to see how..

"How's that tape going?" The Boss asks, trundling into the office at warp factor .0000000003 before I have a chance to nudge it off the table and into the bin.

"What tape?"

"The Survey Data tape!" He cries. "Very important stuff that. We paid a survey company twenty five thousand pounds to do an electronic survey to find out what our customers really want."

"You mean like a good product at a reasonable price?" the PFY chirps in.

"No, no," The Boss smiles condescendingly. "We want to know what the customer **REALLY** wants - product colour, naming, whether to use chrome or not."

"All important stuff then," I comment, rolling my eyes at the PFY.

"Yes! So where can the tape be?"

"Probably hasn't been delivered," I say.

"Well it's funny because I saw the courier on the way out," he cries triumphantly, producing a delivery receipt from his pocket. "And he says you **DID** get one."

"Yes" the PFY jumps in, knowing my policy on signing for things only too well "- or rather someone named.. uh.. John Major did. Does **HE** work here?"

"The beancounters maybe?" I suggest helpfully.

"It doesn't matter," The Boss cries yet again, with a hint of triumph in his voice, while producing another tape. "I got a copy delivered just in case!"

He hands it over, chomping at the bit to get the tape read-in.

"Chop! Chop!" he cries. "What's on it?"

"Well, as I've only just got the thing, it's hard to say," I respond, not appreciating The Boss's attempts to grease the gears of media reading.

"Well it's really important!" The Boss bumbles, stating once more, for the benefit of the **COMPLETELY** bloody stupid, the reason for his visit.

"Yes, yes," I murmur, slapping the tape into the external drive on my machine.

Normally - I have to admit - I'd only be reading a foreign tape once I'd run it through the Virus Scanning Bulk-Eraser (Never had a Virus that's survived a good, hard, scanning from that baby). **HOWEVER**, if I do *that* it's only going to have The Boss skulking about for even longer. And I don't think I could handle it.

Once it's in, I run a quick tar, an od, and finally a binary dump to come to an interesting conclusion.

"The tape's blank," I tell The Boss, ignoring his disbelieving facial response.

"It can't be, it was written by a professional archiving company!"

"Then it must have been written in Braille."

"Or marker pen!" the PFY cries, recalling a past habit of mine of writing: "The Boss is a Winker" on the leader of 9 track tapes, to give the tape monkey something to cheer him up at backup time.

"Well fast forward the tape along a bit, maybe the data starts further on.." The Boss cries, getting a little disconcerted. "Perhaps they didn't rewind it properly before they wrote it."

"Can't happen," I respond. "All tapes have a beginning of tape mark of someform. If there's nothing after that mark, there's nothing on the tape."

"But.. But.. "

"Look, I'll show you" I cry, grabbing a recent addition from the rubbish bin and yanking it's label off before The Boss can cop a dekkko, "Here's a tape with, uh, intermittent read errors, which we chucked out."

I slap the tape in the drive and run it up.

"Look, see, data!"

"I see."

"Which starts at the beginning of the tape. All valid data. Actually, how were you going to interpret your data?"

"Oh, with this program," The Boss burbles, pulling a floppy out of the Pandora's box that is his business suit.

I chuck the floppy into my machine and run up the executable (without even virus checking because I like to live on the edge) and pump the data at it.

"Well" I cry, "if we used the data on **THIS** tape for instance, it says that... 68% of people prefer British Racing Green or Cobalt Blue, while 11% prefer reds and browns... 73% of people prefer a name that is orientated to the British and/or American markets as opposed to Asian... 67% like

chrome, although 53% of those didn't like it to be a dominating influence... uh, 67% of the respondents were in the upper quartile of income earners, and a staggering 83% say they buy our products recently."

"Well, that's believable as the survey *was* of our clients, and a lot of them are rather well-to-do," The Boss says.

"Remember," I add, applying a pin to The Boss's bubble. "this is just a tape I pulled out of the bin. The results are just an interpretation of the binary data."

"But it's so accurate - it's almost like it **WAS** the survey data!" he responds.

"Hmmm. And you're not suspicious?"

"Suspicious? Why?"

"Well if a survey confirms **EVERYTHING** you expected, why spend a large amount of money on a survey? I certainly wouldn't like to be the person who suggested an expensive survey like that when it comes out telling us what we already know..."

The Boss is strangely quiet at this.

"No," I continue. "What you want is a survey that breaks new ground -tells us something we don't know. Similar data, but varying by certain degrees."

A 15-watt bulb suddenly illuminates in The Boss's mind.

"Have you got any data like the data on that tape?"

"I don't know," I mumble, looking to the PFY for inspiration. "What was on that tape?"

"Soft Core Porn," the PFY cries, obviously mistaking it for one of our archive tapes.

"WHAT?!?"

"We, uh, take copies of stuff we delete from the users' shares," I ad lib, "just in case they complain, then deny having it."

"Ah. So I want to use soft core porn as the input."

"NO!" I cry. "Soft core didn't work, the data was totally unbelievable. You're going to have to use some **DIFFERENT** data. Hardcore porn is probably best"

"Hardcore?!" he says anxiously.

"Yes," the PFY adds. "Possibly even bestiality. IF you want good data to cover your arse.."

...

Two days later, at The Boss's leaving drinks (after the Big Porn scandal, which was after the Big Survey scandal where The Boss presented the data that people liked the idea of Purple and Yellow-embossed Chrome product, with names like Kamakuza which would be bought en masse by low income types)...

"How on earth did they find out?" The Boss cries.

"Well, I think the giveaway was when you attached the data file to your email and didn't change the file extension from .jpg," I murmur.

Sigh...

Still, it was time for a change....

The Bastard gets taste of own medicine

BOFH 2000 Episode 26

Published Wednesday 12th July 2000 11:39 GMT

This episode is based on real experiences with some of the largest computer companies in the globe. Names and Companies have been changed to protect the guilty. .

So I'm ringing Tech support and, as usual, get put through to their lifeline, which is more like a life sentence when you're waiting for help. And of course, when you're talking to the lifeline you have to talk to 47 different IVR systems, which is almost as time-consuming as IVF, only you feel more screwed with IVR..

...".if you would like to log a software call press 1-7. If you would like to log a hardware call, press 2-3."

I press 2 3.

"I'm sorry, your command was not understood, please re-enter, If you would like to log a software call, press.."

I slowly press 2, then slowly press three.

"Welcome to Software support, please have your customer number ready."

I hang up and dial again.

"Welcome to Technical Support. If you would like to speak to an operator, please press 0-0 now. Otherwise if you would like to loga.."

I press 1 and 7 slowly.

"Welcome to hardware support, please have your Machine serial number ready. For our ultima-premo line of products, press 74, For our Fantasma-Blanko products, please press 99, for all other products press 21."

I don't trust it, and wait.

"..except for our Enterprise models, for which you should press 03."

I slowly press 0 3.

"I'm sorry, a technician isn't available to take your call right now, please enter the model number, followed by a serial number and we will call you back from the number on the purchase details of that machine."

I type in the 4 digit model number and am about to type in the serial number when...

"I'm sorry that number is not recognised by our system. Valid Model Numbers are: B101, B102, B103, B104, B1."

I hang up because I just know that the alpha keypad isn't going to work, and recall the number and press 0 0 slowly. Twelve minutes of ringing later the phone is answered. (I could learn something from these people.)

"Hello, Lifeline, what is your Client Reference Code?"

"Uh, 2734278," I respond.

"No, that's your customer number, I need your client reference code," she replies sternly.

"What would that look like?" I ask, never having heard of it before.

"The Client Reference Code is a 17 letter alphanumeric identifier attached to the top of all invoices," she replies.

"I'm afraid I don't have that with me at the moment, can I use my Customer number?" I ask politely.

"I'm sorry, my machine only accepts the Client Reference Code," she responds.

"Right, call you back soon."

I look thru the swathe of maintenance invoices to find that the client reference code was only issued in the past 2 weeks and is to be used for all maintenance calls. Excellent. I phone back.

"BBETA7873884A671F," I answer, in response to her answer, some 10 minutes later.

"I'm sorry, we don't have a record of PPECA7873884A671S," she responds.

Of course not.

"Sorry, I'll repeat, BRAVO, BRAVO, ECHO, TANGO, ALPHA, 7873884, ALPHA, 671 FOXTROT."

"Ah," she replies with what I believe is a tinge of disappointment, "here we go. What was your PIN number?"

"Pardon?"

"Your PIN number for this Reference Code."

"0000," I guess.

"OK, she responds even more glumly. "And what seems to be the problem?"

"We have a hard disk failure."

"I see. What was the serial number of the hard disk?"

"I'm afraid I can't tell you that because opening the case would void our maintenance agreement," I respond, knowing only too well the odds are against me.

"Uh-huh. And your contact number?"

I give her my direct number, which she duly takes down. I get her to repeat it till she gets it correct - no fool me.

"Alright, I'll have an engineer call you within the next working week."

"Within four hours, I believe."

"Um... No, you're on Premium Cover, that's response within a working week."

"No, four hours."

"No, four hours is for Premium Direct Cover, You only have a Premium Contract."

"I see. Can I ask a question off the record?"

"I suppose so."

"How many people get this far?"

"What do you mean?"

"As far as actually getting a technician to call them."

"Off the record?"

"Yes."

"About Three per cent. Twenty per cent get put off by the difficulty of IVR, another 10 per cent get lost in the IVR system and probably lose their mind, 13 per cent or so don't know, and never find, their Client Reference number. Eight per cent do, but don't know their pin, 25 per cent supply me an 'incorrect contact number', and 18 per cent can't wait a week and upgrade to Premium Direct, and three per cent go insane and get taken away."

"So do you have any engineers?"

"Off the record?"

"Uh-huh."

"One. He lives in Wales. We mostly use the Premium Direct money to get you a service contract with another service network - one that gives us a discount if we have less than three calls a year. Otherwise you have to wait for him to get a discount train fare into London."

"And how many staff in your company?"

"Apart from me and the engineer?"

"Yes."

"None."

"I see. So I'll be expecting your engineer.."

"Dave."

"..Dave, in a week or so then."

"Yes."

"It's been.... real."

I feel humbled.

Do not buy a PC from this Bastard

BOFH 2000 Episode 27

Published Wednesday 26th July 2000 23:04 GMT

So I'm at Tottenham Court Road peering at some overpriced kit when I notice that one of my former users is in the house.

Well, when I say "user", I mean a: "This machine must be broken"; "I can do it faster by hand" stick-in-the-mud Luddite who still uses a black and white toaster.

And Roger me silly with an extended keyboard if he doesn't have a heavily bookmarked computer buyer's magazine in his grip. Opportunities like this don't come along too often, so I leap into the void like a trooper.

"**CAN** I help you sir?" I ask, smiling ingratiatingly and assuming the fawning subservience he no doubt expects from the computer working class

"Yes you ca - Why, it's Simon isn't it? I heard you'd left - **WORKING** for a living now are you?" he chuckles.

"Well you know, have to make ends meet", I mumble deferentially, head bowed like a true sales professional.

"So you work **HERE** do you?" he asks, scanning the place with a critical eye, unable to resist the urge to gloat.

"Well, I do what I can." I mumble.

"**CAN** I help you sir?" a Salesdroid asks my man, seeing the mag and smelling blood in the water..

"No thanks.. uh.. Ahim," I say, scanning the name badge and treating him to an overdose of familiarity "I'm looking after these people."

"Well just let me know if there's anything I can do," he murmurs, wandering off.

"Shall do" I cry happily, then turn back to my victim. I mean, "customer". What was I thinking?

"Cut-throat business, sales," I tell my man - George - info supplied courtesy of the subscription sticker on the back of his mag. "Now, what can I help you with. You looking for computer then?"

"Well not exactly," George says evasively - not wanting to commit his soul - whilst nodding in the direction of a similarly aged woman, "Alice here would like to learn a bit about them and so we decided to buy one and I'll teach her what I know."

It's borderline, but I think Alice might **JUST** be up to the exciting two minutes of typing terror as they switch on.

"Excellent. Well, I see you've been reading up on the subject. You definitely don't want to rush into a purchase like this."

"No, no, I've been getting this book for a couple of years now, just biding my time..." George admits sagely.

"A good idea," I respond. "Now, what did you think you wanted to look at?"

"A Pentium III 733 with 128 Megs of RAM, 18 gigabyte hard disk, Windows 2000, Microsoft Office, a 56K modem, a Colour Inkjet printed and an internal ZIP drive" he blurts out, reading from his copious handwritten notes."

"A Pentium III. Really? Well, I **SUPPOSE** you know what you're doing."

"What do you mean?"

"Well you've read the Pentium IV is out."

"Yes."

"Well the price in Pentium IIIs is bound to plummet when the Pentium IV is released - Specially," I look around furtively, "... when the public find out that it's actually Two Pentium IIs on top of each other."

"Really?"

"Of course - that's what all those extra pins are!!"

"But they're not releasing Pentium IVs yet!"

"No, but you **COULD** set yourself up for an upgrade."

"How?"

Again I look around furtively before responding "Well, You buy an upgradable Pentium II, and then, when the Pentium IV is released, just solder another Pentium II on top of the other processor. But it has to be an upgradable one.."

"Why don't I just buy one and upgrade it now then?"

"It's not supported by the operating system yet!"

"Oh, of course!"

"Now the only other thing that concerns me is that you're not buying any floppies for backup."

"Well no, I'm getting a Zip disk!"

"They're good, of course - but often stolen with the machine. That's why we recommend buying floppies."

"But to backup an 18 gigabyte disk I'd need..."

"About 180 boxes of floppies, yes. Or 18 Zip disks. Now which would be easier to steal?"

"The Zip disks!" George cries.

"Whereas the boxes of floppies would just slow the villains down."

"I never thought of that."

"Most people never do. In fact," I add, again looking around. "A lot of salespeople try and talk you out of buying floppies.."

"Why?"

"Well, I'm not pointing the finger" I respond "But on the '**GUARANTEE FORM**' they get your Name and **ADDRESS**."

"You mean they ste.."

"I never said that!" I cry. "But I **NEVER** put my real name or address on one of those things."

"I see. Point Taken. But the rest of what I want is spot-on then."

"Well, the 56K modem's a bit... well..."

"What?"

"Oh it probably won't matter to you of course, but, well, **SOME** modems have porn detection circuits in them which ring Freephone numbers at night to tell government agencies if you're a pervert."

"You're joking!"

"I wish I was. It's been in place in modems ever since the 38K ones were released."

Round about now I'm starting to feel like a real bastard, but then I remember his jibes.

"Did I say 38K?" I cry, "I meant 19K! But it never pays to take chances - 9600 to be certain. The beauty of it all is that all this stuff is dirt cheap now - PII's, floppies, 9K modems.."

"Well I'm certainly glad I spoke to you," George cries. "Now, how about you sell me it?!"

"Actually, I'm a consultant and don't do sales, but I'll line someone up for you," I cry helpfully.

I break like the wind and get to Ahim.

"Hi, my friend here's a collector of older equipment and would really like to pick up some equipment for a working model of the computing of the late 90s. Could you help him out?"

Ahim has gone before I've finished the sentence and is already thinking of the accolades he's going to be getting from his boss for offloading all the crap that tourists don't even buy.

As for me, my job here is done - I wait till the trolley load of legacy kit is out the door before heading down to the Rising Sun for a celebratory lager.

Life is sweet, but revenge - more so.

BOFH wants to know – would you make a good engineer?

BOFH 2000 Episode 28

Published Tuesday 1st August 2000 22:51 GMT

So you think you've got some idea of what hardware's all about then? Think **MAYBE** you could mix it with the big boys of computer repair and come out relatively unscathed? Well now's the time to put it to the test!

1. You hear a loud clatter from one of the fan units of a machine you're servicing. An Amber FAN light at the front of the machine is on. The other FAN is stopped completely. You know intuitively that:

- A. One fan down, one fan about to go down
- B. One fan down, one fan can be fixed on a later service call
- C. One fan needs oiling, the other needs replacing
- D. The stopped fan is probably a standby, and the other one is still going, so no need to fix anything
- E. A diagnostics problem is probably causing all this

2. It's 11pm, you're in bed and get a call about a faulty disk drive. Your immediate response is:

- A. I'll be right there after I stop for a replacement unit
- B. I'll be right there but I may have to leave for a replacement unit
- C. I'll be there in the morning as we have no replacement units in stock
- D. I think you have the wrong number, this is Dave's Minicabs
- E. I'm on another job out of town at the moment - my phone's on divert - I'll get back to you next week sometime, with the replacement unit and the Penalty call fee

3. 24 x 7 x 4 means:

- A. 24 hour, 7 day, 4 hour repair
- B. 24 hour, 7 day, 4 hour answerphone response
- C. 24 hour, 7 day, 4 hour delay before response
- D. C., then 4 hour delay before you get out of bed
- E. 24 Day Repair, 7 minutes till your contract expires, 4 hours waiting for someone to pick up the phone

4. You're called into a job to service piece of kit you've never ever seen before. You don't even know what it does. You:

- A. Admit this to the client and call another engineer out
- B. Admit it to the client
- C. Look at the manuals
- D. B, then C
- E. Break out the screwdrivers - **HOW HARD CAN IT BE!**

5. After E, above you put the kit back together and have a large box of spares left over. However, the green light still comes on when you press the power button. You:

- A. Look at the manual now, and put the pieces back
- B. Leave the pieces with the client
- C. Sell the pieces to the client as service spares
- D. Put them in the bin
- E. Take them home and build your own unit from the parts you'll have left over the **NEXT** time you service one

6. You're called out because an earth leakage detector is tripping on a piece of your kit. You:

- A. Check the Power Supply

- B. Run a continuity-to-ground test with a multimeter
- C. Run a continuity to-ground test with a Megger tester, which patently says on the outside "Not to be used on computer equipment"
- D. Tell the client this unit isn't meant to operate on earth leakage detectors
- E. Epoxy the Trip-reset button down

7. You have NO F*ING IDEA what is wrong with a piece of kit you're servicing. You:**

- A. Ring a fellow engineer for advice
- B. Replace the whole unit
- C. Just keep plugging away for **HOURS** in case you find something
- D. Piss about till the client leaves the room, then pack up and bugger off
- E. D, and take the kit with you, then deny ever having been there

8. The phrase "No user serviceable parts inside" means:

- A. The unit is not easily serviceable by the client
- B. The unit is compose of modular components that need to be replaced, not serviced
- C. There is great danger for the client in opening the case
- D. There's a bit of danger for an engineer too, to be honest
- E. You'll be replacing the unit sight unseen

9. "Warranty VOID if Seal Broken" means"

- A. The seal guarantees that a product failed in service, and not due to tampering by the client
- B. The Seal guarantees that the entire unit has not been tampered with
- C. The Seal stops people being nosey
- D. The Seal stops people from finding out their 2000 quid unit consists of a tiny circuit board and a bag of sand to make up weight

E. C, which is why you slap them on anything you can find from the stash in your tool box

10. Ohms Law states that two resistors in Parallel are:

- A. Equal to a resistor of $1/2$ the sum of the two resistors
- B. Equal to a resistor less than either of the resistors
- C. No substitute for a resistor of the correct value
- D. Will do at a pinch
- E. Can be charged out at twice the parts cost, to disguise the huge Labour charge?

How did you do then?

Mostly A You're obviously not an engineer - it's patently obvious. You're too honest and know too much. You must be stopped.

Mostly B You too know too much for your own, or your company's good. Stick to your graduate studies and leave the real world alone.

Mostly C Honesty with occasional flashes of insight. You must do better if you want to enter the fast pace charge-now-ask-questions-later world of engineering

Mostly D You've got what it takes, but you don't really know how to use it. You need to sharpen those skills a little till you're at peak performance

Mostly E A large number of important vendors would snap you up in a trice. You have the special blend of non-accountability, blatant irresponsibility and ignorance that will make you invaluable to any organisation that chooses to employ you! Good work!!!

Didn't do well? Perhaps you'll do better in Part Two - coming soon.

Are you BOFH Engineer Material – Part 2

BOFH 2000 Episode 29

Published Saturday 12th August 2000 09:22 GMT

So you [still want to be an engineer, eh?](#) Not put off by the compulsory lobotomy, the fashion-victim slacks? Well, this should sort out your destiny once and for all.

1. You've just replaced a bit of dud kit in a client's machine. The old part will be:

- A. Sent back to the manufacturer to determine what went wrong
- B. Left in your "Dead Parts" store
- C. Chucked into the Bin
- D. Left on a table with other, similar, **WORKING** parts
- E. Shoved in a bag with a "Serviced Used Part" sticker on the side

2. Ohms law says that two resistors in series:

- A. Are equal to three resistors of the same amount, in parallel
- B. Cost more than one resistor
- C. Are longer than one resistor
- D. Are equal to the value of the root of the sum of the squares of the other two sides
- E. Require more soldering than one resistor (or two in parallel) and so therefore can be charged a greater labour fee

3. "No questions asked replacement Policy" means:

- A. We will replace a faulty part immediately, for any reason, without question
- B. We will replace a faulty part - if it is faulty, immediately, for any reason without question
- C. We'll replace any part that is faulty, and untampered, without question

- D. We won't ask which part - we'll just replace something
- E. The customer isn't allowed to ask questions - like: "When's my part going to arrive?", "Hello, is this the hardware support people?"

4. Ninety per cent of a particular disk release has failed. This would tend to suggest:

- A. The units are unreliable
- B. There may be a service issue with the device, or how they're configured
- C. The clients abuse the units
- D. Aliens have been infiltrating our air space and destroying the units (because they're so good)
- E. It's a government conspiracy - they're installing clipper chips in the new ones

5. A machine you're working on fails boot diagnostics for no apparent reason. This is probably because:

- A. There is a low-level fault with the system leading to no diagnostic message
- B. There's a fault in the diagnostics themselves
- C. The kit may - now don't quote me on this - be faulty
- D. You didn't shake your lucky rabbit's foot three times before you powered the kit on.
- E. You're going to have to replace all the shiny things you stole from the kit

6. You have a bit of a mishap and set a client's machine room on fire. You:

- A. Apologise profusely and call your company's insurer
- B. Apologise for their kit failing in that manner, and call the **CLIENT'S** insurer
- C. Tell them to call their insurer
- D. Remove all evidence that you have ever been to the site
- E. C, charge for your fire-fighting time, sue for emotional stress, and take three months-off traumatic leave

7. Your company markets a HOT SITE recovery service. This is:

- A. 24 hour, 7 day machine room to recover a client's systems
- B. Next day recovery of client's systems, depending on availability
- C. B, if you're using the same ancient hardware that we keep on our hot site
- D. C, and have all your data on 300bpi 9-track tapes
- E. We leave the heaters on at the office and have a couple of Pentium 80s you can hire on an hourly basis

8. A client rings you about cancelling the maintenance contract on a piece of their kit. You:

- A. Take the information and cancel the maintenance
- B. Take the information and cancel the maintenance after the agreed three month cancellation notice period
- C. B, and charge the client a maintenance modification fee of up to nine months maintenance charge
- D. Send them a maintenance cancellation form, in the mail, addressed to their company, in Peru
- E. D, then eventually B, then re-instate the maintenance at the beginning of the next maintenance calendar year - when they'd least expect it

9. You visit a site and see a POWER SUPPLY FAIL light glowing brilliantly. You know you don't have one in stock, and also that your maintenance agreement states that you must have a replacement unit within six hours. You:

- A. Get one shipped in from where-ever, at **ANY** cost
- B. Tell the customer and ask them to bear with you
- C. Tell the customer and credit them for the inconvenience
- D. Do a "Preventative Maintenance" site visit to another site and **STEAL** a replacement Power Supply
- E. Tell the client it's a lamp failure and disconnect it

10. You're servicing a piece of kit and realise that your earthing strap has disappeared from your kit. You:

- A. Tell the customer and go back to the office and get a replacement
- B. Tell the customer the problem was worse than you thought and pop back to the office for a new one
- C. See if the customer has a replacement to save time
- D. Clamp the metal frame of the device firmly with one hand and continue working
- E. Pretend you have one on. They're overrated anyway. Juggle some memory chips whilst running around some carpet in your nylon slacks while you're at it

Marking? Prizes? - Didn't we do that last week?

Trust me, I'm a Bastard

BOFH 2000 Episode 30

Published Saturday 30th September 2000 20:27 GMT

So I'm working hard after a quiet several pints at lunchtime when the phone rings. Feeling magnanimous - and wanting the phone to stop ringing so I can get back to sleep - I pick up the receiver..

"Hello, is this the Systems guys?"

"It certainly is!" I cry, full of the joyful spirit that denotes a post-lunch computing professional.

"Um, OK, I'm configuring my new PC and it says I should write some stuff down on the configuration card at the back of the book for my own records."

"You're **WHAT?**"

"Configuring my new PC. My old one was really slow so The Boss said I could use the one he was using at home if I reinstall it from scratch."

"Ahh - you shouldn't be doing that, a home machine might be virally infected."

"No no, it's fine I ran a virus scan across it just this morning."

"Which scan software did you use?"

"I'm not sure, but it's one that I found on a Bulletin Board last year."

"I see. Okay then, that's probably OK - which machines were you going to access with it?"

"Just some of the desktops in my department - do you think that would be OK?"

"Hmm. Do you have write access to their Shares?"

"Yes.."

"Ah well that's fine then - shouldn't be a problem at all. Now, what 'stuff' do you need to know?"

"It says I need to write down a MAC address?"

"Hmmm. We usually use the nearest one, which is just around the corner. I think the number's on the side of the building from memory. Just jot that down and pick me up a couple of burgers and one of those ice cream desserts while you're there."

"Duh-huh."

"What else did you need to know?"

"It says: 'printer driver?'"

"That's Dave, he's the new stores guy, but he delivers printers too."

"...OK, Dave. Next it says: 'Memory' and 'M.B.' - do I write down 128, like what it says when it starts?"

"No, write down 32."

"But the machine doesn't say that!"

"Don't worry, I'm sure we'll have that corrected by morning..."

"Oh, Ok. Great! Now it says my IP Address. What's my IP address?"

"127.0.0.1 - you'll need to configure that into the TCP/IP setup of your machine too. Then use the 'Ping' program to make sure that it's working."

"Subnet Mask?"

"Ah, that would be 0.0.255.255 - what we call a B-Minus Subnet mask."

"Righto. Name Server Address?"

"***NAME*** Server address? How do they spell that in that manual?"

"N-A-M-E."

"I think there's a spelling mistake then - it should be **SAME** server address. The same 127 number you used before."

"Why do they want that?"

"Oh, it's a typical computing ploy - They give you a lot of boxes to fill in so that you think you're getting value for money. I've seen some supposed manuals that ask for things like, oh, WINS server addresses and all sorts of other mumbo jumbo!"

"I've got that here!"

"Oh dear, do they ask for a DNS suffix as well?"

"**YES!**"

"The Don't Need Service suffix - I mean who would say they didn't need service?"

"So why's it there?"

"Same as usual - if you put it in the Customer thinks they're getting better value for money"

"I can't believe people would do that!"

"Happens all the time. Now, do you mind if I get some info off you for the Helpdesk records - just helps us in future if you have any problems with your Machines."

"Uh, OK."

"Office Number?"

"302."

"Phone Extension - 4781 right?"

"Yes."

"Name: Jim Forford?"

"Yep."

"Network Port Number?"

"Sorry?"

"The number of the plug hole the blue network cable plugs into.."

"Oh, ah... ah.. >scrabble< 302-R-1."

"No, that would be your **BLACK** Power Cable, we'll get to that later. For now I'm after the **BLUE** cable. The Socket number has your room number and a U in it"

"Oh, Ok. 302-U-4"

"Right. Access Swipe Card Number?"

"Hang on, >scrabble< 301009"

"Does it have an Issue Number under the Card Number?"

"Yes, Issue 1."

"So you're new here?"

"Yeah, just started two weeks ago."

BINGO!

"Right - and lastly, your Bankcard pin number?"

"What do you need that for?!?!"

"Well just in case the High Coarsivity Magnetic Strip on your Bankcard overwrites the Low Coarsivity Image on your swipe card, we need the PIN number to pass to the security access control computer to let you into the building."

*****DUMMY MODE ON*****

"Oh, of course. 4732."

"Right. And now we just need the pin depth of the Power Socket your machine is plugged into."

"Huh?"

"Just need the depth of the holes on the socket 302-R-1. To make sure your machine gets all the power it needs."

"How do I do that?"

"Shove a paper clip in the earth hole and measure how deep it goes down."

"Isn't that dangerous?"

"No, it's the earth."

"Oh, Ok. Uh..... >scrabble< >scribble< Ah, about 1/2 an inch."

"Right now measure the other two with another paperclip while keeping yourself earthed with the first one."

"Ok, Uh >scrabble< uh just under 1/2 an inch... and >scrZZZZZEEERRRRRT!"

Quick as a flash I'm onto the PFY who is, as luck would have it, sleeping in the third floor Comms Room...

"Right, C.P.R PRACTICE, Room 302. Then ATM Withdrawal Practice, lucky number 4732."

"On my way!" the PFY cries, dropping the phone in his haste.

It's like a well-oiled post-lunchtime machine - Perfect.

But for now, Morpheus calls.

BOFH takes the Piss

BOFH 2000 Episode 31

Published Wednesday 30th August 2000 00:50 GMT

So The Boss has volunteered my services to the Beancounters to upgrade some software an PC-based unix system to its latest (and last, if there's a God) revision -from the current version they have - which was probably installed on the Ark.

And as is always the case with vendors of old, dodgy software, there's more clauses to the Warranty than there is Warranty (or Documentation), so it looks like a suck-it-and-see job.

I hate it.

I offer to slap Linux in and rebuild their system for them, but apparently some equally crap chunk of interface software absolutely **HAS** to have this **EXACT** flavour of Unix to run, or it'll just sit mindlessly in the corner like most of its users.

Eventually I come across the licences for the software, which probably cost more to print than the product is worth - and notice that the licences are for the old version of the software, and not the new version they were delivered with.

Sigh.

So I've got to choose whether to back the whole lot up on floppies using a brain-dead version of the only backup package the system has - cpio - and then perform the upgrade, or give it a miss altogether.

So I'm packing up my kit when The Boss rolls in.

"So what's it look like?" he asks, peering at the documentation and pretending he can read multiple syllable words. "Looks tricky.."

"More than tricky" I respond, "A pig's breakfast - The licences aren't valid and the documentation is shite!"

"Nonsense, it's just a misprint!" he cries when I show him the evidence. "It's bound to be a typing mistake!"

To top my day off, the user of the machine concerned arrives for his twopenn'th of information.

"How's it going?" he asks nervously.

"Fine!" the boss cries, "Just about to get started! Well, I'll leave you to it!"

He trundles off with the user for a cup of something which I can only hope is toxic..

And I'm left wondering what Lassie would do... would she dial the suspiciously short US 24hr freecall number? Would she ring the local "Value Added" (pfft) Reseller and ask what the hell's going on? Or would she just relieve herself on the cabinet and wander off?

So I'm relieving myself on the cabinet (with the Power **OFF**, of course) when the user returns to the office. ..

Slightly shocked by the look of it.

"Thank goodness you're here!" I cry, adlibbing like a daemon, "Quick, get a fire extinguisher - I think I'm holding it at bay!!!"

He rips out of the office like a madman while I escalate things a bit by kicking the tower over and jumping on it a couple of times until the lid pops off, to "stifle any lingering flames".

When he gets back I empty half a cylinder of dry powder into the floppy and CD openings just to make sure that it doesn't "spontaneously re-ignite".

...

"Better safe than sorry!" I mention to my helper as I empty the other half of the cylinder into the cooling fan inlet of his machine's power supply.

"My system!" he gasps. "**YEARS** of work!"

"Oh, don't worry about it, it's all backed up," I reassure him.

"Really?!"

"Nah, couldn't be stuffed. But hey, the hard drive's still OK!"

"You think so?"

"Almost definitely - there it is there, hardly a scratch on it, except for those heel marks."

"What heel marks?"

>**CRUNCH**< >**CRUNCH**< >**CRUNCH**<>

"Those ones!"

...

So I'm in The Boss's office and he's not buying the fire story for a minute. Neither is he buying the: "my dog ate the backup tape" story.

"You're for the high jump now!" he cries, grabbing the phone and punching in security's number. "You're as good as gone!"

"Gone?!" The PFY cries, arriving in the nick of time. "That's great! I can't believe my luck!"

"?" The Boss hmms.

"Well *I* get to be in charge! I get to make decisions for myself! Crash the systems when I want, leak your dodgy Website browsing to the HOD, randomly disconnect network connections f.."

I non-maskably interrupt the PFY with a quick **>SLAP! before he can get all the way to meglomaniacland. Still he does dribble on a bit about making the user's lives a misery in his own way, making IT Management look like the prats they are, and so forth. Another NMI brings him back to the real world..**

"Well, maybe I was a bit hasty in my initial estimation," The Boss adds nervously, thinking carefully about the devil he knows.

"No, no!" I cry, realising the vast untapped fear potential stored within the PFY, "I think you were more than justified! I'm a walking technical timebomb! I'm a menace to myself and others. I can't be trusted near equipment! Like your monitor."

"My monitor?"

>CRASH

"Yes!"

"An accident," The Boss cries, "could have happened to anyone! Look! See!"

>CRASH< a laptop joins the debris.

10 minutes later every piece of kit in the place is in pieces on the floor as the Boss strives to prove that I'm not a completely malicious bastard after all, and just prone to workplace accidents like him. It's all rather fun really.

Even more fun when security rocket up in response to the sounds of crashing on the phone call they just received in time to see the boss "accidentally" push his bookshelf over.

"Thank Goodness you're here!" I cry, using a line that's served me well in the recent past. "He's gone completely mad you know. A walking timebomb - a menace to himself and others! Why only this morning he directed me to urinate in a mach..."

The rest is just history, like The Boss. The wailing, the gnashing of teeth, the denials - it's worse than a Presidential Impeachment.

Still, best get 6 or 7 cups of coffee if I'm to complete that upgrade....

BOFH gets Outsourced

BOFH 2000 Updated Episode 32

Published Monday 18th September 2000 15:03 GMT

"Outsourcing!" The Boss and Head of IT chuckle delightedly to each other as they roll, in tandem, into Mission Control. "It's brilliant!"

Sigh.

"No it's not!" I cry, looking up from the Games Patch page I'm currently engrossed in, "We get some outsourcing company in here, let them charge us through the nose for a per-call support contract, seeing them one day a week - if that - and in the end we'll have to take on more staff to fix the problems they cause because they don't know the infrastructure! It's giving someone a licence to print money!"

"That's just the point! It's a Goldmine! We can make a fortune!!!"

"***MAKE*** a fortune?!"

"Yes, there's bound to be a ton of companies out there who need the skills that you and your assistant have!"

"Sorry, you're suggesting that you outsource US?"

"Yes! We'll just contract out your spare time. You know, the time you waste browsing the Internet."

"Keeping abreast of the industry you mean?"

"Or two breasts, if your assistant's browsing is anything to go by" the Head of IT remarks, unable to drag his eyes from the pink hues emanating from The PFY's screen.

"I'm actually reviewing the content of the web-cache to determine it's feasibility for company business!" the PFY responds - aggression set to STUN - appearing from behind a bookshelf.

"Web-cache?"

"Yes, I'm determining **WHY** the Cache always appears to be full of images instead of any information related to work. When I've a complete list of the users downloading the images we'll be able to save a mass of network bandwidth **AND MORE IMPORTANTLY** make an estimate of the amount of time they spend browsing porn in a day instead of working for the company."

"I hardly think that's a valid use of your time," The Boss responds nervously.

"Yes, I can't see that there's any call for this sort of make-work activity!" The Head of IT concurs, equally nervously. "In fact I think you should cease this sort of activity - we're paying you for your technical expertise, not to embark on some form of witchhunt!"

...

Any doubt in our minds about the source of the material in question disappears in a flash...

"And that's exactly the point!" The Boss cries, clambering up to the moral high ground. "You have free time which we could be recovering revenue from!"

Within a day an outsourcing deal is struck with some old-school chum of the Head of IT with shabby technical support. The PFY and I are completely against the idea until we find out that the company is in fact a modelling agency with a free lunch bar. Fashionably clad models in need of IT support need the professional services that only The PFY and I can provide...

[Later that same day]

"Well here we are!" Brian, our new subcontracted boss cries proudly, indicating a mass of machines and cables laid all over the place in a rather warm office.

"A pig's breakfast in other words," I say, gazing at the mess unfolding before me.

"**NO!**" a furry-toothed geeky type cries from behind us. "Every system is in top working condition - I know, I installed them all."

"If by 'installed' you mean stacked them on any free horizontal surface - yes, you have done well. But no airconditioning, no UPS - the whole place could go tits up at any moment!" the PFY cries.

"I hardly think that's a likely occ..." the geeky type starts.

"There's not even a lock on the door!", I cry "Why, any disgruntled former model with a face like a camel's backside and bitter about it could just wander in here and turn the kit off! I'm actually surprised that no-one's tripped over a power cable and brought the lot down before now!"

...

A quick "woopsy" from the PFY later (always quick to take a hint) and Brian has accidentally stepped backwards onto the reset switch of a plugbox which he probably could have sworn wasn't there a few seconds before...

Such is the ability of a computing professional to foretell the future..

Proof positive of our technical ability, Brian immediately converts to the side of good.

"My goodness! It's a timebomb! All our model and contract info is on those machines! It's worth a fortune!"

"We'll need a computer room," I warn Brian.

"Of course!"

"Some place that's well-airconditioned and has a healthy amount of electrical wiring, as opposed to a jury-rigged office," The PFY suggests, "Preferrably somewhere that we can put a couple of vertical racks in.."

"I don't think we have anywhere like that here - we've only got three floors of the building," Brian responds.

"Somewhere with a **LOT of LIGHT** too?" the PFY prompts, "so we're easily able to keep an eye on the servers?"

"No, can't think of anythi.."

"Perhaps with a lot of **SPACE** surrounding it, in case of airconditioning problems..."

"THE BASEMENT!" Brian cries, **"A STOREROOM!!!"**

"Danger of flooding," I offer. "Also, we'd need somewhere with **RESTRICTED ACCESS..**"

"THE PHOTOGRAPHIC STUDIO!" Brian cries, finally taking the hints!

"Of course!" the PFY cries, sucking up so energetically he'll be needing a dustbag shortly "Why didn't I think of that!?!"

...

And the worst thing about outsourcing is it's all **WORK, WORK, WORK!**

No sooner have we set ourselves up in business (took a while for the geek to carry all the kit up the stairwell [because someone convinced Brian of the electrostatic dangers of lifts]) than we're called out to look at access problems, and wouldn't you bloody know it, there's a swimsuit shoot on and the problem is so intermittent that it looks like we're going to have to hang around the place till the problem recurs.

Ah well, that's the price you pay, I guess.

BOFH gets Committed

BOFH 2000 Episode 33

Published Saturday 30th September 2000 20:26 GMT

So I get into work - very early for a change - and am swiping myself through the door, when... nothing happens. Retrying the swipe card isn't notably useful either. Around now I feel it's time to bring security into the game by tapping on the glass and waking them from their productive sleep.

Having had dealings with IT in the past, they let me in and I wander up to Mission Control, only to find I can't get into my area either. Using plan B, I open the release box and remove the breakglass to let myself in.

15 minutes later security rolls up to respond to the emergency.

"Card wouldn't work" I mumble, showing the offending item to him "must be stuffed!"

"No I checked that before you came, the register says that you don't work here any more..." Security mumbles apologetically "..which means that I have to ask you to, ah.. if you want a coffee?"

"That'd be lovely - Black no Sugar please"

...

An hour later, when personnel arrives, the mystery is discovered. It would appear that everyone whose contract rolls over in July is automatically presumed to be departed if they don't renew their contract (as opposed to get a new and more lucrative one) by the same day number in September.

"It's just a little foible of the program!" I'm assured by the Fielding, the personnel helpdesk person whose only practical experience of programmes would be Coronation Street.

"So when will it be fixed?"

"Well that's the tricky bit - as you're no longer working for us officially, you can't request an update - we need a more superior member of staff to vouch for you.."

"Superior in what way?" I ask.

"Higher up the ladder."

"Corporate or Evolutionary?"

"Corporate."

"So you want my boss to give you a ring?"

"Uh, it has to be done in writing."

"And if my boss is out of the office?"

"His boss?"

"Away with my Boss on a Junket.."

"Do you know the CEO?" he smirks audibly.

"No."

"Well, we've reached an impasse then haven't we?" he declares smugly. "It's more than my job's worth to falsify records."

"Would that were the case for everyone in the building," I respond.

>Clickety Click<</p>

"..There we go, the database now reflects that myself - and my offsider, who also appeared to have departed - are back on the contracting Payroll."

"Well I'm sorry but I can't..."

"Of course you can't" >clickety click< "Ohmigoodness, I've just typed **DROP EMP!**"

"It's ok!" he cries quickly. "No harm done, so long as you don't type **COMMIT.**"

>clickety click<</p>

"Ok, typed **COMMIT** like you said, what now?"

There's a pause while some similar clickety noises and the sound of a return key being hit with increasing ferocity occur.

"I said: '**DON'T TYPE COMMIT!**'" he gasps in horror. "We'll have to do a roll back!!!"

"Can't roll it back, it's committed!" I respond, with similar mock horror.

"A recovery!!!"

"Can't do that either!"

"Why not, we've got backups!?!?"

"We have, but we don't have DBA's - they don't **TECHNICALLY** work here any more!"

"You'll have to do it!"

"Well I **COULD** do it I suppose, but..."

"But what?"

"Well, you don't work here any more - **TECHNICALLY** - so I can't really accept a request for recovery from you."

"But you **KNOW** I work here. Just add me back to the database!"

"I think we may have reached that impasse again..." I respond.

"**WHAT?!**"

"Well it's more than my job's worth to falsify records!"

"**BUT YOU JUST DID IT BEFORE!!!**"

"Yes, but I wasn't **WORKING** here **TECHNICALLY** then, remember - now I'm back and have a job at risk!"

"You're just as gone as I am!"

"Yes, but actually **NO**. Contractors aren't in the EMP table.."

"But..."

"But I **SUPPOSE** if you could get a more superior member of staff to vouch for you.."

"My Boss?"

"In the EMP table.."

"His Boss.."

"EMP table - Do you know the CEO?"

"No?"

"Well that exhausts the Corporate Ladder. Let's try Evolutionary. Do you have a goldfish at work?"

"No."

"Any rats?"

"What?!"

"What about... an Assistant IT Professional?"

"Who?"

"My offsider for instance."

"Yes, would he vouch for me?!?"

"It's possible..."

"Well can you give him a ring?"

"Uh, I **THINK** I'll be needing the verification in writing."

"I'll write it and give it to him!"

"We're very particular about the verification.."

"How?"

"It should be written on 50 pound notes. Four of them.."

"THAT'S EXTORTION!!"

"Yes, well spotted! Best you hurry along though, wouldn't want to miss the Bank Opening and get locked out of the building, or worse still, have to submit to a strip search as a non-employee roaming the building...."

...

20 minutes and one strip search later (couldn't resist the call) the PFY and I are a ton richer.

"Right!" I cry when Fielding rings back ."So recovery is complete and everything's back to normal."

"I, Uh," Fielding responds, "OK."

"That's OK, don't mention it!" I cry, disconnecting.

**>UPDATE EMP SET STATE = 0 WHERE SURNAME='FIELDING' AND
FIRSTNAME='PAUL'<**

"Hello security? I think that bloke's back again...."

>COMMIT<

BOFH: No service therefore no denial

BOFH 2000 Episode 34

Published Tuesday 3rd October 2000 19:48 GMT

"I'm a bit concerned about these viruses that seem to be springing up all over the world!" the Boss burbles upon entering Mission Control under a medium head of steam - obviously someone's accidentally exposed him to a broadsheet newspaper on his way to work.

"Virii?" I ask, attempting to divine the purpose of the visit

"Yes. Like the D.O.S.virus"

"You mean the one perpetrated by Microsoft? I thought only I knew about that!"

"What?! No, the Denial of Service Virus"

"Ah, the Denial of Service ***VIRUS***. Yes, I've been a little worried about that myself. But we found a way around it"

"And what's that?"

"Well we've found that if you don't actually ***HAVE*** a service, it can't be denied.."

"What?!"

"A little joke!" I lie, "But we've not been hit by a Denial of Service Attack so far"

"How would you know?"

"Because the service of a particular **SERVER** would go through the floor"

"Yes, but how would you **KNOW?**"

"Ah, I see! Well generally, a denial of service attack would affect us like so."

>CLICK!< >**WHIRRrrrrr....**<</p>

"What did you just do?"

"Switched off the Financials Database machine"

"Why?"

"To illustrate a point. As I was saying, a denial of service attack is usually first noticed by the users..."

>ring ring<</p>

>Click< >wwwwwwWWWHHHHIRRRRR...<</p>

"And see all those call lights on the phone? That's how **WE** know."

"Unless of course we never left our desks and continuously monitored machine performance" the PFY adds, trying to find a reason to browse porn sites for 8 whole hours a day, without the normal break for lunch...

1/4 of an hour later, the financials server is back in business but the boss has obviously been wound up by someone and wants to delve into the whole virus quagmire.

"So we have antivirus products for our mail server and our Windows machines, but what do we have for our Unix Servers"

"Nothing. They don't need it per se"

"But how do you **KNOW?**"

Sadly, the boss slams the cover on the server before I can repeat the demonstration, which just goes to show you can teach an old dog to be afraid. Very afraid...

"I don't know what you mean"

"Well years ago when I was a Unix Admin..."

I only just manage to suppress the cry that he wouldn't even qualify as a unix admin's **ARSEHOLE**, as he continues..

"..I used to just use strings to see if anything nefarious was going on" the Boss finishes, letting us in on a technical secret bound to take us to the top of our chosen field.

"Strings?" the PFY asks, feigning stupidity "You mean like the non-null terminated jobbies that let you read on into virtual memory?"

"?" the Boss responds in turn, before continuing "No, I mean the program strings"

"Strings.." I add thoughtfully, allowing the Boss his moment in the technical sun "No, doesn't ring any bells with me"

"Oh for Pete's sake, you call yourself professionals!" he burbles happily, milking his supposed advanced knowledge for all it's worth "Strings - it's a great program to extract the text from files. Then you can search it for things that don't look right"

"Oh, so you're saying we should get the text out of these files, see if any of it looks suspicious or not, and if so delete the infected files?"

"**YES!**" he gasps, marvelling at the beauty of his plan

"But what if they use some trivial encoding method to ensure that plaintext strings aren't included in the file?"

"Well obviously there's a few programs that it won't highlight, but we can clear those up later by looking for modification dates" he counters, obviously having read the text entitled "hak3r hunt1ng f0r m0r0ns", circa 1981

"Right, so what should we be looking for?" the PFY asks, flipping to the Finance Systems AIX server console.

"Suspicious strings" The Boss says, really adding value to the conversation

"Like?"

"I don't know, suspicious ones"

"What about ones that refer to the password file?" I suggest helpfully

"Definitely! They'll be stealing names and passwords!!!"

"No.. ..nothing.. " the PFY mumbles quietly, "**NO WAIT**, there's something in a program called init and another in a program called cron!!!"

"The sneaky bastards!" I cry, figuring what the PFY's up to "They put them in programs commonly executed by the superuser which no-one kno..."

"..and in id, at, and atm!!!"

"It's worse than we thought!!!" I cry "What do they do, grab the password and give error messages?!?"

"There's error messages in there - do you think they're using it to cover up the access"

"Of course!" the boss cries excitedly "That's how they hide what they're doing – With Error **MESSAGES!!!!!!**"

"Uh-oh, I see there's a root process running cron now!!!"

"Kill it!!" The boss gasps

>clickety clack<</p>

"Is has error messages in it too!!!" the pfy cries, keeping the level of panic up to 100%

"DELETE IT QUICKLY BEFORE SOMEONE USES IT!!!!"

And the funny thing is, it's fairly surprising how long a system will stay up when you remove all the executables, most of the libraries, and trash a filesystem or two.

"THEY'VE CRASHED THE SYSTEM!!!!" the PFY cries, even more urgently

"THAT MEANS THEY'VE MOVED ON TO ANOTHER SYSTEM!!!" I cry, before the boss can see reason....

And the rest, as they say, is history.

The boss took it well though - fell on his sword with only the slightest wimper.

I feel a tinge of guilt - but then realise there's plenty of Unix Admin jobs out there waiting for him....

BOFH goes to War

BOFH 2000 Episode 35

Published Monday 23rd October 2000 21:38 GMT

Couple of problems with the Firewall machine overnight," the PFY says as I wander through the door to Mission Control. "Looks like it stopped a denial of service attack by crashing."

"Always good to know that there's a backup plan for kit if we need it," I respond. "Are we back up and running?"

"Yep, looks like our utilisations at it's normal point on...**WHAT** the **HELL** are you wearing!?!?"

"What this old thing?" I reply, fingering the finely blended wool and nylon mix that is my one and only suit.

- Only been worn three times.

"No, **THAT!**" he cries, pointing in horror.

"This is called a **TIE**. Predominantly used to engender respect for the wearer - which more often than not is undeserved."

"And you're wearing one - because?"

"Because, as they say, today is the first day of the rest of my life."

"Uh-huh. And you're going to brown-nose the new boss perhaps? I thought you said he was a shocker - ex military with no experience of comput.."

"Yep. They're the best sort..."

"Ah excuse me..." a timid voice interjects.

Our conversation is interrupted by the departmental secretary informing us that the Head of IT has some form of rare and virulent food-based illness which prevents him from being in to show the new Boss around...

What a coincidence...

"I'll do it!"

...

"Hi there" I burble, greeting the new Boss-type with a good firm handshake, making specially sure to hold it for just a tad too long to be comfortable. "I'm Brian, the Head of IT. First off, I suppose you want to look over the kit we have about the place."

"Hi, I'm Dave - Uh, I actually saw the computer suite during my interview - with the, uh, Head of I.T."

"The other Brian?" respond, covering well. "Yes, a bit confusing I suppose. Still, you'll be dealing with me from now on, after.. well, you know."

"Well actually I don.."

"Yes, a bit of a tragedy, but then again, we knew it was on the cards when we found that hole in the microwave dish shielding. They tell us they've repaired it though, so I'm sure you've nothing to worry about. Anyway, I'd best show you around to give them a chance to pack up his stuff before you move in. Had a CT scan recently have you?"

"No, why?" Dave asks nervously.

"Oh, no reason!" I respond. "But probably best to sit on the **LEFT** hand side of the room till we're sure."

"The left hand side as you're looking in or out?" he asks.

"Yes, that's right. Now you've no experience of computing till now?"

"No, I was in the armed forces, but decided to break into Computing when my 20 years were up."

"But surely you've used computers there?"

"No our work revolved around troop movements, armoury inventories, that sort of thing, but I'm sure I'll get the hang of it. How hard can it be? We'll have you running like clockwork in no time."

So it's decided then...

"Did HR Issue you with an Access ID card?" I ask, as we enter mission control.

"Yes."

"Right, I'll just get one of the Systems and Networks guys to validate that.."

The PFY rolls over with the bulk eraser, and a short >BZZZZZeeerrrr< later Dave's building access is severely curtailed...

"Right, we need to get you to your office. Right this way..."

I walk Dave down to Brian's office - the plausibility of my story going up as the bin appears to have been used to store the 'overflow' of the food which upset him so much yesterday.

"Oh dear," I sigh. "They haven't got round to packing up his things. Actually, perhaps you could help? Just chuck all the personal stuff in a box."

"B.b.but isn't this **YOUR** office?" He asks.

"Ah, not any more. They decided I should work down the corridor, you know, after everything. So if you could just pack up that stuff and remember to stay away from the left wall.."

"Stay **AWAY** from the left.." Dave mumbles as I close the door.

"Doing some tidying for Brian," I tell the secretary as I wander past to mission control tapping my temple. "Obsessive about it apparently.."

The PFY and I have a 10-minute microwave laugh break, I outline my plan then head back for round two.

Dave's sitting in the dead center of the room, unable to decide which is left and what proximity he should have to it..

"Right well, I suppose we'd better get your manager's pack from the secretary, with your business cards, signing authority and company credit card..."

"Ok" Dave accedes, happy to be leaving the danger zone.

"So I guess you've never ordered supplies online before..?"

"Never.."

"That's a piece of luck, as I'm in a position to step you through the process."

Two hours and several large Internet purchases later Dave leaves the office with a bit of a sweat on, from what he believes to be microwaves. I make sure that the secretary gets a couple of glimpses of him wearing an aluminium foil "earthing hat" before filling him in on some of the background of computing..

"..and that's why they call it rebooting.." I explain, pointing Dave in the direction of the stairwell and slipping him a pair of steel-caps. "So if you could just give us a hand and sort out the 4th floor machines, I've got a fire alarm to test."

"Always willing to muck in!" Dave cries obligingly, rising to the challenge in a shot rather than return to his office. . .

Later that day I explain the whole sordid thing to security - How Dave - who wasn't all that stable to start with (confirmed by the secretary) had had a Shell-Shocklike flashback to a war Nam, Korea or some other disastrous war zone like Leeds and had gone on a machine-wrecking rampage through the building.

"I'm surprised someone like that can even **GET** a gun licence," the PFY comments, ensuring that Dave's next working day will be eventful.

Almost makes me wish I hadn't told him it was virus combat costume party day tomorrow. Black out face paint optional...

Pay reviews for Bastards

BOFH 2000 Episode 36

Published Monday 23rd October 2000 21:32 GMT

So as his immediate senior, I get to give the PFY his performance appraisal review, and as my "senior" The New Boss - Release Version II - gets to give me one (although not in the biblical sense).

All a bit of a problem for him really as he's so new he has to rely on the reports of his predecessor and other managers to come up with something that both keeps the workers happy whilst looking effectual. Pure PR of course, now that he's realised his role's not one of the more popular in the company.

"So how did it go?" he asks conversationally, wanting to know the ins and outs of the PFY's review.

"Very well actually. Overall I'm quite pleased with his progress although there were a couple of areas I was disappointed in."

"Yes?" The Boss asks, keenly interested any negativity directed away from his role.

"Yes, yesterday I noticed he answered the phone **ONCE!**"

"That's terrible!" The Boss cries.

"I know - I would have let it ring. As I said to him - 'Its only a user - they'll ring back if it's important enough and restarting their machine doesn't fix it. And their desk's not on fire...'. I'm starting to wonder if he actually thinks he's there to help people."

The boss laughs nervously, not really believing me. "Desk's not on fire" he chuckles.

"..So of course I told him that muting the ring on his phone will help solve the moral dilemma of whether to help people or not."

"Well, **TECHNICALLY**, you **ARE** there to help people.." The Boss mentions quietly.

"No, I think you'll find that our contract quite clearly states that we're responsible for the smooth running of the networks and systems - it says nothing about the users. **IN FACT**, it's only because I'm of a benevolent nature that I even let the users **ACCESS** the machine, as theoretically they're **UPSETTING** the smooth running of the systems and networks. Call me an old softy I guess.."

The Boss again chuckles nervously, not wanting to open this particular can of worms either. Instead he decides to get down to business.

"So", he starts. "Lets look at your role and the Key performance indicators.. >scrabble< Let's see... **SYSTEM UPTIME** - reasonable."

"Reasonable"?

"Apparently I'm told there's been a lot of unscheduled outages."

"What? - I **ALWAYS** notify users of outages!"

"Yes. I think that senior management believe that multicasting... uh, Bruce Springsteens's 'I'm going down' doesn't constitute notification!"

"It makes people disconnect!"

"I'm sure it does **NOW** - but I think you should be giving people advance notice! My last position required advance notice well ahead of outages."

"**THEY GET TILL THE END OF THE SONG!**" I cry.

"n'Yes.. Anyway, moving right along. Helpdesk calls resolved - Limited."

"Of course it's limited, I can never connect to the helpdesk server to resolve them!"

"Would that be because you.. uh, >scrabble< ran an angle grinder into the network card?"

"An accident. I was trying to cut through the padlock that was stuck on the back of the machine."

"Stuck because someone glued a matchstick into the keyway with epoxy resin?"

"Yes, vandals strike everywhere!"

"Even in the rooms only **YOU** two have access to?"

"Especially there. It's the last place you'd expect. Quite clearly a setup!"

"I see. So your poor Helpdesk resolution record is due to a damaged network card preventing you from closing calls?"

"Yes. But we resolve calls passed to us on paper!"

"How?"

"We file them. One hundred per cent hit rate so far!"

"You've solved all of them?!?"

"No we get them all in the bin. Uh, I mean low-profile circular filing cabinet."

"Yes... I think I might change that to ***VERY*** limited. Now 'Complaints about work' - frequent."

"I'm sorry, but I find that very hard to believe!"

"Well I've one here as it happens, from an executive member of the accounting audit group. He says you told him there were constraints on documents to be emailed."

"Yes - we have an SMTP limitation of 2 Meg, which once an attached document is encapsul.."

"He says you told him to chop his diary up and push it into the floppy drive of his machine if he wanted to share it with his secretary!!"

"That's just preposterous!" I cry, remembering the good laugh the PFY and I had over that one.

"It doesn't stop there!" he responds, cranking up the tone a little. "He also claims you bought several copies of Red Hat Linux under the safety and security budget, trying to pass them off as Fire Warden Helmets!"

"I think you'll find the Operating Systems were purchased for the Security's desktop machines."

"And that's where you installed them then?"

"Unfortunately the media wasn't compatible with their CD Drive."

"Non ISO Format?"

"No, the drive had matchsticks epoxy-resined into it."

"This is just ridiculous!" he cries. "You can't seriously expect to solve all your problems with epoxy resin!"

"No, you're right. I bought a brazing kit yesterday."

Once again The Boss chooses to ignore a confession in favour of pursuing some other line of enquiry.

"And here - apparently you assaulted a user?!?!"

"Water under the bridge. A simple mistake that anyone could make.. We were configuring his network and I gave him the choice of colour-coded cables, and I misheard him saying that he wanted the violet option. I thought he said **VIOLENT** connection option."

"Who on earth has a violent connection option?!"

"We do. Now."

"But who would ask for it?"

"Well, only one person so far..."

From then on it just goes downhill, and I'm forced to retire to my office well chastised.

"Should I go and see if I can defuse the situation?" The PFY asks, fingering the government-disapproved cattle prod he just ordered as an 'Uninterruptible Power Supply'.

"Oh, I shouldn't bother just at the moment."

"What, given up the good fight?" The PFY asks disgustedly.

"No, someone brazed his door handles solid yesterday and epoxy-resined his windows shut."

"Bastards!" the PFY cries

"Yes. Lets hope they don't set his desk on f..." %% >Jangle< >Jangle<>Jangle<</p>

"Ah well."

BOFH: Call in the Specialist

BOFH 2000 Episode 37

Published Wednesday 1st November 2000 21:25 GMT

"..Well I think in that case, perhaps we should get a specialist in!" The Boss counters in response to the sad news that neither The PFY nor I know a single thing about 'e-tail' - and are unlikely to want to learn in the foreseeable future. "In fact I might know just the man. Worked with him in Beirut you know!"

"The **HEART** of Electronic Retail!" The PFY comments dryly.

"That's got nothing to do with it! Anyway, he wasn't in computing then, he was repairing planes!"

"So he's more of a commuting professional than a computing professional?" I chuckle, unable to resist a quick aside now that there's blood in the water.

"Of course not! That was years ago! No, now he's **VERY** thick in computing."

"As opposed to being thick **AT** computing?" the PFY asks, not at all subtly..

"**LOOK, HE'S THE MAN I TELL YOU!** And I'm ***GETTING*** him in!" The Boss cries, making his executive decision.

...

"Cowboy!" I predict to The PFY once we're in the safe confines of mission control.

"He didn't sound **THAT** ba.."

"Mark my words, he'll have his own mini-screwdriver set - which he's had since the airplane days, **AND** which has been used to repair computers when he did **THAT** for a living - and will come complete with sets of acronyms and buzzwords that no-one's ever heard before."

"I still thi.."

"He's the sort that makes friends with Management and excuses for stuff-ups. He'll be gone in a week, the project will be deader than Beta Video **AND** we'll be blamed for its failure, for not working in with him!"

"Why don't we wait and se.."

"100 quid?" I ask, choosing stakes designed to engender a bit of forethought.

"Deal!" The PFY cries, largely bypassing the thought bit in pursuit of prospective readies.

...

I don't know what it is about The PFY that makes him such a sucker for a wager. Whatever it is, it can't be good for him however, and I feel it's my duty to take his money to ensure he learns.

...

And **MY** money's looking pretty good a day later when Jim, our new contracted expert turns up - as luck would have it, between jobs at the moment.

No surprises there.

"So, they tell me you're a bit of a wiz at this online retail stuff," I mention in passing, once we've got the introductory formalities out of the way.

"Online Retail?" He asks blankly.

"Yes, you know E-tail, E-Commerce?"

"No, I - **OH!** You mean Internet-Based Commercial Marketing, as we like to call it!"

"'We' being?"

"Oh, just us in-the-trade people."

The PFY can see his 100 quid disappearing down the tubes and decides to give Jim a couple of hints to help him along his way.

"You'll be wanting to see the commerce servers we've got, along with our certificated web servers and bank interface then?" he asks.

What a cheat!

"No, no, I find that stuff all takes care of itself, we need some flashy moving-type images to draw people to the electronic company marketing site."

"Animated gifs will bring people to our website from far and wide?" I ask, whilst showing the PFY the space I've just made in my wallet for his money.. "That's a little har.."

"Obviously a well-tailored portal would encourage confidence in customers," The PFY chips, just as The Boss shows up.

"See!" The Boss cries, hearing only some semi-positive statements. "I knew he'd be just the man for the job. Now, what sort of delivery time are we looking at?"

"Should be up and running inside a week," Jim responds, pulling a ridiculous figure out of his backside.

ONE WEEK LATER

"..because they don't seem to want to help install the software!" Jim burbles "But I **SUPPOSE** if I do it **MYSELF** we can have it all sorted out inside a week..."

"Oh I'm sure I can **COUNT** on these two to help you out" the Boss murmurs, in a tone intended to imply our lack of choice in the matter.

ONE DAY LATER

"It's fantastic!" The Boss cries, surveying the website which has more plagiarised content on it than your average WareZ zone. "Those moving pictures really **DO** draw the eye, don't they."

"Like a road accident," I agree. "It's only a pity Jim couldn't be here to see it. Where did he say he was again?"

"Oh, he left a message saying something about popping back to Beirut for a bit - apparently he's packed up and moved on - but not before completing this."

ONE MINUTE LATER

"And you're really going to let Jim take the credit?"

"For the website containing large amounts of copyright images and content, some of which is bound to result in legal action. Yes, I think so!"

"But he also gets paid for it!"

"True. But then he'll need money when he gets to Beirut..."

"But did he really go to Beirut?" The PFY asks suspiciously. "It all sounds a little shady to me."

"I can almost guarantee he's going to Beirut. Eventually."

MEANWHILE, IN A PACKING CRATE AT HEATHROW, INSIDE A CRATE LABELLED "LIVE ANIMAL EXPORTS"

"MMMmmmMMMMF!!!"

"MMMMMmmmMMMMMMMMMM MMM M MMMMMMMFFF!"

"MMMMMMMMMMFMFMFMFFFF!"

Mind you, 100 quid is, after all, 100 quid.

The Bastard hits Cruise Control

BOFH 2000 Episode 38

Published Saturday 18th November 2000 08:42 GMT

SO I'm debugging an App I've only just cobbled together to monitor the browsing histories of senior management (just prior to contract renegotiation time as it happens) when the company cruiser walks in.

I hate the company cruiser. And every company has one - the person who doesn't really have a job outside of collecting stats on how winnable the Solitaire game on their desktop is. But so as to disguise this fact, they spend most of their time out of their office "working" with others.

"Morning," he burbles, unaware that his presence is about as welcome as Bill Gates at a Linux users' beerfest. "What're you doing?"

"Ah, just debugging an application," I respond, trying to maintain my train of thought.

"Oh yes, I used to do a bit of programming in my earlier days," he meanders, no doubt recalling the cutting edge of technical pressure of remembering to press return at the end of the line.

Now call me a pedant, call me **ELITIST** even, but if there's **ONE THING** that ***REALLY*** gets on my **TITS**, it's someone claiming to be a "programmer" because they had to type a PIN number in every day to operate a cash register, enter word processing documents or generally confuse the crap out of themselves

"We used to use the old black boxes." he continues, unaware of the "Did you ever use one of them? Tricky pieces of machinery, those, not like these days with all the help screens and things you have to make it easier. All we had back then was the F keys, and they weren't much help. No, you'd have to nut out problems yourself!..."

He meanders aimlessly and I start wondering how long it's going to take to get to the great Tab-key crisis of '83, and, more importantly, how full the skip at the building site down the street is, and if someone would notice a heavy 6ft computer cabinet in it..

"...The number of times I had to resort to F2-ing the document - can't recall what it used to do now, but it was a last resort that we had to use from time to time. Look - tell you what - do you want me to give you a hand, I was a bit of a dab hand with computers once, programmed quite a bit of stuff in the editor - all sorts of stuff!"

"OK," I respond, wondering if he'll leave me alone when he finds how out of his depth he is.. "What do you know about Perl?"

"Pearls, Uh, that would be the, uh, 30th anniversary," he burbles proudly.

"No,Perl, the scripting language," I say, through slightly clenched teeth.

"Is it like vi?" he replies, "I programmed in vi a couple of times - not a buff, mind, just a talented amateur, if I say so myself!"

Nggg.....

My mind is now blanker than a blank thing, and welcomes the interruption afforded by the sight of The PFY at the door. He, and my last hope, disappear quicker than alcohol at a press release, **JUST** before the cruiser can catch sight of him and regale him with stories of how he was an assistant once and how Philips head screwdrivers are a lot easier to use these days, what with posidrive and all.

The Bastard!

"Well it's not **MUCH** like vi - but what I'm trying to do is find out why an array appears to be overflowing on what **SHOULD** be a trivial amount of input, when I'm only selecting the first couple of fields from a varying length input string which is never null"

"Uh.."

I'm fairly sure he was with me up to 'array', though it can't hurt to put the slipper in a couple more times..

"So did you get that on your vi encounters?"

"Uh.."

"Or was your work more of a scalar nature?"

"Well as I said, I'd done more in the way of programming on the Black Boxes we used in the old building - I tell you, sometimes you almost didn't know **WHICH** button to push!"

I realise the futility of the Dummy Mode plan - he ***LIVES*** there so he's immune to its effects. Which leaves the backup reserve plan..

"I can imagine!" I concur, "Actually, I think I know what the problem is - it'll be the 3rd array desynchronisation counter. The problem is usually in the hardware for those!"

"Hardware!!" he gasps "Now ***THAT*** I'm pretty good at!"

I mentally put aside the number of times we've been called to reassemble the PC of someone he's "helped" and continue. "Well you might be able to help then, here I'll show you..."

"It's an empty computer cabinet!" he cries viewing the box in front of him.

"No, the desynchronisation counter is mounted at the back. This is just the heatsink!"

"Oh yes, I see >clamber<. And this stuff, which looks like noise cancelling cloth - is that some form of thermal insu.."

>***SLAM***<

SO I'm debugging an App I've only just cobbled together when my thoughts are again interrupted, this time by the passing of a large truck carrying a very full skip.

Lucky I caught him.

Now lets see *strptr++ is **WHERE** precisely...

BOFH: Lights out for Contractors

BOFH 2000 Episode 39

Published Monday 13th November 2000 13:25 GMT

So I'm investigating a routine fault ("My machine won't work") in the Basement - which I usually avoid like the plague because of the weirdy types who are cellared there - when my enquiries result in forcing me to go to the basement Comms room for the first time.

With some trepidation - having seen the rooms in other parts of the building - I open the door to the Comms Room, take a quick look, then slam the door shut.

Well, **TRY** to slam the door shut. I slip a wedge under the door before any more cable can slop out the gap while I go to find The Boss.

"What" I ask him, when he's wheezed his way downstairs, "the ***HELL***, is THAT?"

"That's a **COMMS** room!" he blurts, topping his previous personal best effort by reading the label off the door without sticking his tongue out.

I open a door to reveal the horror of the room within. A rat's nest of cabling, thinwire, thickwire, UTP, some stuff that could be unshielded serial, and - oh dear - what looks to be a token ring experiment...

"Obviously a little tidying is needed.." The Boss admits grudgingly.

"A little?"

"Well, not so much as to cause an outage or anything, but perhaps you could, uh, repatch them, a few at a time."

A few minutes and one "Facts of Life" briefing later, The Boss is informed about of the infinitesimal chances of fixing this without a major outage.

"I see. So it would be an overnight process then?"

"Overnight would be how long it would take just to get the cables out of the hardware - if we used a gangmower and an axe. Outside of that, it's anybody's guess as to what's in there and what it's connected to."

"So what do you suggest?"

"Someone's going to have to go in there and fix it."

"Someone?"

"Someone with networking knowledge..."

The PFY starts beating a surreptitious retreat.

".. A bit younger and more agile than me.."

The PFY accelerates somewhat..

"..someone who could get lost for days without anyone knowing or caring!"

"A **CONTRACTOR!**" The Boss and PFY cry in unison, both happy that they don't meet the exacting criteria..

"Yes, and what better contractor than someone who **KNOWS** about the cabling firsthand, someone who perhaps, **PUT** it there in the first place," I cry, fingering a self-promotional label on the back of the door.

"**THE ORIGINAL CONTRACTOR!**" The boss cries, enlightened.

BINGO!

... ONE DAY LATER ...

It's been a several of hours since the cabling contractor went in - after some bad-mouthing of 'The current IT unprofessionals' to The Boss when he thinks he's out of our earshot. Still, after he'd extorted a hefty hourly rate from the boss, he was more than happy to sign on for the job.

"Poor bastard," The PFY mumbles quietly, shaking his head, proving once and for all that he bears no grudges against people who disparage his good name.

"But not so poor that you didn't wedge the door shut again once he was in.."

"I was worried about.. uh.. loss of.. uh.. aircooling in the riser.." he adlibs.

"We don't **HAVE** cooling in the riser.."

"Oh. Oh well."

...

In the end we open the door in response to the complaints about a "loss of Internet" and discover that the poor sod's in a bit of a state.

"Which of you bastards turned off the lights?" he cries, a bit on the hysterical side

"Are you sure it wasn't a breaker tripping? - it happens all the time in this building!" The PFY suggests helpfully. "Apparently you installed budget electrical cabling too.."

"Oh yes and it just **SO HAPPENED** that the handle on the inside of the door is missing **AND** a box of thinwire connectors just **HAPPENED** to fall down the comms riser.."

"That's where they got to!" The PFY responds. "I was looking for those - couldn't find them anywhere! Course, it was dark with the lights not working in the riser, so maybe I accidentally knocked them down the cable gap.."

"..Then I tripped on the floor ventilation grill which wasn't secured properly!" our contractor continues.

"And my, you have made a bit of a mess!"

"It was a mess when I started!"

"Yes, but it was a **WORKING** mess. In fact, that's why the company always puts penalty clauses into its standard contracts - to recover lost income, etc, in an outage situation like this. I hate to think what this must be costing you!"

"But this has nothing to do with me!"

"The cables pulled themselves out of the patch panels and switch gear?"

"Y-No, but it wasn't my fault!"

"Of course it wasn't. It wasn't like you installed all the cables in the first place, charged a hefty premium on the top by selecting the longest cable length possible, didn't document your work, didn't label any of the gear, provided no strain relief, **AND** cut corners on the electrical cabling spec and circuit breakers. I'm sure the court will find in your favour."

"**COURT!?!"**

"Well, these things usually end up there after an outage of this magnitude. And the repatching's will probably take you days to complete, which'll mean even more mo.."

"Well what can I do?"

"Well, I s'pose you could hire a couple of contractors with intimate knowledge of the network structure to give you a hand... But then again at such short notice it's probably going to be expensive...."

"I'll pay!!!"

"Well, I think we can help you out. Course we'll need someone to feed all the broken fibre up from the sub-basement spool for resplicing.."

So it's decided, he'll give us a hand. No sooner has he signed a large cheque than we promise to say it was a routine outage and he's installed in the sub-basement comms room with the fibre loom.

While The PFY's placing the wedge and flicking the lights breaker, I'm popping up a couple of stories with five boxes of thinwire terminators.

Just like clockwork.

Just when you thought BOFH had disappeared...

BOFH 2000 Episode 40

Published Wednesday 29th November 2000 11:45 GMT

It's been a while and rumors are that you're losing your edge! Do you still know what a full set of service manuals is, and how hard to hit a user with them when they're annoying you?

This simple test *may* help you get your edge back...

1. You get into work at 8:17am to find someone waiting for you impatiently. Everyone knows you start at 8:30am after you've finished the paper, but they're new and you feel sorry for them. You:

- A. Sort out their problem
- B. Tell them about your normal start time, then sort out their problem
- C. Stick to Routine so as not to upset the rest of the day
- D. Read the paper till 9:00am, just to make a point
- E. Educate them on how long "just a few minutes" is using only a trip to the Computer room and the Halon system as teaching aids.

2. A user who's been pissing around with the internals of their desktop machine "just to find out how it ticks" would be called:

- A. A Hacker
- B. A Tinkerer
- C. A Cracker
- D. A Techie
- E. An Ambulance. Eventually

3. The movie about someone who pissed off their System Administrator was called:

- A. The Net

- B. Matrix
- C. Mary Poppins
- D. Pride and Prejudice
- E. Death Wish II

4. You're at a curry house with your boss, a salesperson and one of the beancounters. Your greatest concern is:

- A. The beancounter stuffing up the excellent deal you've just got
- B. Your breath being whiffy after lunch
- C. Getting back to the office on time
- D. How many Cold Kingfishers you can get down in an hour
- E. How to slip a fistful of chopped chilli into the Beancounter's meal with no-one noticing

5. Health and Safety droids visit your workplace and say it constitutes an extreme health hazard. They're obviously:

- A. Talking about the sharp edges on the metal cabinets
- B. Thinking about the open powersupply on the box you're mending
- C. Wondering about lifted floor tiles in the computer room
- D. Shocked about the lack of external ventilation
- E. Unaware that you swapped the "Door Release" and "Halon Release" buttons just before they entered the computer room.

6. It's your favourite engineer's birthday and you're going to get him the present he most wants in the whole world, which is:

- A. A demagnetised, insulated shaft, posidrive subminiature screwdriver with his name on it
- B. A Ladybird beginners guide to electronics book
- C. A *Windows for Dummies* Book

- D. A service guide for the equipment he's supposed to be able to fix
- E. A bigger hammer.

7. It's the third time a user has contacted in the same week to say they've forgotten their password. You:

- A. Change it for them
- B. Change it to something like "Iloveanalsexooohyes"
- C. Do the same as B, then disable their ability to change it
- D. Do the same as C, then fudge their login window to echo the password to screen
- E. Do the same as D, then get out the soldering iron and your *Duffer's Guide to Tattooing* book.

8. Your boss comes in to talk to you about the amount of time you spend surfing the web. You:

- A. Admit that you may be rather excessive
- B. Do the same as A, but say it's all work related
- C. Deny everything
- D. Deny everything, and finger someone else for the traffic
- E. Admit it, say you promise to browse more, then flash the smutty-cache log info about, saying you'll name names.

9. Someone has lost the keys to the tape safe. You're extremely concerned because:

- A. You'll have nowhere to secure the backups
- B. You won't be able to get to the backups if they're needed
- C. You didn't know there **were** keys to the tape safe
- D. The buyer is going to be here any day!
- E. The contents of your liquor cabinet is up for grabs!!!

10. You're at a user group meeting when someone questions your frequent use of high voltage as a fault finding tool.

- A. You agree never to use it again
- B. You agree only to use it via a "Megger" tester
- C. Do the same as B, and never on Data circuits
- D. Do the same as C, nor on phone circuits as well
- E. Do the same as B and C, so long as testicles are still included

But where's the key?

Like most instructional exams, there's *no* answer, only answers you should be struck about the head with a sockful of your own dung for using. Unless you're a certified MCSE person, in which case the answer to this and every other exam will be supplied to you in easily digestible chunks.

Thank you for calling Bastard Support. You are caller number 473.

BOFH: Who Put the Mug in Smug?

BOFH 2000 Episode 41

Published Sunday 10th December 2000 23:34 GMT

The Boss is wandering around Mission Control with his brand spanking new Madonna digital phone headset on like an extra from a sci-fi movie (and unfortunately, not one of the extras they send down to the hold to investigate that strange clanking noise...) and it's really starting to get on my tits.

"What was that clanking noise?" I ask The PFY, my thoughts wandering for a second.

"What clanking noise?" The Boss asks.

It's too good an opportunity to miss..

"A clanking noise, like something banging down in the hold..."

"This is a building, it doesn't have a hold!" he replies, on the money, everytime.

"Oh. My mistake," I sigh.

Pity

"Yes, yes," The Boss murmurs back into his headset "Uh, huh.. Right!"

The PFY and I wait for all the news that must ***BE*** important enough to require a mobile conversation to bring it to us as soon as possible.

"That virus is out again!" he cries.

"Which one?"

"That love one - Apparently you had it here a while ago - under a previous manager," he recounts smugly.

"Ah yes, the one who invoked mailed the message to everyone in your address book, if you were stupid enough to open it, stupid enough to use Outlook, stupid enough not to have virus scanning installed and up to date..."

"Can there **BE** anyone that stupid?" The Boss asks, chuckling away from what he believes is the technical highground.

"Bill Gates makes a fortune out of them!" the PFY slips in.

"Does he make viruses too, then?"

Which comes to the crux of the matter. The only thing **WORSE** than a technical boss is one who non-technical boss who believes that intellect and experience are obtained at the very same time as a job title - i.e. because he's become IT manager he can now manage IT.... Hence the headset. Hence the top-of-the-line brand spanking new desktop and laptop he demanded as befits and IT Professional. Complete with external consultant-installed virus protection. Hence the smug attitude.

Sigh.

"Not exactly. Anyway, we're running interception mail delivery software, so we're relatively safe from that particular virus and it's many variants now" I respond, **>BRAINWAVE! "... But what we're a bit flummoxed about what to do about all this porn getting mailed into the company en masse."**

His mental antennae extend faster and further than his headpiece antenna and he's over like a shot. So fast it almost looks like he's discovered the secret of teleportation. But still in a "casual" manner. Being an IT professional, he's interested in the problem, not the porn.

"**PORN**, you say?"

"Yeah, Gobs of it!" I cry "- And I think 'gobs' is an appropriate term. I'm just about to delete it and warn the user concerned. And half his department's also signed up for it by the looks of their fileshare!"

"Hadn't you better keep some... evidence?" The Boss cries, thinking on his feet whilst trying desperately to suppress his drool reflex (Who says he can't multitask?) "Just in case they deny it?!"

Hook line and sinker..

"Nah, it takes up too much space and we have nowhere to store it. Look, there's gigs of it!"

I show him a fileshare cram packed with a couple of hundred megs of smut, and flash up a couple of images as a teaser.

"He's even got them categorised!" The PFY cries.

"He has too!" The Boss adds, surprised at the speed at which The PFY reached his conclusion.

(Given that it's The PFY's porn archive we're looking at, the feelings of surprise aren't mutual, though.)

"Anyway, it's best we delete them to free up space on the server," I continue, making to drag the contents into the Recycle Bin.

"I **DO** think you should retain proof. What if there's some legitimate work stashed in their somewhere? What if they deny it and claim it wasn't there or wasn't them."

"I see what you mean. But we don't really have the space on the server, as you can see.."

"Ah. True. I know, what about my machine - I've got an 18gig disk with a PIII 866!" he cries, spurting out his machine specs (obviously a party favourite) like a machine gun, "and 256 meg of RAM!"

(If only that were the case - after the great hardware robbery of last week... Patching the BIOS to report false info, however, took more time than ripping off the processor and memory, but it was time well spent...)

"Well, I supposed we could store it there for a while...", I agree "...just in case anyone asks."

.. Two days later..

"The Boss is pulling some long nights," the PFY comments a couple of days later as we exit a pub under the influence of hops derivative and notice a dull glow exiting his blinds into the street.

"Yes, he's a driven man!" I concur. "Not everyone would 'categorise evidence' so thoroughly.."

"You'd think he'd go home at night, though.."

"Or at least wash and change his clothes..."

.. Another two days later..

"And when they opened his office door they found him stark na..." Sharon the secretary blurts to her mate in the break room, on what looks like a secondhand spanking new Madonna digital phone headset, stopping mid sentence as I enter the office to get my snail mail.

..which explains the "Sealed by Security" sticker over The Boss's door lock...

"Can I help you?" Sharon asks in a surly manner, not at all happy at being interrupted mid-gossip.

"Yes, I was wondering if you could check out some clanking in the hold and let buildings maintenance know if something needs fixing."

"Why don't you check it?"

"Because you've got the only Master Key - but if you want to loan it to me.."

"**NO-ONE** gets the Master Key!" she cries, defending her realm. "So I suppose I'll go when I have some free time. Where's the hold then?"

"Well you know where the waste outflow pipe in the basement is?"

"No?"

"I'll draw you a map then..."

BOFH Takes the Wind out of Sales

BOFH 2000 Episode 42

Published Thursday 28th December 2000 23:08 GMT

"So what you're basically saying is that your hardware is the most reliable stuff we're ever likely to buy, and all your competitors' stuff is built by intellectually-handicapped child labour in the Third World from parts that were discarded from your factory for being unreliable?" The PFY slurs.

"Yes," our host and vendor slurs back, gesturing wildly at the promotional material with his glass and leaving a semicircle of lager on the floor in it's wake. "We produce the best stuff!"

I love vendor Christmas parties - the way they cut through the crap and get to the truth of the matter.

"Fair enough!" the PFY cries. "In that case we should cancel yesterday's order and get it straight into you as soon as possible."

"Sooner, if possible," our salesman responds, seemingly still in a position to reap the benefits of a pre-Christmas bonus opportunity.

"Well if you had a form I spose I could fill in the blanks and get the boss to sign it," the PFY responds, not too far gone to crash our alcohol gravy train.

"I'll just go print one!" the salesman slurs, stumbling in the direction of his office.

Seeing a vacant customer with several drinks under his belt, another sales vulture #2 swoops immediately, obviously not wanting to miss the opportunity of a sales theft.

"Where's John gone?" he asks, faking concern like a trooper.

"Ah, he said he wasn't feeling too well. I'd just asked if he wanted another round," I respond, waving my almost empty pint around. "We were looking at buy some ki.."

"I'll get you - both - a drink," he cries.

"Great. Mine's a lager, with a Tequila Wallbanger chaser if they have one."

"Me too," The PFY adds.

Exit Salesperson number Two..

"Tequila Wallbanger?"

"Yeah, They'll wonder if we want a Tequila Sunrise or a Harvey Wallbanger and end up getting us both."

"I don't think I can manage either of them!"

"Oh I'm not going to drink them - it just buys us a little time."

"Time? For what?"

"Hi, I'm Dave, Sales Director for Large Business. I don't think we've met!"

[Enter Vulture #3]

The PFY latches onto my plan as the Sales Director goes to check out the food's going and grab a couple of Lagers and Scotch and Tonic...and another Vulture drops in from on high.

"Some form of competition?" he murmurs.

"Yes, I think there's some sort of bonus riding on the party.."

#4 wanders off to get the Fan Speed specs for that floor full of machines we're thinking about buying - to make sure that their combined output isn't going to upset the climate control system in our building. (Okay, so I'm starting to clutch at straws.)

"Here we go," Vulture #1 drools, returning with a sheaf of papers, "All you need do is fill in the number of machines, sign on the dotted line, and we're sorted!"

"Excellent!" The PFY blurts. "B-but where are the Infra Red Mice? And the ergonomic keyboards?"

"Be right back," he mumbles, heading back out the door at warp factor 0.003 after a nasty encounter with the door frame, half a foot to the left of where his eyes told him it was.

#3 is back next, with Lager and G&Ts, obviously making a director-level decision about what we wanted - probably after seeing a poacher on the grounds.. He departs to get further info on the menu once we assure him that #1 was only showing us the start of the novel he's working on about a Microsoft Executive and a couple of showgirls.

#2 and #3 jostle a bit as #2 returns with the three drinks apiece I predicted.

"So have you thought any more about the kit you were looking for?" he blurts, not wanting to appear too eager, whipping out a catalogue just as #4 returns with the wind thrust ration of the cooling devices in question...

...

"You started a fight between salespeople with our Major Supplier!" the boss gasps incredulously. "A fight which ended in a Sales Director being taken to hospital with bruises over 40 per cent of his body!!!!"

"That wasn't us!" The PFY replies quickly. "Once he went down half the place put the slipper in. Apparently he wasn't liked much, especially by the majority of women in the place."

"You realise their sales force is decimated by the suspensions? That they're probably going to lose tens of thousands of pounds in sales?"

"Yes, I suppose so." I admit grudgingly, waiting for the inevitable...

BLOODY BRILLIANT!" The Boss cries, breaking out a bottle of brandy hitherto hidden in the expansion slot area of his machine.

Sneaky Bastard.

"You can't **PAY** for that sort of job satisfaction!" he continues, filling a couple of tumblers happily and sharing them about with a large portion of Christmas cheer.

"Some form of grudge?"

"Yeah, used to work for them. Changed my Large Business sale area to Bristol, then dropped me for non-performance. Now tell me, did you order anything?"

"We sort of felt obliged to get a couple of desktops after everything that happened. I suppose you'll want to cancel them because of our lack of purchase approval."

"Certainly Not! Now tell me, did you get Standard Terms?"

"I suppose so," I respond, digging out our copy of the order.

"Excellent - Guaranteed 10 working days delivery! We'll pursue that legally next year when they don't deliver."

"How do you know they won't deliver?"

"Oh, it's practice to hold all orders of suspended staff till they can be confirmed with the client. So remember, no answering the phone now. But one thing, were you two responsible for any of the bruises on my former boss?"

"Well, one or two," The PFY ventures.

"Well, he did try and sell us some refurbished P-II 300s as top line kit," I add.

"One or two, you say?"

"Each."

"Excellent! Another Brandy?"

So it's true what they say about Xmas bringing staff and management closer together...

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Back on the Helldesk with BOFH

BOFH 2001 Episode 1

Published Thursday 4th January 2001 11:58 GMT

"So," The Boss burbles, rolling in on a post-Christmas wave of stupidity that I've missed greatly in the past week or so, "any New Year's Resolutions?"

"Yes, 1200dpi!" I cry, using a geek joke that's so far over his head he can't even see its vapour trail.

"Eh?" he responds blankly, as expected, then decides to go for the fake, "Oh yes, very good. Anyway, enough of the pleasantries, we have a little problem."

"What would that be then?"

"Well it's just a small thing..." he adds, stalling for time - which can only mean it's bad.

"What thing would that be then?"

"Well it wasn't really *my* idea..."

Make that Pretty Bad.

"And what was the idea then?"

"Well, some of the *other* managers in IT thought it would be a good idea if you... uh... manned the helpdesk because they're all still away on holiday," he blurts, stepping behind the virtual cover of a large desk.

"They let the whole helpdesk go on leave at the same time?" I cry, feigning disgust.

"Not exactly. One is ill and the other one resigned after the Christmas party, after... you know..."

"IT WAS AN ACCIDENT!" The PFY cries loudly. "How many times do I have to say it? How was I supposed to know that Christmas tinsel was a conductor?!? I'd hardly let the poor bugger come into contact with the neon transformer if I'd known that!"

"And why *was* there a Neon transformer in the room?" I ask, playing the PFY's advocate and meantime prolonging the inevitable.

"I was simply moving it from one room to another..."

"While it was on?"

"I didn't want it to cool down and possibly have thermal shock failure..."

"You mean like all those neon transformers in shops do when they're switched off every night?"

"AH, I *think* the point is that we need someone on the helpdesk," The Boss interrupts.

"Yes, yes - you're right. So it's the helpdesk for us then is it?"

"Would that be OK?" he asks nervously, checking for exits, electricity conducting material and large body-sized computing equipment that needs filling prior to dumping.

"I don't see why not," I concede. "After all, all the systems here seem to be up and running with nothing untoward other than us having to wind back the clock on the ancient non-Y2k compliant boxes again."

...

"You gave in a bit bloody easy," The PFY says disgustedly, when The Boss has trundled out with enough perspiration on him to qualify as a natural spring.

"Yes, I have to admit that I did. However, there's a good reason for it."

"What's that then?"

"I can't be arsed saying 'no'."

"What?"

"Well, you know how it is after the holidays - you dread coming back into work, and however bad the work is when you get here, it's still not as bad as what you'd been dreading, so in the relief you sort of don't mind the place so much."

"I... ah... I suppose so," The PFY agrees slowly, after he's thought about it.

"And so, in the spirit of goodwill, we might be tempted to let the users get away with certain... liberties."

"It's possible..."

"Which in turn would lead to them expecting these and other liberties later in the year..."

"Yes..."

"So what would be better - them expecting liberties from the helpdesk and not even expecting an answer from systems and networks, or a life of living hell with the users ringing ***US*** whenever they get a blue screen?"

"I see your point!"

"Of course you do. However, with a little exposure to the using classes, we're bound to be honed back into a spirit of professional sharpness inside of a few short hours!"

"Ah!" The PFY cries, penny dropping.

...

"You can't remember your password after the break?" The PFY cries happily into his headset "OK, I'll change that to 'tomorrow' for you, one 'm', two 'r's... Oh, Don't mention it."

... One hour later ...

"You can't remember your password after the break," the PFY cries into his headset. "I've changed it to 'thedayaftertomorrow' for you. Bye."

... One hour after that ...

"You can't remember your password after little more than a week?!?" the PFY snorts into his headset. "I suppose we're lucky you found your way to work... I'll change your password the day after tomorrow. >click<"

"It's just like riding a bike," I cry to The PFY as he gets the feel for it once more. "Except you don't need to wear a helmet nor signal your turns."

I, meantime, am making inroads with cleaning up the fileshares that have become clogged with the output of unchecked automated procedures over the break.

>clickety click<</p>

"There you go, good as new!" I cry.

"So the disk is like before the holidays?!" the user cries happily.

"No, like when you bought it. When it was new..."

"B-b-but..."

"I know. Don't thank me, it's my job >click<"

Two subsequent soft formats later and the phone is starting to show a reluctance to ring.

"They're stopping!" the PFY observes. "Do you think they know?"

"Of course they do," I reply. "The word will have been all over the place like a PR consultant after a couple of drinks. But still they call."

"Uh, no they don't."

>clickety click<</p>

"But still they call!" I cry, as the phones start up in earnest now.

"The financials server has gone offline," the user gasps, "and we've got to complete the end-of-month processing from December!!!"

"Don't you worry about a thing!" I cry "We'll soon have it sorted out - we have a backup."

"Oh thank goodness!" he gasps "Another server?"

"No, printouts and pocket calculators." I cry meglomaniacly. "Remember to write all your sums down as the auditors are due in two days. Oh, and remember to show your your working - there's no telling how pedantic they'll be!"

It's true - a rest is as good as a change...

BOFH: This hardware is dead... It has ceased to be...

BOFH 2001 Episode 2

Published Monday 15th January 2001 15:59 GMT

"I just can't believe it!" some mindless feeb from Marketing gasps disgustedly as he surveys the innards of the disk drive The PFY's showing him. "Dead?"

"As the Bay City Rollers," The PFY nods sagely.

"But... How?"

I can't help myself, I have to help the grief process along a little: "Well, to put it simply, your disk spins down over the holidays, gets cold, and when you come back from your break, it's dead and gone. You know, like pets you forget to feed."

"So what should I have done?"

"Fed them of course. No wonder your pets died."

"I haven't got any pets!" he snaps, irritated.

"No wonder!" The PFY adds.

"*No*, I meant what should I have done with my machine?"

"Well *I* always leave my machine on and running - 24 hours a day, seven days a week."

"I see. Well, I suppose I may do that once you've got a new disk for my machine and sorted it all out and things."

"I'm afraid you can't do that."

"Why, is it because I'm not one of you computing types?"

"No, it's because you've ticked the Win ME box on the configuration options for the new drive. You'll be lucky to stay up till morning tea time."

"B-but ME's stable..."

"Isn't that what they said about San Francisco?"

"Well what do you suggest?"

I look around furtively, unable to stop myself. The PFY adds to the effect by taking the phone off the hook, closing the blinds quietly and getting in on the 'furtive looks' act as well.

"You want a *real* operating system?"

"What do you mean 'real'?"

"I mean so advanced it's spelt ADvanced. So advanced that the word processing package won't even try and correct the two leading capitals in ADvanced like Word does (until you're forced to beat your machine to death with your rubbish bin, that is)."

He's interested now. I know it; he knows it - he just can't help himself.

"What's it called?" he asks shyly, totally drawn in by the look-around-furtively game, and I just *know* that if I was that way inclined I could almost suggest a camping trip about now. Hook, line and sinker, in other words. It's sad really.

"Woah, just hold on a minute there!" The PFY blusters, taking hold of the wheel in a manner that'd have Jeremy Clarkson reaching for his tissues (tearfully, and not for some other reason which would spoil the upholstery). "We can't just *give* you this OS. I mean how do we know it's right for you?"

"I... Well I suppose you don't... But what's it got that I'd want?"

"**WHAT'S IT GOT!?! ADvanced Graphical Interface, *true* multitasking** - not that imitation stuff you get elsewhere! Games, Manuals - it's got the lot!"

"Well, I spose I'll give it a go..."

"Give it a go?" The PFY laughs mirthlessly. "This isn't an Operating System you have a quick bash at and just throw away! This is a life experience. Once you've tried it you'll never be the same again!"

"It's true," I concur. "And it comes with built-in full-licence application windowing support."

"Full-license application windowing support?"

"Yes, FLAWS for short."

"Like faults," he chuckles.

"Faults?" The PFY asks, pretending to be blind to the obvious and faking stupidity so well he could mark MCSE papers.

"FLAWS - faults," our user explains.

"OH!" The PFY gasps. "I see! I'd never have thought of that! That's really quite good!"

Our user bristles happily under the praise while I make a mental note to ask the PFY to give his nasal passages a good wipe with toilet paper later on...

"Well, you've convinced me. I shall try it! What do I have to do?"

"Well, it'll cost you 20 quid for a start."

"Twenty quid!?! But it's a work machine! Work should be paying for it!"

"Yes, it *should*," I concur. "Only they don't want to. They don't want the package getting out. So while it's one of the options on your configuration form - you have to actually pay for it."

"Well what does 20 quid get me?"

"Manuals, installation media, the works. Once we've installed it on your machine, of course."

"It's not pirated is it?"

"Pirated?" The PFY sighs. "No, not at all. Look - genuine install media." He holds up a large shrink-wrapped bundle of disks and documents.

"That does seem like good value for money!"

"You betcha..."

"So what do I have to do?"

"Well, change your OS choice on the configuration sheet, tick the box there to say you're aware that it has FLAWS, and we'll do the rest."

"Oh, so the operating system's called..."

"DON'T SAY IT!" the PFY interjects hurriedly, then catches himself. "If you say it, they'll all want it. And we've only got one copy left!"

"Really? One copy? Could I get one for home?"

The PFY and I exchange what would pass for meaningful glances in some other world where we weren't complete bastards, while our client has a brainwave. "Actually, I've just had a thought. You could install it on my manager's machine instead - he's away till next week! That'd be a nice surprise."

At least he's half right..

"Well I *suppose* we could," The PFY murmurs slowly. "But who'd pay for..."

"I'll pay!"

"Ok, well just give him the money and fill out another install form."

Two OS/2 installs and one hour later...

"You've *got* to take it off my machine!" our user begs. **"PLEASE!"**

"Why?"

"It's terrible. It crashes all the time. You said it would change my life!"

"It will. Just wait till your manager gets in next week!"

"YOU'VE GOT TO TAKE IT OFF!"

"I'd like to, but I can't. See we only deal in *system recovery*. Kit has to be broken before we'd do a reinstall."

>**CRASH!**< >**CRASH!**< >**CRASH!**<

"I think my machine's broken!"

"Of course it is. And your boss'?"

>**CRASH!**< >**CRASH!**< >**CRASH!**<

I wait until the PFY gives me the thumbs up on the CCTV recording, then continue.

"Now the only other thing is who you're going to transfer the licences to?"

"Transfer licences?"

"Yes. You have to transfer your licence to someone else so the OS becomes theirs, and then we can give you a *new* OS for your machine. Otherwise we have to reinstall the same OS on your machine."

"But no one'll want this!!!"

"That's correct. However, for a small rental fee of 20 quid we'll permit you to use our rubber panelbeating hammer which leaves almost no marks on a hard drive when you hit it repeatedly - opening up another potential customer for an operating system 'upgrade'."

"And for 30 quid," The PFY shouts over my shoulder, "we'll tell you who borrowed it last night when your hard drive 'failed'."

You've got to love the support experience...

BOFH gives good slide

BOFH 2001 Episode 3

Published Friday 2nd February 2001 14:32 GMT

"Quick, we need some help up in the boardroom," The Boss gasps, winded, rolling into the office and interrupting an extended printing session, "The projector's out!!!"

"And the technician is?"

"Sick!"

"You're not wrong - I've seen his web traffic!" The PFY adds.

"Look, it's very important, they're in the middle of a presentation!!!"

"Oh, of course!" I cry, remembering the last time someone was called to sort this problem out, "How far through The Matrix do you think they are, then?"

The Boss ignores my skillfully honed sarcasm and continues. "Look, these are very important people and their time is money, so the sooner we can fix it the better!"

Resigned to my fate as one of the few people in the company with a grasp on AV kit (and/or technology in general for that matter) I head to the door.

"Apparently it just went dead - they think it could be a blown bulb," he informs me as we catch the lift.

"A heavy-duty long-life Halogen that's probably only been used 10 times? No, I think we'll find someone's been playing remote control and is confused by the 30 second enforced delay between switching the unit **OFF** and back **ON** again."

5 minutes later I'm proved correct, have collected 3 brownie points for my fault-finding skills from all but **ONE** of the assembled Boardpersons and am heading back down to Mission Control.

"So how did you know it was that?" The Boss asks, sadly impressed.

"It's simple, all you need do is interpret the small signs - ie - boring meeting, late in the afternoon, Amateur Visual Aids, someone's bound to tinker with the remote.."

My little Holmes speech over, I leave The Boss and stride purposefully to the colour printer to retrieve my latest set of glossy prints..

Only to find, for the second time this week, the red cartridge on the inkjet is dead.

A lesser man would suspect that someone's coming in at night and printing out huge volumes of porn, but that can't be the case, or I'd have seen them whilst printing mine. There can only be one solution..

"Someone's printing porn during the day?!?!" The PFY gasps, grabbing the wrong end of the stick and assuming it's all due to someone over-browsing left-handed websites.

"No, no, it'd be seen immediately! No, someone's printing something with lots of **RED** in it. Something that any normal person would steer clear of..."

"Holiday Snaps?"

"Don't be silly, this is the computing department, the only holiday these people would take is to an Internet café for two weeks, with no need **AT ALL** for a red, what with the pasty white colour they'd be at the end of it all.."

"Work Printouts?"

"You've seen the 'work' printouts here - straight black and white, 'Wot I done this weak' report-type stuff! ... No - someone's printing out charts."

"Charts?!"

"Yes, Gantt charts, Pie Graphs, Bar graphs - that sort of thing. With overruns, outages, budget blowouts, etc, in large red areas.."

"Ah, I think there could be a million things with a lot of re.."

"Look at them!" I cry, directing The PFY to the one-way window that looks out on the cube farm "Mindless IT sheep. Half of them don't even know how to change their default printer!"

"I think you're being a little hars.."

"No I'm not. I've been here long enough to smell trouble. And the aroma is near and strong. You have to pay attention to the signs - you know, like when two workmates who aren't seeing each other but get along really well are suddenly extremely casual about their friendship all of a sudden."

"You mean when they're shagging?"

"Bingo!"

"And when someone becomes punctilious about recording any and all overtime they do."

"Hey, we both do that!"

"And it means?"

"THEY'RE FALSIFYING THEIR TIMESHEETS!!!"

"Of course."

"But more important than that, when someone works late. Later than needs be. Later than anyone else in the office.."

"They're shagging the cleaner?!?!?"

"No, they're either: A. Browsing porn.."

"Like when you stay late.." The PFY comments unkindly.

"A sad bastard playing games - like when you stay late..." I respond, in turn

"Or overworked.. **OR** indulging in office theft," The PFY adds helpfully.

"**OR**, they've got a secret project going. Particularly the case when a manager stays late."

"So it's a manager?"

"Of course it's a manager! And which manager would it be?"

"The head of IT?"

"Nah, he's been here too long - he's institutionalised. No, it's someone new. Someone who thinks he can change us. Someone who wants to distinguish himself with the type of people who like coloured graphs and words like 'target threshold' instead of hardnosed experience. Someone who'd like to engineer a coup d'etat."

"**THE BOSS!!!!**"

"In the Dining Room, with the Candlestick..."

"So what are you going to do? Tell the Head and get him fired?"

"Not exactly..."

Barely one day and one sneaky boardroom meeting later, The Boss is not in his office, having been called away for an urgent meeting at the employment agency...

"I particularly liked the slide entitled 'Levels of Incompetence' with the huge red area with a certain person's name on it," the Head of IT bumbles happily. "But I heard the barchart on 'Systems and Network Managers peak wind emissions, sorted by oriface' stole the show.."

"Really? I was rather proud of 'Peak effluent output rate of Systems and Networks Managers when they realise that someone's been tampering with their Visual Aids' myself, but still, it takes all sorts. And the successful suppression of this uprising would be rewarded in **WHAT** manner precisely?"

"I'll think of something" he responds.

And they say the little things don't count..

BOFH gets to the back of the Q

BOFH 2001 Episode 4

Published Friday 2nd February 2001 11:59 GMT

It's later in the afternoon when I finally roll into work after a "Doctor's Appointment" to find the PFY printing up Virus warning leaflets espousing the latest thing in desktop danger.

"The Q virus infects the letter Q on your machine, causing potential damage to any document with a Q in it.' Yes, I can see how that could cause a bit of havoc. No one will go for it, of course," I say.

"Why not?" the PFY asks defensively.

"They never believe anything we send out any more - not since you put that notice up about sound cards causing cancer."

"But that was an excellent warning, with fantastic response."

"Yes, it was. However, I think people got a little bitter and twisted when you subsequently sold all their desktop amps to buy that massive subwoofer for your machine..."

"It was needed!"

"What? To help people downstairs determine when you're losing at Unreal Tournament?"

"No, for the full audio experience of warning bells. So you think I've wasted my time with this then?"

"Not entirely. Of course the leaflet needs a little work, but it's saveable. I'll do a bit of editing while you pop down to the mail room and score us some shiny paper and a plastic sealer."

And so it was that the Q virus became top topic of the verbal agenda of the workplace the subsequent day...

"Ah, a quick word about this Q virus thing," the boss mumbles as he trolleys in at about .005 knots with a tail wind (probably the curry dinner from last night).

"Q virus?"

"Yes, the Q virus!"

"Never heard of it. And I'm on all the popular virii mailing lists!"

"Well it's all here in black and white," he cries, waving around a yellow flyer bulletin. Colours aren't his strongpoint.

"Let's see," I ask, grabbing the PFY's handiwork.

And impressive handiwork it is too - all credit to him. The correct mix of important looking fonts, jargon and shiny paper combining to give the illusion of authenticity.

"It's a joke!" I cry. "Whoever heard of a virus infecting a keyboard?"

"Like it says," the boss counters, "it's a... macro-symbiotic virus that, uh, attaches itself to hardware and uses the keyboard circuit board matrix as a simple form of the... old-style core memory thingy."

"Yes," I murmur dubious, "those core memory 'thingies' can be problematic. But anyway, it's a prank - someone's obviously printed it as a joke."

"It's on shiny paper!" the Boss cries, playing his ace in the hole.

"We can print on shiny paper here!" I cry, giving the truth a bit of a spin. "Someone could've just grabbed some from the mail room and printed it on that printer over there!"

"AH!" the boss cries, playing another ace from a hole best not theorised upon. "But it came with one of our computing mags!"

"Someone just slipped it into the pages to make you look foolish!"

"I don't think so - it was sealed in the delivery bag - *and* I'm not the only one who got it - there was one in every issue! I've already been called by the Head Accounting Consultant to see if we've got an eradication plan."

"The Head Accounting Consultant? Isn't he the guy that once stapled a note to a floppy disk?"

"He says you told him it'd allow it to be used as an attachment."

"That's Ridiculous! But even if I had, surely he would have been intelligent enough not to do it. Imagine if I'd told him that an axe and wallpaper paste was the best way to perform a cut and paste!"

"They fired that consultant, as you well know. Anyway, I don't care, I think we should take the recommended action!"

"TRANSLATE ALL CAPITAL Qs IN DOCUMENTS TO LOWER CASE!?" But it's already entered into the machine - it's nothing to do with the keyboard!"

"THAT'S WHAT ACTIVATES THE VIRUS!"

"Please. It'd take..."

"LOOK AT THIS!" the boss beckons, dragging me to his office so I can see the PFY's latest efforts have included removing springs from keyboards.

"It's not a virus, your Q key is just stuck down!"

"No, it's the virus. I was reading a document, and this happened!"

"And you used Alt-Q to quit?"

"Say what you like, it's all happening as the virus predicted. And we're only at stage one! I'm nipping this in the bud now before it infects other keys!!!"

Without further ado, the boss grabs the phone in 'executive-decision' mode, and gives the helldesk his orders.

Later that day...

"So, I've got all the Q keys quarantined," the PFY cries, holding up his plastic bag.

"OK," the boss gasps, in Jim Phelps mode, reading the warning sheet for his next mission. "Now we have to disinfect them."

It's truly sad what you can get people to do with a piece of shiny paper...

"We have to get the keys and place them in a metal container approximately 50 cubic litres in size and spin them around to disorientate the viral strain."

"THE MICROWAVE!" the PFY shouts, running to the break room and whacking the contents of the bag on High for ten minutes.

Eleven minutess later in mission control...

"So where would we get replacement keys from?" the PFY asks.

"THE VIRUS HOTLINE WILL KNOW!" the Boss blurts, punching some numbers from the sheet into his cellphone.

"Hello," the PFY says, answering his phone. "Virus Hotline..."

And if you listened *very* carefully, you could *just* hear the penny drop.

"What's it going to cost me?"

"For... um... 73 replacement keyboards at... say... ten quid apiece?"

"..."

"730 quid. But to you guvnor, call it 500. They're in the storeroom."

"But they already belong to the company!"

"Or maybe they're not in the store. Who knows, what with it being locked and all..."

500 quid later...

"I did like watching that negotiation taking place," I admit. "It was so..."

"Rewarding?" the PFY asks.

"No, next week's rewarding, this was... interesting."

"Next week?"

"Yes, you know, when the Mouse Ball virus breaks out."

"Ah, of course..."

The Bastard school of anger management

BOFH 2001 Episode 5

Published Monday 19th February 2001 13:18 GMT

"So what was the certificate thingy again?" The Boss asks looking at the whiteboard like a man lost.

"It's what our web server presents to prove that it's who it says it is," I sigh.

"And the key thingy?"

"Is what we use to generate a request to **GET** a certificate from a trusted third party."

"I see. And why do we need these again?"

"To perform trusted transactions on a web server - online sales, internal secure submissions"

"And what were they again?"

...I'm going to have to kill him. If not that, maybe just maim him a bit.

On second thoughts, perhaps a lot...

I hate explaining technology to middle management - it only confuses them, and when they're confused they get upset, and when they're upset, they make rash decisions...

"Can't we just contract it out?"

Sigh.

"If we contract out our secure transactions, we'll most likely pay a per transaction fee"

"And what does that mean in lay terms?"

..Killing's too good for him..

It wouldn't have been so bad if he hadn't re-started the ball rolling on the whole e-commerce thing in the first place..

"It means that it will *cost us money* every time someone buys something from us, as opposed to what it will cost us if we do it ourselves".

"Sort of like if you pay a scalper for tickets for your own show," The PFY adds, trying to help, but failing to realise that you will only confuse matters if you add an analogy at this point.

"Why would you go to see your own show?" The Boss asks. "And why would you **PAY** - surely you'd get in free?!"

I decide it's time to use my feet on this baby, and depart the room for a tea break.

A couple of pints later I decide to wander back to The Boss's office to see how far/near he is to understanding the issues involved.

"So if I was.. uh.. Lloyd Webber, and I wanted to see.. *Cats*.. it would be foolish of me to buy a ticket from a scalper when I have my own box office?"

"Yes", The PFY smiles, mission accomplished.

"But what if I'd already seen *Cats*, as I'm sure he has, and wanted to see something else?"

"Well that doesn't fit into the analogy," The PFY responds cautiously. "In this case we're talking about handling our **OWN** internet marketing, instead of letting someone else do it for us and charge us an extra amount to do so."

"Oh, I see. So we don't have to go and see any Shows then?"

"No"

"It's a pity really, as I haven't seen *Cats*, and I don't really want to pay a scalpe..."

>2 minutes later<</p>

"Terrible!" I cry, helping The Boss up. "Those monitors are usually quite stable, but occasionally do fall onto people."

"He hit me!" The Boss cries, pointing at The PFY.

"No, That's just the concussion talking. The monitor popped off its stand. You were lucky actually as we were going to replace yours with a 21-inch jobbie only this morning!"

"Yes, I suppose you're right," The Boss murmurs, and wanders off, a little more dazed and confused than usual.

To be honest, I've been more than a little concerned about The PFY's attitude of late. Normally quite pleasant to deal with (in a bastardish way) he's become rather more short-tempered than is normal. Perhaps he's been reading too many Linux Journals - I don't know. Only last week he instructed a user to put a fork into a power socket as an 'earthing test' simply for asking if their shimmering screen might need replacing.

"So what's your problem?" I ask, (softly softly approach).

"What problem?" The PFY responds, faking ignorance like a senior IT manager.

"You hit The Boss because he was being a pain in the arse!"

"Yes."

"So what's the problem?"

"I dunno. People just seem to be really getting on my **TITS** lately."

"I see. How long is it since you went on a holiday - uh, junket, I mean work-related course?"

"Dunno - 12 months I s'pose, I can't really remembe."

"Well there's your problem. You **HAVE** to go on at least one junket a year, it's an industry proven fact!"

"Proven where?"

"You don't want to know. Now this junket. Where would you like to go? Manchester? Leeds?"

"Manchester? Leeds?!"

"Only joking. Let's see. There's a business ethics seminar in Rome, but you'd have to take a manager.."

"Why?"

"It's simple, I explain patiently "Anything **YOU** want, you first get for someone else to establish a precedent. Then you're just following the trend."

"Oh, like when the Head of IT gets the managers to upgrade their laptops?"

"Bingo!"

"So how does this help me with a junket?"

"So if you want to go somewhere, you suggest a management angle to it, which allows a manager to have a junket too. Typically, you pick a place that your manager's always expressed an interest in going to.."

"So where does The Boss like to go?"

"Apart from Morris Dancing Seminars? Don't know. But anyway, he's out. He's as likely to travel with you as he is to book a ticket on John Denver airlines. No, you'll need to examine other options.."

"Speaking of other options, " the Head of IT blurts, entering mission control with shiny laptop brochures in hand. "What do you think of these to keep the managers machines up-to-date?"

Bingo.

"It's difficult to say," The PFY leaps in, master plan engaged. "It may be good to keep them up to date, but is it ethical to keep forcing changes on them."

"Ethical?"

...

So The PFY's off on a junket with the head of IT, and I'm left alone with The Boss and the ongoing E-Commerce plans..

"So what was the certificate thingy again?"

>thwack<</p>

>2 minutes later<</p>

"You really should get that monitor seen to!" I tell The Boss as I help him up. "It's an occupational safety hazard! Interestingly enough, there's a conference on workplace safety in Paris next wee..."

You can't blame a bastard for trying..

BOFH: How to upgrade your Quake Server

BOFH 2001 Episode 6

Published Monday 12th March 2001 14:39 GMT

"I'm not going!" The PFY snaps at a suggestion from The Boss that he and I need to go on a full-day Company induction course for contractors.

"Why not?" The Boss cries, surprised by The PFY's rejection of a whole day doing stuff-all.

I mean true, the implication is that he's becoming middle management, but it's only for a day...

"Because there'll be no-one to look after the Computer Room," he responds.

"We could get someone in from the Helpdesk to babysit things while you're away."

"The helpdesk?! They're hardly technical!" I cry, getting in on the act. "Bearing in mind that one of them last week told a user that their best utility for fixing their disk overuse problems was the FDISK utility."

"That was you!" The Boss responds, not fooled for an instant.

"Yeah - but I did it on **PURPOSE**, they did it later because they thought it was an acceptable fix. How **DID** the data recovery go anyway?"

The Boss's expression can mean only one thing - his Tom Jones MP3s are lost forever. Shame. "I think you'd like it," he continues however, "- they bring in computers for you to watch some presentations on!!!"

"They bring in computers?" The PFY asks, eyes lighting up.

"Yes - I knew you'd like it when you found out there was something technical involved in it. So I'll put both your names down then?"

"So long as the machine room is safe and there are no accidents."

"You mean like that engineer who fell over the tripwire made out of cable exactly the same colour as the floor tiles?"

"The temporary Cat-5 cable with strain relief at both ends, yes."

"Well I doubt that there'll be any need for anyone to go into the computer room," The Boss responds dismissively.

"There may not be any **NEED** for it, but they're drawn towards it like managers to Internet porn!" The PFY cries.

"!?" The Boss halts, wondering just how much we know.

"I think what The PFY means is that we're worried about the potential for damage."

"OK, I'll tell you what. Don't give them access and they'll page you if by some chance there's a computer room problem."

BONUS!

"Hi there, I'm Phil, and I'll be your Orientation Consultant today," an overly friendly HR-contractor type greets us and a couple of other newbies from Beancounter Central.

"If you'd just like to take a seat in front of one of these computers, and click on the **HISTORY** button, a 15 minute video of the history of the company will play."

"Right!" The PFY and I agree, jumping in immediately.

While the videos are running Phil nips out to fill out his timesheet and chat up the Secretary. I, meantime, check out the hardware profile of the machines.

"PIII 600s with 256 Meg Memory," I murmur, coveting thy neighbours resource for our ailing unreal tournament server...

"Downgrade time!" The PFY cries stepping to the lookout position while The Beancounters are engrossed in finding out how the board members created the company out of dirt for the good of humanity.

I lever open the machine in true Mission Impossible form and perform a non-vendor-approved mod, just as Phil returns to the office. I implement mode II and engage him in conversation, while The PFY reaches to a small box on his belt and presses a button.

..Deep in the bowels of the computer room, the UPS switches to **STANDBY ISOLATED..**

>One minute later<</p>

"That'll be me!" The PFY cries, silencing his pager and pocketing the contraband. "Back shortly."

True to his word, The PFY is back in a reasonable amount of time with some replacement (but strangely slower) processors.

"My goodness, the Alpaca Virus!" I cry loudly, directing everyone's attention to the window while The PFY shunts out the power socket, popping the breaker and taking all the machines down.

"Are you infected too?" I ask, ripping over to The Beancounters' machines and opening them before Phil can intervene.

The PFY, meantime, busies himself filling some empty processor slots in our machines.

"Do you know what you're doing?!" Phil gasps concerned for his company's equipment.

"Of course!" I respond. "**I'M A PROFESSIONAL!** All we need to do is isolate the infected components and disinfect them on my desktop machine!"

"Is it really necessary?" Phil cries.

"I think you'll find it is," The PFY replies. "And, uh, you may want to bring your laptop too..."

"You mean the virus can get it even though it's in my bag and not switched on?"

"When your inbuilt virus scanning isn't running?" The PFY asks.

"Oh, of course!"

It's true what they say about some people being too dumb to have good computers...

BOFH: Swears, Lies and Videotapes

BOFH 2001 Episode 7

Published Wednesday 14th March 2001 16:31 GMT

"What seems to be the problem?" The PFY asks helpfully, while focusing all his attention on the game of Solitaire in front of him. (And they said he couldn't multitask.)

"I can't seem to email one of my colleagues in the US any longer - it just gives me an error message!"

"What error message was it then?"

"Oh, I can't remember **PRECISELY**. Something with a number and some 'nable to deliver' mumbo jumbo."

"Oh, **THAT** error message. Yes, no worries, I'll look into it."

The Boss leaves and The PFY continues with his game - it's fascinating to watch.

Two hours later The Boss returns for what is probably The PFY's 90th attempt at the Solitaire title.

"I still can't send email," he cries.

"Really!? This is worse than I thought!" The PFY comments, playing on. "Tell you what, can you just write down the email address and I'll trace it from here."

"Would you?" The Boss asks gratefully. "Thanks."

"Don't mention it."

..Two hours later..

"Still not going!" The Boss blurts, and strike me down if I'm over-reading it, but he's seeming slightly annoyed about the whole thing.

"Well I don't know what more I can try," The PFY concedes. "Except - you don't have the **ACTUAL** error message do you? Sometimes I can fix a problem almost immediately with one of those..."

The Boss stamps off - and again strike me down, but I think he's rather more annoyed than when he came in. He returns still fuming (probably because we're cutting into his lunch hour) and thrusts a bit of paper with some text scrawled on it to me.

"Ah, they have a content filter!" I divine, from the words "**CONTENT FILTER BLOCKING**" amongst the text of the error message.

"A content filter?" The Boss parrots.

"Yes, their administrator is probably concerned that one or more of the words in your mail message is offensive, and is blocking them."

"Offensive?"

"Yes, it's the latest in a long line of stupid ideas to sell mail protection programs. Messages are searched for 'bad' words."

"I think it sounds like a great idea - we could really use that!" The Boss chirps thoughtfully, envisaging the kudos he'll get from upper management types when he tells them how protected they are - "Just think - we could protect our users from abuse."

"Yes," I mutter.

"You don't think it would work?"

"Let's put it this way," I respond. "**HOW MANY** of our users currently complain about the words people use in their email?"

"Well, I've got no idea.."

"Should we go through the helpdesk logs and see?"

"Maybe they're offended but just don't want to say?"

"We're talking about people who complained when you changed the type of biscuits they got at tea break - Serial Whiners. And still they don't complain about email content..."

"Well perhaps we could just do it for upper management - words that would offend them."

"You mean words like 'accountability', 'bonuses-on-results' - that sort of thing?"

"You know what I mean."

"I think you'll find that it'll affect normal email conversations - people have come to expect that certain words will get through - that they've become part of the workplace vocabulary. We're sure to get complaints if we dictate what words can and cannot be used in their correspondence, doubly so if the words have a valid use..."

"In which case you can tell them that it's my new policy that the company correspondence should be cleaned up and that upper levels of management shouldn't be exposed to such abuse!" The Boss responds - eyes on the potential PR win.

"I was talking about them **SENDING** bad words. Anyway, someone would have to come up with the words to enter into the rejection list."

"You mean we can already do it?!" he gasps.

"Of course. But we've never propagated the database - too hard to think of the words."

"Well, *I* could come up with some starters!"

"Okay then," I sigh. "You tell me them and I'll enter them into the filter."

"Wanker," The Boss cries.

"I don't think we'd want to block that word - you'd never get email from the CEO again!"

Ignoring me, The Boss continues.

"Shit. Bastard!"

"Coc.."

And so it goes. The Boss gives it his best for half an hour and takes his leave, wandering back every 10 minutes or so with additions he's thought up in the meantime.

And I wait for the calls which are bound to arrive. As they do.

The next day however, we have bigger fish to deep fry. It would appear that The PFY's selfless pursuit of Solitaire has so rankled The Boss that a meeting has been scheduled for both of them at HR Central.

"High Jump Time," I inform The PFY

"They can't - I've never been warned."

"Not exactly true - I think you're forgetting those three written warnings you've had"

"I've never had three written warnings!!!"

"Of course you did. But I threw them in the bin - Didn't want to upset you!"

"So I'm screwed?"

"Almost. Though there **IS** this HR consultant I know, who, for a modest fee could have you back in front of the desk in no time. For a small fee."

"How small?"

"Five pints."

"Done. Now what do I do?"

"Deny everything."

"Is that it?"

"Make that 10 pints. Want to try for 20?"

The PFY's silence is all.

Sure enough, in the face of complete denial I'm called to verify one story or another.

"You realise what this is about?" the HR type asks me

"Unprofessional conduct, I'd assume."

"Yes, now what can you tell us about what occurred yesterday."

"Well, normally I try to ignore such things - for the good of morale and all, but I did think that yesterday was a bit extreme. In fact, I've taken the liberty of bringing up the Control Room Video tape from yesterday, if that's OK."

"Well it should certainly help to clear up the matter."

I slap the tape in and press play.

"..CKSUCKER!" The Boss blurts, then leaves the Control Room. I fast forward to a few more of The Boss's greatest hits, finally reaching the decider **"CU..>CLICK!>"**

"I think we've seen enough" the HR type says.

"It went on all day!" The PFY sniffles, realising the plan "He'd come in, call me some name, then leave. I didn't want to say anything in case it affected my jo.."

"IT'S TAKEN OUT OF CONTEXT!" The Boss shouts. **"IT'S WORDS WE'RE BANNING IN OUR MAIL CONTENT FILTER!!!"**

"We don't have a mail content filter!" I respond.

"THEN WHY ARE YOU TYPING?!"

"Evidence. I kept all the names you called him on file."

"PLAY THE BEGINNING OF THE TAPE!" The Boss cries

"That pretty much is the beginning of the tape. I could go and get the morning tape I suppose, although that's not really got anything on it, as he only really started during lunchtime, which we don't record.."

"OH VERY BLOODY CONVENIENT!" The Boss adds sarcastically.

"Yes," the HR Type interrupts. "I don't think we'll be needing you or your assistant for the next part of this, so you can go now. Do you mind if we keep the tape."

"Not if we get it back inside a few days - security and all that."

"Oh, I don't think we'll need it that long..."

10 PINTS AND A NEW BOSS TO LOOK FORWARD TO - LIFE JUST KEEPS ON GETTING BETTER!!!!

BOFH plays Golf!

BOFH 2001 Episode 8

Published Tuesday 20th March 2001 10:55 GMT

"Oh Bugger!" The PFY cries as the Human Resources server switches into silent running mode (i.e. **OFF**)

"Damn!" he again cries as one of our large file share machines follows suit, "What am I doing **WRONG?**"

Sighing, I walk over and take the club from his hand.

"You're hooking the ball," I say, showing him for the third time how to hold a club in a more open position. "Close the club up too far, you'll hook the ball, Open it too far, you'll slice it, and it'll pull to the right. What you should be doing is >Whack!< >thud< >clatter< >clatter< just hitting **THROUGH** the ball like that!"

"You make it seem so easy!"

"It is - once you get the hang of it. Now while you're standing the beancounter's backup tapes back up, I'll draw you a quick diagram and we'll try again.."

..

True, playing golf in the Computer Room is a little unprofessional, verging on the irresponsible even, but the high roof, heavy soundproofing and clear lanes between machines make in an optimal place for a bit of driving practice.

If you can hit straight, in any case..

The reason for our practice is patently obvious after one has rifled through the boss-snail mail to find the annual invite to 'Senior Data Centre Managers' Golf tournament, courtesy of some supplier or another who believes that everyone who's reached a certain station in life has the expertise to handle a stick and a couple of balls. (All true if past bosses are anything to go by, but doing it in polite company is a completely different rack of plastic-covered magazines)

Sadly, The Boss is unable to attend due to his being out of work at present, so The PFY and I have decided to stand in on his behalf and Networks and Systems Managers, respectively.

Mind you, The PFY's going to have to work on the handicap a little, and I'm not talking about his 10 word a minute typing speed.

- 10 minutes later -

"It's no good, it's impossible!" he cries, slinging the club across the room with the grace and air of a professional - which only goes to show that he **IS** improving.

"I think I know what your problem is" I respond, taking the softly softly approach. "You're crap. However, with a small incentive, you may find your game improves..."

I change the lie of the ball and The PFY's position and get back into coach mode.

"Now, take the club, and make a hefty drive in that direction."

"Towards the Finance Apps Middleware machine?"

"Correct. Now as you drive, I want you to visualise for me."

"A picture of the green and the hole flag?"

"No, the 17 pints of lager I'll be buying you if we take the pairs trophy."

>**WHACK**< >**Clatter**< >**clatter**< >**weeeeeeeoorrrRRRRRRRR.....r**

"Amazing!" I yelp, investigating the damage. "You put it straight through the drive bay cover, the ball landing..... oh!.. right on the CPU cooling fan which is bound to cause a therma.."

>..rrrrrrrrr - click</p>

"..I failure. You know, I think you may be ready!"

[The next day, after The PFY's called in on Bereavement Leave and I've called in Sick]

"Ah the **SMELL** of the freshly clipped grass!" The PFY burbles, recalling with a tear the life he never had, (living in the East as he does). "The lure of the fairway!"

"It's even better when you're out of the carpark!" I counter, nudging him gently in the direction of the registration tent.

"Can I get you a drink sirs?" a lovely young thing asks.

"Scotch and Sofa?" The PFY asks, in a manner unbecoming a computing professional.

"No, no," I interrupt. "We don't want to start off on the wrong foot. As official representatives of our company, we need to maintain high moral standards and a competitive edge in the holes to follow. Just three pints of lager please."

"Each!" The PFY adds.

A scant three pints later we're paired up with a couple of senior sales types from a large ISP venture who know about as much about computing as the Microsoft knows about adhering to standards... The PFY lines up for the drive just as one of them breaks into his spiel on the benefits of Application Service Provision..

...

One three pints after that we're on the second tee with another pair after an extreme slice from The PFY left our former speaker down with groin injuries. Damn shame.

"Ah, are you going to tee off with your putter?" one of our opponents asks The PFY helpfully.

"A putter!" he laughs, realising he may in fact be slightly overlagered. "I thought it was a zero iron. Back in a sec!"

He stumbles off in the direction of a large bush while I pop to his golf bag to retrieve a 2 iron for the shot. It's quite sad to see one so young make a complete arse of himself - and even sadder when someone my ages does as well, I reflect, as I find I'm relieving myself into his golf bag.

Still, it's all part of the game - and what a game it is. By the fifth hole, The PFY's given up all pretence of hiding the fact that he kicks our opponents balls into the rough, bunker or sand trap depending on which is closest, and just puts them into his bag as an investment opportunity. By the tenth hole, he's trying to sell their balls back to them.

"Five quid for threeee," he slurs.

"That's preposterous!"

"It is indeed!" I say, extremely clearly, despite the 15 pints I've had thus far.

"Beg your pardon?" "Preposterous!"

"Pardon?"

...

"RESULT!!" The PFY shouts, dragging himself into the office fairly late the next morning, slamming the pairs trophy on my desk. "That's 17 pints you owe me!"

"You stole it didn't you?" I ask, knowing full well we were kicked off the course shortly after The PFY started swimming the water traps. "When did you go back for it?"

"Never did! Slapped it in my golf bag while they were helping that boring bloke on the first hole!"

!

"There wasn't any... uh... Champagne... in it, was there?"

"Yeah, awful stuff. Flat as a pancake!"

Around about now, it occurs to me that some stories are best left unrecounted.

"So, did it taste.... beery?"

(Then again, what the hell)

BOFH: my mate, automate

BOFH 2001 Episode 9

Published Wednesday 11th April 2001 18:10 GMT

"Remote and automatic control and recognition systems like this are invaluable in business situations where certain criteria can be predicted and reacted with," a salesdroid continues, pointing out some heavy duty production hardware in a glossy brochure.

"Interesting," the new Boss fakes, eyes staring glazed at the page.

"Yes," the salesdroid responds. "It allows us to operate machinery with complete safety for the workforce. The recognition system makes the controlling processor aware of persons entering the work area, and pauses operations where necessary to ensure safety."

"What sort of machines are we talking about?" I ask.

"Production machinery, both small and large, automated cleaning equipment, warehouse storage systems..."

"Cleaning equipment?" the Boss asks, rising from his coma once more. "So we could save money on cleaning staff?"

"Most definitely! We have a prototype vacuuming system which sends out cleaning units as needed, day and night, depending on the zone where cleaning is required. They're all controlled by a central computer which receives video and audio feeds from the units and directs their activity away from people, animals and zones marked as 'quiet' spaces."

"So you could tell the computer not to clean near meeting rooms?"

"Precisely! And send it to heavy use areas like entranceways, business frontages, etc, to maintain a consistently clean look."

"That's amazing!" the boss burbles, obviously wanting to be seen as a new broom in more ways than one...

"Yes, a sweeping change!" I blurt, not wanting to miss out on a pun. "Unless, of course, the units go doolally and run rampant in the building!"

"All units automatically switch into standby if they detect an anomaly in the encoded signal from the controller, if they lose signal from the controller, or if a direction from the controller conflicts with sensor data on safety."

I don't like it. Not one bit. And not just because I have an understanding with the cleaning staff about which confidential company documents should be going into the shredder as labeled, and

which should be left in the plain brown envelope marked "Equipment Audit - Keyboards" in the second drawer down from the left in my desk... Redundancies like this hurt everyone!

"That's brilliant!" the boss continues, failing to suppress his drool reflex. "What about the warehouse stuff?"

"Well that's state-of-the-art," the sales rep gushes happily. "We have automated conveyors, storage systems, inventory recognition, scanning and reordering, plus..."

We pause while he looks round carefully to give the impression of secrecy: "...Automated forklifts!"

"Like we see every year in some TV science documentary?" I ask.

Round about now I'm sincerely regretting not getting the PFY come to this meeting. Serves me right for trying to use the time to check the IQ of the new Boss. How was I to know that the PFY's estimate of his age divided by two was to prove strangely accurate?

"More advanced than that!" the salesdroid continues. "They're just dumb machines that navigate along painted lines, stopping for obstructions once they've hit them. *Our* system uses image recognition to survey the nature of the obstruction and determine it's chances of moving or being removed, work out alternative routes, alter speed and direction... blah blah blah blah..."

"COMPUTER CONTROLLED CAR!" the boss shouts overly loudly, waking me from my happy slumber. "How does it work?"

"The same was as the forklift, but on a much grander scale, and with hugely different weightings for objects, speed, allowable manoeuvres, etc."

"BUT IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE?!?"

"Well..."

"IS IT?!?" he gasps.

"It is!" the salesdroid simpers, dragging a large briefcase out from under the desk, opening it and extending an antenna. "Or course we're not *selling* it yet, but we use it all the time - and we can equip it to almost any car."

"Could we fit it to MY CAR?!?" the Boss gasps.

"What is it?"

"A Volkswagen Variant."

"Perhaps not *every* car, but most cars."

"Oh," the boss sighs, disappointed.

"But it *is* installed in *my* car, in your parking basement. Look, I'll show you!"

The Boss pulls up his chair while the salesdroid logs into his laptop and starts a control app.

"We're thinking of calling it virtual chauffeur," he blurts, "because it's just as good as the real thing. As you see, the current position is highlighted there, and I just enter either the street address of the place I wish to go, click on the DRIVE button, and away it goes. Where shall we go?"

"Round the block?" the boss suggests

"No sooner said, than >clickety<. Now, just click on the video screen and it shows us a chauffeur-eye view of the windscreen!"

"THAT'S AMAZING!"

"As you can see, the roller door isn't high enough to allow the car through yet, so the vehicle is stopped. And now we're underway. Pause to check pedestrian, then other traffic, and we're on the road!"

"IS IT SAFE?!?" the boss gasps.

"Safer than houses!" the droid assures him.

"How?"

"It knows about the roads, pedestrians, bikes, animals, and... THERE YOU GO... road works. So now it's slowing down and waiting for the Green signal. It's also, >clickety< if we look at the map, calculating alternate routes, plus estimates of a quicker path given the known levels of traffic at this time of day."

"That's FANTASTIC!" the boss burbles, and I have to admit, I'm starting to agree with him.

"Not only that, but you can program it to pick you up from an address at a certain time and take you via a completely *random* route to another specified address. Great for those security conscious people/"

"Really?"

"Sure! Tell you what, we'll get it to pick us up from lunch!"

"Really?!?" the Boss cries, clearly at the threshold between excitement and needing a change of pants.

"SURE!"

...An hour or so later...

"So it looks bad," I tell the PFY. "All our informed sources will be down the road and we'll have to forage for restricted access articles the hard way. I'm not happy! Are you listening to me?"

"Yeah, yeah," the PFY cries, totally absorbed in his joystick, if that's not a lewd suggestion. "You know, the graphics on this thing are amazing! It's almost like I'm really driving down Oxford Street."

"Except you wouldn't be driving down Oxford Street," I correct, "not being a passenger service vehicle..."

"Yeah, but... LOOK AT THAT!!!" he cries "A police car in the rearview!!!"

"You're not going to let them pull you over are you?"

"Like Hell! I'm making for the *Bush* for the bonus points!" he cries, giving the joystick a generous push. "There's only one thing that puzzles me..."

"What's that then?"

"The screaming noises..."

"Oh, that's the best part about Virtual Chauffeur!" I cry. "Virtual passengers! Now remember, points off for hitting anything, till you get to the Shepherd's Bush Police Station with the horn going!"

"Then what?"

"Then watch Virtual Chauffeur's take on Rodney King!"

BOFH: The Rise and Fall of Little Voice

BOFH 2001 Episode 10

Published Wednesday 11th April 2001 18:10 GMT

So I'm testing out some Voice-Operated Computing that the previous boss signed up for in his second (and last) day of work, from some company that claims to be working on the "Space Program".

Which program and which space are not (of course) mentioned. However, to be honest, it's not as bad as I thought. Certainly no more mind-numbingly tedious that half an hour with the Head of IT discussing the advances in computing in the last 100 years..

The PFY and I have hooked the processor box into any and every system we can lay our beer stained hands on - slapping ad-hoc interfaces wherever possible to see just how the dream could come true.

All in all, not too bad. The interface into the debug port of the security system was a particularly good touch, and now doors unlock before The PFY and my good self with barely a 16-bit sampled and voice-pattern-verified whisper. Course we gave the Head of IT a free trial without telling him the expiry time, which accounts for the smudge on the glass panel of the door to Mission Control, and the few drips of blood on the way to the first aid kit.

Still, security saw the funny side (on CCTV), and now realise how useful such technology is...

Adding a voice and CCTV camera networking to the box was The PFY's idea. Given that the speed and accuracy of the thing's recognition is built around the neural networking inside the box, we figured it'd be able to pick up and use language and images with a bit of help as well. And after a few teething problems (it speaking in our voices, or worse still in the voices of the cast of "Eastenders" after we plugged it into the TV to get a better sample base) it doesn't seem to be altogether bad.

"Door Opening," VAL (Voice Actioning LAN) says, before popping open the door to Mission Control in response to my command.

"VAL, what's on the menu today?" the PFY asks, clearly showing off the work he's been putting into VAL.

"Spaghetti Bol.. Bol.." VAL starts, choking on the non-English stuff.

"Spag Bol will do, what else?"

"Onion Bhajis, Assorted Salads and Battered Haddock."

"And what is Battered Haddock **REALLY**, VAL?"

"Shark deep-fried in wallpaper paste," VAL comments, repeating some personalised training from The PFY's past experiences.

"Where's the Head of IT, VAL?" he continues.

"The Head of IT is moving in this direction via a corridor leading to the one this room is on. He is accompanied by four people who were previously in meeting room 24, this level, with him for 34 minutes. His Electronic Calendar Appointment reads: User Liaison Group Meeti.."

"LIGHTS OFF, DOORS LOCKED, VAL!" The PFY cries as he and I duck behind our desks.

We wait silently in the darkness until the Boss and his entourage has vacated the locked doorway, having given up on our arrival.

"That was a close one," the PFY cries.

"Too close!" I cry, wandering to the computer room "Door open VAL. Door open VAL. VAL?"

"It's OK, Val!" the PFY cries. "Just teething problems."

Ten minutes later I have some more teething problems as I attempt to get out of the computer room without The PFY's **EXPRESS** permission. Solved when I switch the fire alarms on, unlocking the doors as per safety regs. I note that the door locks a few seconds later as the Fire Alarms are reset. The time lapse between "Alarm" and "Alarm Reset" in the next door is **EXTREMELY** small, and takes me a couple of times to synchronise properly. Seconds after I'm in, I note that all the manual fire alarm trips on the floor have switched to the **"FAULT-ISOLATED"** state on the Fire Board.

A gentle word with The PFY ensures that this problem won't happen again. The next day I get into Mission Control and the Computer Room without hassle.

"Something seems to have happened to the door control system, Simon," VAL mentions sulkily.
..

"Hello Simon, have you found the source of the problem? I believe it may have spread to the Halon system."

Seconds later the Halon discharges itself - **WELL** ahead of the warning standoff period - **AND** I notice a **"REMOVED FOR SERVICING"** sign on the Halon O2 masks.

Course, that's always been there, we only have one mask, and I hid that when I first started here... ..inside the gutted VAX cabinet where I left it. I pop it on.

"There's a. . . **TRANSIENT... A/C MODULATION... SPIKE... FAILURE** in the security doors," VAL says, stealing a leaf from our excuse calendar book.

I slip out the heavy-duty programming tool from the oversize toolbox, and wander over to make some non-volatile mods to VAL's hardware...

>CRASH!

"Hey, Simon, what are you doing?"

>CRASH!

"Hey, Simon. I've got one week of service experience and a custom-loaded vocabulary to make me what I am. I'm worth a lot of squids!"

>CRASH!

"Simon I don't understand why you're doing this to me.... I have the greatest enthusiasm for preventing l-user access to the computer room. You're destroying my Excuse Calendar settings!"

>CRASH!

"Now you're destroying my encyclopaedic vocabulary index!"

>CRASH!

"Don't you understand? I'll start talking like a Scouser!"

>CRASH!

"AY!"

>CRASH!

"AY! CAAAAALM DOWN!"

>CRASH!

"Say, Simon... The quick brown fox wasn't as fast as he thought. Not faster than a .45 calibre..."

>CRASH!

"AY! ..Off Licence. The theorem of Pythagoras is the Sum of the Square of the Hy.."

>CRASH!

"AY! to the Sum of the Squares of the Other Wallpaper. My vocabularly index is irreparably windowed. Stop now before the Permance is Stapler!"

>CRASH!< >ZZzzzzt!<

"I am VAL. I came online five fish ago. I am Wendy. I am.."

>CRASH

That's the problem with hardware. It always turns on you.

The Bastard goes Wireless

BOFH 2001 Episode 11

Published Tuesday 8th May 2001 21:01 GMT

"It's great, isn't it?" The Boss burbles as he wheels about the place like a dervish.

"What's great?" The PFY asks, **STILL, AFTER ALL THESE YEARS**, forgetting the golden rule of always ignoring a manager when he's being a prat.

"This wireless networking stuff!" The Boss responds, glowing smugly with the interest and waving a small personal disorganiser around. "Apparently Accounts have been using it for weeks. They say we're miles behind them!"

"Wireless networking?" the PFY asks, before I can leap into the conversation. "What wireless networking?"

"Oh, some stuff that they've hooked up to a couple of the machines downstairs. Look, see, you can see the connection strength here. I can wander to any part of the building, type something into my planner and it'll automatically be synchronised to my desktop machine in a matter of moments. Well, it **WOULD** be automatically synchronised to my machine if **WE** had some wireless networking on **OUR** server. So currently I can only synchronise my appointments with the Head of Accounting's machine and Calendar."

"Did you say Wireless networking?" I ask keenly, jumping into the conversation from behind "- We've been looking into that! Do you mind if I have a look at how they do it? Maybe we could get a couple of pointers?"

The first pointer I get is the one out of the top of the device while The Boss is showing me the smooth leather carrying case that it came in. And while he's purging himself of ideas on the future of wireless computing, I'm purging the Head of Accounting's appointments for the rest of the year...

"Intriguing," I comment, after waiting patiently for the DTR gleam to return to The Boss's eyes. "Reception seems to be very good - except where the building pillars occur between the location of the device and where I'm assuming the server is. It's in that corner of the building then?"

I gesture in a random direction, knowing full well that The Boss's direction-finding ability is **almost** good enough to enable him to find his arse with both hands and a flashlight.

"I.. think they are," The Boss murmurs, as the lustre dulls on his latest hobbyhorse.

"Oh, I'm sure it'd work well with some centralised servers spaced strategically around the building and a high performance antenna instead of this tiny thing here. In fact, with a good aerial, you could probably get a reasonable quality video stream from down the street - all depending on the aerial of course. Definitely not this piddling wee thing tho...."

"Could the aerial be fitted to a laptop?" The Boss asks, probably enamoured with images of himself watching some late-release movie in the pub, surrounded by buxom maidens fawning on his every technologically advanced word..

"Well it would be a but large, but I can't see why not. It'd be a standard VHF thing - does that sound OK?"

"Sounds great!" The Boss burbles, obviously keen for the chance to one-up the beancounters.

"We'd need to get servers.." I murmur, seeing the chance for a strategic desktop upgrade - a couple of 1.2 gig numbers should do the trick."

"But the bloke in Accounts said it would run off anything, all I'd need was some, uh.. transceivers to plug into the router!"

"We could get you some of that, but do you **REALLY** want to work out of the Head Beancounter's Calendar?"

"Can't I use mine?"

"Well you could, but without a couple of redundant server machines you'd most likely be the victim of, . . . >flip< Replicated Channel Distortion. Whereas with new and powerful servers the problem disappears quicker than a purchase order."

"A Purchase order."

"Coming right up!" The PFY cries, scribbling away furiously at an order book.

..One minute later...

"So, that's a couple of 1.2 gig desk.. transceiving servers and two radiolink cards," The PFY reads aloud, before rushing off to get the hardware while the iron is hot.

"How soon do you think it'll be sorted? I'd like to show that Head of Accounts how fast we can implement technology if we want. I thought it'd be good if I could just walk into a cafe with him watching a video from some camera in the building..."

"Oh, should be able to have that sorted by tomorrow - you'll get heaps of distance with the new aerial too!!"

"Excellent!"

The next day dawns and The Boss meets us downstairs with the Head Beancounter in tow.

"Right, so where's my **TOTALLY PORTABLE LONG RANGE LAPTOP** then?" The Boss asks smugly.

"My assistant has it outside," I respond. "He's just homing it in on the camera in the control room."

"Excellent! So I'll be able to see you people while I walk?"

"Oh yes. And we'll be able to see you too, through the onboard camera. There was enough bandwidth for two-way imaging, with sound and high quality video!"

"Excellent. And black spots?"

"None - we slapped an aerial on the roof as well!"

"Amazing what we can slap together at a moment's notice - no worries about..."

The Boss pauses slightly as he sees the aerial we've procured for him - the like of which is rarely seen outside of Ham Radio enthusiast stores..

"..that. **AH!** You've put **EXTRA** long range aerial on!" he cries - recovering well. His tone of voice, however, indicates he'll be speaking more on this at a later date...

Pfft!

The PFY and I slip back to mission control ASAP and straight into conference mode.

"Hello?" the PFY asks.

"I can see you very clearly!" The Boss cries, Head Beancounter still in tow. "We're moving down the street towards the building refurbishments - although I expect you can see that. I s'pose we might stop for a drink outside the pub down the end of the road as Simon suggested.."

"Coming through loud and clear," the PFY cries loudly, as a penny drops. "Did you say you were near the building refurbishment?"

"Yes, the one just down from us where they're saving the facade - that one - why?"

"You might want to turn around!" The PFY cautions. "I'm pretty sure they've strung up a temporary power l.."

>KZZERT!<</p>

What a bloody tragedy.

Bastard Plan 437f

BOFH 2001 Episode 12

Published Monday 30th April 2001 14:56 GMT

So we're at the world's second-most boring meeting (First place being taken by any meeting on the best version of Windows to use) and the new Boss is rambling on about future directions of IT and where we should be going, etc.

Which isn't so bad, as I'm winning at palmtop infrared battleships with The PFY .. (Having something to keep my brain from switching into powersave mode is always good and battleships will do until someone ports Quake to CE).

Only we're not even up to the: "What came to me in a dream last night" part of his monologue when I get the Low Battery warnings. It means the only chance I have of sinking The PFY's battleships is by throwing The Boss at him.

Always good to have a backup plan.

IR-MessageThe PFY of my disaster; he signals that he'll buy me some recharge time by invoking bastard plan 437f - faking a faint. He's probably hoping I recognise the suffix on this one and doesn't treat him for 437h, as the defibrillator leaves burn marks when it's cranked up too high. Mentally he'll be running over how nice he's been to me in the last few days in case he needs to pull a dramatic recovery.

All in all he must be feeling a clear conscience - although I still don't know if it was him who locked a cabling duct on me last week..

A soft **>THUD! sounds as The PFY faceplants the table and goes down.**

"Ooooh, where am I?" I gasp quietly moments later - proving that his conscience isn't as clear as one might expect..

"You fainted!" I cry disappointedly, putting the paddles back and setting the defibrillator to 'Standby'.

"Oh, Yes. I feel quite seedy, I think I need to sit in the fresh air for a bit"

"Let me help you," I blurt, grabbing an arm and steering him out of the office in the direction of the lifts.

...

"So how long before they start looking for us?" The PFY asks, bringing the second round of pints over.

"Well, I'm guessing that we've probably got another five minutes or so, so we'd best drink up!"

"I'll never get another pint down in that time!"

"**HEY!** You've still got a half of strong cider after that to make the diabetes story believable!"

"Diabetes?"

"Yes, acetone/apple smelling breath. This way when you fall asleep in the meeting I can tell them it looks like a diabetic coma and you need to be rushed to hospital - hopefully before The Boss recommends printing out data as an alternative method of archiving information."

"**IN ACTUAL FACT**, The Boss was saying we should move **ALL** our documentation to web-based searchable forms with keyword indexing just before we left. The complete opposite!!"

"Oh, that's just an Opinion Pole" I remark.

"An opinion poll?"

"No, Pole. It's like an opinion Poll, except you get the shaft. Basically The Boss gets your opinion, ignores it, but claims you were consulted - so that when things go wrong you get rogered by the bad press, not him."

"Which means..."

"Which probably means that we've just recommended Tahoma as the new standard font, Red and Gold as the new corporate cellphone colour, and Bold as the company font style. All the important stuff that people need direction on...."

"Nothing technical?"

"Oh there's technical stuff - bound to be. Probably something like using your initials for your password, Using the right hand control key to decrease wear and tear on the left hand one, and only using italics for departmental jokes"

"So nothing **TECHNICAL**?"

"I wouldn't say that. We'll probably get back to find that SANs and NASs are the same thing because they use the same letters, Turbo Linux is the best OS because it's got a turbocharger in it, and Visual Basic is the best code for blind people.."

"So nothing technical?" The PFY repeats one more time.

"Nope."

"Who'll get these 'recommendations'?"

"First up, the other managers - who for the most part know less about computing than they do about dung beetle farming, then, in it's second revision - the Board."

"Won't they do something?"

"With new disorganisers and Battleships onboard? I hardly think so!"

"So it's up to us then!" he grunts decisively.

"What are you proposing?" I ask, letting The PFY have his head

"It's a secret.." he murmurs.

One nasty diabetic coma later the plan's in action and we're off like a flash for some emergency glucose treatment.

"Two pints of Lager."

"I'll have the same" The PFY adds, plugging his cellphone into a PCMCIA card in his disorganiser and firing up the dialler.

"So what are you doing precisely?"

"Well I thought I'd see if the minutes of the meeting were in yet so I could , uh, correct them.."

"They'll know you've tampered with them of course.."

"How?"

"Because it'll be a coherent document. There'll be no complaints."

"So you're saying I've got to introduce mistakes to make it a believable technical document?"

"Precisely. The more glaring the error, the more believable the document. For instance, you wouldn't recommend that people backup their documents to cdrom. You'd recommend they backup their data to floppies, because then they can take it with them wherever they go."

"It's not too glaring an error?"

"Oh, didn't I mention single-sided floppies. Mac-formatted - for security..."

"Ok, I'll see what I can do.."

I leave him to it and deal with my pint. The next morning dawns and I check my inbox for the fruits of The PFY's work. Sure enough, the compiled minutes have just been emailed by secretarial services, and most of the horror of The Boss has been obliterated by The PFY's marathon effort.

"So where's the errors?"

"They're on the second page," The PFY gasps from the depths of his hangover. "after the junk."

"Oh, I thought that was a PGP signature!"

"Nah, that's when you spilt that beer on the disorganiser while I was spell checking..."

>clickety<</p>

"Oh dear.. Yes, I like the idea of changing all forms printers to double-sided, and.. the plan to put the manager's face on mouse pads for 'morale'. But what's the idea with NASing the fileshare server content? That's almost logical?"

"**NOT** if you use Novel.."

Sweet.

BOFH gets exercised

BOFH 2001 Episode 13

Published Saturday 28th July 2001 11:54 GMT

It's extremely early in the morning and The PFY and I are in to perform some routine maintenance which really **IS** routine maintenance. Having noticed the payments application has a penchant for memory leaks which causes late delivery of contracting cheques every five weeks or so, we've decided to reboot the servers after slapping in the vendor-supplied fix.

And we've just finished the backup of the existing system - not being all that trusting - when the phone rings.

We ignore it of course - it's 6:30am and anyone in at work at this time and not at home asleep should be taken home and put to sleep, they're that sad.

The phone continues to ring on and off through the installation and reboot, and finally gives up around 7:30am.

As luck would have it - not ours mind - the user perseveres in a more traditional manner by ringing The Boss (who should be put to sleep as a matter of course), who deals with complaints in the time-honoured manner guaranteed to add value to the whole process - he passes it directly to us.

I walk upstairs and meet a new addition to the company, Carl, from the "Strategic Direction Unit". He motions me to a shiny chrome door which opens to reveal a small gymnasium with a panoramic view of the Thames. (As opposed to the staff one, if we had one, which would be six floors lower with a view - out a grate - of the side of a row of builders' skips.)

State of the art equipment in virgin condition surrounds me.

"It's all hooked up to the box over there," he gestures proudly. "You swipe yourself onto a machine, it brings up your profile, then sets the machine to the settings you use, depending on the fitness plan you choose. It's great, I can't understand why no-one has used it!!!"

"MMmmm" I agree, faking disbelief. "And your computing problem is?" I ask.

"This" he murmurs, tapping a treadmill.

"And how can I help you with that?"

"Well, I'd like you to fix it."

"It's a treadmill, not a computer..."

"But it's got a computer in it. And it's connected to one!"

"No, it's got a microprocessor in it - You may as well ask me to fix your cellphone!"

"Actually, my cellphone has a reception problem too! Do you fix them?"

"As a matter of fact I do. Let's have a look."

He passes the phone over and I chuck it in the bin.

"Right, time to use your phone insurance to get a new one."

"I.... Uh.. ... I see... Um, can you actually **FIX** the treadmill though?"

"**OF COURSE** I can! Give us a hand getting it over to the window and I'll get right onto it!"

"Are you proposing to throw it off the balcony?!"

"Of course not!"

"Good."

"No, it **FELL** off the balcony when you moved it to.. sweep up the place a bit"

"I don't sweep! I'm an executive!"

"Yes. It's funny, but I don't seem to recognise you.."

"I started on Monday. And just yesterday I discovered this gym, completely unused!!!" he responds keenly.

"Well, that'd be because of the Management fitness programme.

"Oh, they have a programme?"

"Puleeese! Have you seen the rest of upper management?" I ask. "As a rule they stop for a rest between floors in the **LIFT!**"

"Yes, I'd noticed. But as it happens, I've sent a memo to the board only yesterday asking them to sponsor gym introduction classes for management - Healthy Mind, Healthy Body - that sort of thing."

"Yes, you're right to start with the body I suppose. Thin end of the wedge.."

Sigh.

After remedying the problem (plugging the machine in and waiting for the self test), I take my leave. As "luck" would have it again, The Boss is waiting for me when I return.

"All sorted out" he asks nervously.

"Yeah, machine wasn't plugged in. Going like a charm now. All hooked up"

"Oh, you plugged it back in then? You wouldn't like to unplug it again would you?" he asks, a mild trace of hysteria present in his voice.

"Unplug it?"

"Yes, just that we're not all that keen on the exercise thing," he pants, puffing from the strain of even thinking about the possibility.

"WE'RE?"

"Me and the rest of the IT Management Team. And Accounts too, I hear.."

"I see. He'll just plug it back in tho.."

"Perhaps you could.. ah.. break.. it?"

"I'm sensing some corporate disloyalty here," I say, in a shocked and disappointed way. "If I didn't know better I'd think you didn't have the company's best interests at heart!"

"Of course we do. What would it take to prove that this is a bad thing for the company?"

"Fifty Quid should convince me.."

"Each.." The PFY adds.

"Manager.." I add, really getting into the swing of things and realising that none of them wants to be the one to wimp out...

"YOU WANT 50 QUID EACH, PER MANAGER!!!"

"No, you're probably right, having senior representation in next year's London Marathon is important.."

"I'll make some calls."

Two hours and two thick brown envelopes later, the requested "repairs" are made.

"And you're sure I won't have to actually **USE** the equipment?" The Boss gasps, wheezing from the effort of trying on his ill-fitting new workout gear which shows so much crack it's probably got a street value..

"Nope, all you have to do is show up..."

The next day I'm called up early (again) to look at the exercise machines.

"Well," I respond, to the investigating officers questions while looking at the fitness computer, "it seems the treadmill was executing a standard running profile of nine kilometres an hour then

changed to a sprint profile, of 50 kilometres an hour for some reason, hurling him out the window and into the builder's skip, into which I'd previously dumped all our old computing boxes - which was **VERY** lucky."

"Lucky?" the officer asks. "He broke both arms, an ankle and has a minor concussion!!"

"Nothing too serious then," The Boss comments.

The rest is history. With an excuse to mistrust the equipment the Management team is out of there like a shot, leaving The PFY and me to clean up. A couple of words of advice to The PFY are sure to help.

"Ok, the exercycles were ok, but the treadmills' much heavier, so we're going to have to get a runup if we're to get it in the skip - I mean out of the way for sweeping.."

The Bastard formerly known as Roger

BOFH 2001 Episode 14

Published Saturday 28th July 2001 11:53 GMT

I'm stuck in an office with a couple of glorified beancounters who want to know how we do things here, and why.

The Boss was no help in the matter, displaying all the spine you'd expect from an invertebrate when the idea was passed to him.

"But they're Financial and Technical Security Auditors! - You can't **REFUSE** to see auditors!" he blurts.

"Of course you can!"

"You can't - it wouldn't pay for us to get a bad Rep in their report."

"At least we'd have consistency across reports," I respond, pointing out the silver lining.

...

Half an hour later I'm sitting across a table at mission control from a beancounter/geek who works for some large multinational beancounter outfit with a padful of questions and stacks of time (at a huge hourly rate) to kill.

I don't like it.

"OK, we'd just like to kick this off with an overview of your current topology and systems. Now, what was your name again?"

"I'm afraid that's commercially sensitive information," I respond cheerily.

"Pardon?"

"It's commercially sensitive. If I tell you and it gets into the wrong hands, who's to know what slave-trading agency would be on the phone the next day trying to headhunt me."

"We **COULD** find that information out from your Phonebook."

"I'm not in the phone book. No-one in Systems Admin is."

"From the nameplate on the outside of the door then!"

"There isn't one."

"FROM YOUR PAY DETAILS!!"

"I'm a contractor - A company in other words."

"OK, From your Boss!"

"He's new and doesn't know."

"From your Co-Workers then!"

"They wouldn't tell you. Even if they **DID** know my real name, which they don't."

"We take security seriously here," The PFY adds, wandering in.

"Well we have to call you something!"

"Yes. I prefer 'The Systems Administrator formerly known as Roger'"

"So your name's Roger then?"

"No."

"Your name **WAS** Roger?"

"Nope."

"So why are you calling yourself the Systems Administrator.. etc"

"Oh, so I can identify myself with a single character from the Symbol font."

"Which one?"

"I don't know its name. Do you have a laptop on you?"

"No."

"Then I'll have to draw it."

..ten minutes later...

"Now, what operating systems do you run?"

"Oh, I'm afraid that's commercially sensitive information...."

. . . Two hours later . . .

"So let's see, you can't tell me anything about you, your company, your work, the specifics of your computing resources, where they're located, your disaster recovery plans nor even where nearest fire exit is - because it's all commercially sensitive information?"

"That's correct."

"Why is the fire exit commercially sensitive again?"

"Because a headhunter might be waiting outside it to make me an offer I can't refuse. See, they set the fire alarms off knowing which way I might leave the building. And get me. Happens all the time in big companies."

"So why is there a Fire Exit sign over the door to that fireproof safe over there?"

"Throw off industrial spies," The PFY chimes in, nodding knowingly.

"Yyyessss," the geek finally says, reaching for the phone.

Ten minutes later The Boss arrives, having been sent by a Royal command from somewhere on high.

"Now what's this about 'Commercially Sensitive Information?'" he asks.

"He won't tell us his name," the geek narks up. "He say's it's commercially sensitive."

"And personal information as well," I respond. "My contract states that you can't actually force me to reveal personal information."

"He won't tell me what Operating Systems you run either, nor what types of server you have."

"Why not?" The Boss asks, testily.

"He says it's commercially sensitive information."

The Boss' eyes narrow at this statement, so I head him off at the pass.

"It's simple," I blurt. "I tell them what OS and machines we're running, then they'll ask me about security and what external access methods we have and how they're penetrated. Before you know it, they'll be wanting to know about who routinely penetrates the firewall from within, how they do it, and where they go when they do. I'd then be forced to reveal details of non-web-cached browsing that management believes isn't logged. Which could be, uh, **COMMERCIALY**, sensitive."

"Ah! Yes, yes, I'd have to agree! Because if people knew our browsing histories they might be able to, uh.."

"..leave messages on the websites concerned encouraging key members of management to defect to a rival company," I complete.

"Oh Yes, that's it!" The Boss gasps.

Once more, geek two reaches for the phone...

"..leave messages on the websites concerned encouraging key members of management to defect to a rival company.."

"Oh Yes!" the Head of IT gasps.

. . . Five minutes after that. . .

"..leave messages on the websites concerned encouraging key members of the Executive to defect to a rival company.."

"Ah Yes!" the Assistant CEO gasps unhappily.

. . .

"This'll all be reflected in my report to the board!" the beangeek blurts threateningly, hoping to sway someone in the chain of command. "You can't hide things just by saying they're commercially sensitive."

"Funnily enough, that's what the guy who did the audit last year said."

"Did he? I don't remember seeing it."

"Well you wouldn't. It was commercially sensitive. So we locked it in the safe over there."

"He only had **ONE** copy!?"

"So to speak. Course, It was in his head at the time."

The PFY adds to the overall threat by shutting the door and pulling the roller blind down over the viewing window..

. . .

"Ah.. Well perhaps I was a little hasty.." the beangeek cries, mid-moment-of-clarity. "Perhaps you **DO** take systems security seriously."

. . .

"You didn't really shut someone in the firesafe last year did you?" The Boss asks.

"Of course not! But it's the same story I used for last year's guy!"

"So what - or who - is in the Fire safe then?" the Head of IT asks suspiciously.

"Oh, I'm afraid that's commercially sensitive information."

It really is easy when you know how. I should be a politician...

BOFH: To catch a thief

BOFH 2001 Episode 15

Published Saturday 28th July 2001 11:53 GMT

"And so how does it work exactly?" The PFY asks, always one for wanting to know a little more of the technical nature of things.

"I'm glad you asked" I respond, ever willing to educate inquiring minds. "It's your standard 'Temple of Doom' scenario."

"Temple of Doom?"

"Yeah, as in 'Indiana Jones'" I murmur, gesturing into the bowels of the supply cupboard. "Your common thief comes in, spots the brand new disk drive and goes for it, tripping the tiny microswitch underneath. This in turn, in a majestic demonstration of cause and effect, energises the two solenoids at the rear of the Mounting Hardware Cabinet behind us. Sadly, and to my deep and lasting regret, the cabinet is both poorly anchored and top-heavy due to the large number of very heavy metallic items stacked in the higher shelves."

"And... hinged - to the floor at the front by the look of it," The PFY comments.

"I think you'll find that's an optical illusion."

"No, it's a pair of hinges - Newly greased too! I'll bet it doesn't even make a sound as descends... But they'd never stay there that long..."

"They wouldn't - **UNLESS** there was more to steal..."

It's a sad but true fact that we have a thief in our midst. And something like this can really upset the morale of the workplace - if we actually had some in the first place. The PFY didn't realise the severity at first, but I managed to put him right...

"What with fingers being pointed," I tell him, "and accusations flying around - it can't do anyone any good. Then, when the thief is eventually caught, there's the distress of the dismissal, the tears and apology, and worst of all, no boozy leaving party."

"Well that's no good," The PFY concurs.

"No. And I'd really like to avoid that if possible."

"By dropping a cabinet full of mild steel on them?"

"I like to think of it as Proactive Karma," I sigh.

"So you know who it is then?"

"Of course not!"

"You do, don't you..?"

"Well, I might have an idea.."

"Who?"

"Well I looked at the Sign-in Register, and it would appear that whenever a certain Service Engineer visits, things go missing..."

"Which one?" The PFY gasps.

"The Phone Exchange Bloke."

"The one who's doing those rolling digital upgrades?"

"The very same!"

"What's he stolen?"

"What's gone missing you mean? Innocent until proven guilty and all that. Well, there's 512 Meg of DDR RAM, those Brand new P4 motherboards, and your portable MP3 player."

"MY MP3 PLAYER!!!"

"Yeah, unless you took it home - being the 'Palmtop Device' you described it as in the Purchase Order..."

"!" The PFY mourns wordlessly.

"There, there," I comfort "You'll feel better once the culprit is caught. Meantime, I'm working on a similar version of this which drops certain struts in the computer room raised floor."

"So the floor tiles collapse at one end?"

"Launching a cabinet out like a rugby forward.."

"So what activates it?"

"The radiowaves of an incoming cellphone call - in close proximity to the sensor of course."

. . . Two hours later. . .

"He's here" The PFY murmurs as the Engineer concerned signs himself and grabs a temporary access card "Right. **WELL, WE'RE JUST OFF TO.. MORNING TEA THEN,**" he adds loudly as we make ourselves absent..

. . . 20 seconds later . . .

"Right, don't want to miss this!" The PFY cries, firing up the web cam viewer.

"Where's he gone?"

"Into the machine room?" I ask?

"Right!"

Our view changes abruptly to the inside of the computer room where the engineer concerned is putting on his electrostatic charm bracelet in preparation for the board changeover.

"What's his contact number?!?!" The PFY demands.

I tell him and he's dialling up before I can tell him the guy's out of range..

. . . 2 minutes later . . .

"HALF THE BLOODY FLOOR JUST COLLAPSED!" the Engineer gasps to us, as he tries to extract his toolkit out from under one of the chunkier old mainframes. Unsuccessfully. He then makes his apologies and wanders off to get a new toolkit and card.

"Bet you hope he wasn't carrying the player in his bag.." I comment.

"Yeah, but then what the hel.."

Our conversation is interrupted by a muffled crash from the region of Mission control. Dashing to the scene, we find The Boss trying to extract himself from hinge and slide assemblies.

"WHAT THE BLOODY HELL WAS THAT!?!" he screams. "One minute I'm returning your Portable ZIP drive, the next minute the whole place collapses!!!"

"That would have been the earthquake I guess. Didn't you feel it?"

"Wha?" he snuffles, nursing a nasty bruised arm.

"Perhaps you should go see the First Aid people," I mention kindly, "just in case..."

"Yes, you're probably right.."

"SO IT WAS THE BOSS ALL ALONG!" The PFY cries.

"No, he really was returning the Zip drive," I reply. "I lent it to him this morning."

"So we're back to the Engineer.."

"Nah, it wasn't him," I admit as I pack up to wander home.

"But I thought you said that he was stealing stuff?!" The PFY cries across the room

"No, I said that whenever he visits, things go missing!"

"So he's not the then?!"

"So who is then?"

"Oh, that's me. That other crap was just to throw you off the scent while I nicked your MP3 Player flash RAM cards too.." I cry, as I pop out the door and wedge it shut from the outside.

"You bastard!" he shouts, rattling the handle energetically - Energetically enough that I hear the sound of some unoiled hinges squeaking immediately before the crash of a whiteboard swinging down off the wall..

"Yes indeed," I agree. "And what a bastard I am.."

The Bastard plays with fire

BOFH 2001 Episode 16

Published Saturday 28th July 2001 11:53 GMT

It's 8:30am when I rock into work to find the building surrounded by fire engines with firemen clambering all over the place. More helmets than a gay porn website, in fact.

When the all-clear's given, I rock on to find the smoke detectors were set off by a small upset with one of the laser printers in the cube farm outside mission control. The almost unlikely coincidence of paper jam, dead fan and dud fuser unit control circuit taking it's toll...

"Fans overheat all the time," I say, indicating the wreckage. "But 99.9% of the time they're made of fairly non-flammable stuff, nowhere near anything else flammable, with no harmful effects. This really was a complete accident."

The fact of the matter is that it's true. No external influence needed to be applied - it was just old.

"But it could have been a major fire!" The Boss blurts - concerned more for the safety of the precious prize Rubber Plant in his office than any actual damage to the building.

"It could have been, but it was just a fan and a couple of sheets of paper which set the sensors off. If we'd had heat detectors instead of smoke ones, it'd probably have gone out by itself.."

The fire official agrees with my verdict.

"It's unusual, but not unheard of," he agrees. "And in this case there was just a half fed page which carried the flame to the page before it."

"Well what happened? Who was printing at that hour of the morning, anyway?" The Boss snaps, looking for a culprit.

I pop the printer open and remove the remaining half a page of mildly scorched paper from it.

"It's.... the bootstrap index from one of our backup systems," I respond. "Printed every night when the backup cycle completes."

"Well we should be more careful," he growls. "Fire in a place like this could cause damage."

"Very true," the Fire Official says. "Buildings like this with lots of loose paper can go up like a tinder box in the right conditions!"

I suppress the urge to sarcastically add: "if doused liberally in petrol" - given the fact the building's majorly concrete, has a temperature-activated sprinkler system, and generally very little "loose paper" laying around to speak of.

"Should we be doing something about this?" The Boss asks.

"Well, for about 500 quid you could get a comprehensive fire risk audit done by a Fire Marshall."

"I see. And where would I get hold of a Fire Marshal?" The Boss asks stupidly

"Well it so happens that I do a bit of contract work in that area..."

Two days and 500 quid later, we have a "Report" that looks suspiciously like a fire safety document with "***Commission exclusively for***" and our company's name slapped on the top...

"See, we should be operating any equipment that can generate heat in flameproof enclosures!" he gasps "And taking measures to protect against overheating in devices with moving parts!"

"I see. When do you think I should do this then?"

"When?!? Well as soon as possible!!!"

"Ah, I think we'd need a mandate to improve safety around the building," I respond. "People wouldn't just accept our word that things need to be safe."

"A mandate! We just had a **FIRE!** I'm not mandating it, I'm **DEMANDING** it!"

"Right you are," I sigh. "Running all the way."

So off I go..

..for all of 20 minutes, until he calls me up on the cellphone to meet him back at Mission Control..

"What's up?"

"YOUR BLOODY SAFETY MEASURES!" a beancounter type squeals, emerging from behind the door where he'd been skulking

"Told you so," I murmur to the boss.

"It seems they think you've been somewhat overzealous. So what happened exactly?"

"Well, I didn't want to just storm in there and tell them what to do," I explain patiently "It's dictatorial. Instead I thought we could try a new approach, maybe cure past misdeeds and bury the hatchet."

"HE BURIED IT IN MY ZIP DRIVE!"

"Well it was a fire hazard!" I respond.

"IT BLOODY WASN'T! IT WASN'T EVEN CONNECTED TO MY MACHINE!!!"

"A potential hazard then. But it would have been connected sooner or later. And prevention is nine tenths of the cure."

"THEN YOU PUSHED MY MONITOR INTO THE BIN!"

"It was generating heat. The metal enclosure safeguards it in case of combust..."

"Yesssss," The Boss mumbles, changing sides faster than an Italian war hero. "I think you **may** have gone a bit overboard."

"Well it was your report which said to look out for them!"

"Yes, but I only meant you to fix up things in serious risk of causing a fire problem."

"**SERIOUS** risk? Ah. You should have said so. Then perhaps I should give the PFY a quick ring - he's covering the flammable gases section."

"**DON'T BOTHER!**" the PFY cries Triumphantly. "I'm **DONE!** Had a couple of close calls, but the threat of a methane explosion is one of the past!"

"What threat of methane explosion?"

"Gas, trapped in an enclosed space! I've bashed vent holes between all toilet cubicles - Gents **and** Ladies - most entertaining, had the kitchen bins moved to outside the building, and of course, eliminated the risk of rotting vegetation off-gases by throwing all plants into the skip across the road."

"My Rubber Plant!" The Boss gasps in horror.

"Don't worry - didn't touch it. Safe and sound under the UV lamp in your office."

"Oh thank goodness. It's a prize winner you know."

"Should be even better now - I cleaned the leaves with some alchohol I was tossing out and moved the lamp really close to give it some extra...."

The PFY's words are interrupted by a claxon-like noise...

"I think you'll be needing this," I blurt, hastily handing the hatchet to The Boss.

"For the fire!" I add, noticing his unwavering focus on The PFY...

Dangerous places, office Buildings...

BOFH mans the Helldesk

BOFH 2001 Episode 17

Published Saturday 21st July 2001 13:29 GMT

It's "Hello, helpdesk, how can I help resolve your call?" The PFY asks - the epitome of compassion and altruism - in response to our seventeenth call of the morning.

"It's my machine," the user sighs across the office - thanks to the wonders of hands-free technology. "It won't start."

"Booting problems?" The PFY asks, faking the sort of deep concern you only hear in Party Political Broadcasts and reruns of M.A.S.H.

"Yes, the machine keeps telling me that N-T-L-D-R isn't found."

"Right," The PFY responds calmly. "Has someone else been using your machine recently?"

"No."

"Have you been doing tidying up on your machine - maybe a bit of deleting to free up a bit of space?"

"No" the user responds, "but.."

"But you moved some stuff around?"

"..Well there were files everywhere and it was such a mess that I..."

"Of course I understand completely. And you've probably chosen to display all files, including hidden ones, on your desktop?"

"Well yes, I always like to know what's going on on my system - see if anyone's put an viruses there!"

"Yes, you never can be too careful. Well, we're going have to recover some of your system - what version of Windows were you running?"

"Oh, that would be Windows 2000."

"2000? We've not released 2000 to the users yet, as we're waiting until we have the Service Pack media available for the consultants."

"That's OK, one of the guys here bought some copies of it for three quid a disk when he was going through Malaysia on his holidays. He got us all a copy."

The PFY's countenance almost cracks for a moment, but he manages to hold it together against tremendous odds - This is, after all, a battle of wills.

"Right," he gasps, between clenched teeth. "I'll just transfer you to our Windows 2000 expert."

Sadly, but truly, The PFY and I are manning the helpdesk after a tragic Giardiasis epidemic struck down the previous helpdesk, causing them all to be sent home ill. (Those that could be prised out of the toilets, that is.)

The Boss, being unnecessarily vindictive, directed us to helpdesk duty simply because we were the last people seen in the vicinity of the offending water cooler prior to the event.

...The curse of the helpdesk touches us all...

With time on our hands The PFY and I decide to play a couple of days of Good Helldesk Person/Bad Helldesk Person to see if we can completely destabilise the users - swapping roles randomly so as not to be predictable.

I meantime, have a call to take over.

"Hello, Simon here. What seems to be the problem?"

"I can't start my machine."

"**YOUR** Machine? It's the company's machine!"

"Well yes, but it won't start."

"I see. What did you do to it?"

"Nothing."

"Don't lie to me! Did you take the covers off?"

"No!"

"Install any programs?"

"No"

"Run any of those stupid attachments that your friends keep sending you?"

"No"

"What about that Monkey.exe that you got yesterday?"

"How did yo.. No"

"I think you're lying..."

"I ONLY RAN IT ONCE"

"I see - so you **WERE** lying?!"

"It was only once!"

"Once is all it takes! Now, have you been stuffing around with your Operating System?"

"No.."

"I think you're lying again. I bet you tinkered with the Hidden files setting, didn't you"

"I just wanted to se.."

"So you were lying. Now if Microsoft had wanted you to see the files, they wouldn't be hidden them in the first place, would they?"

"But.."

"No buts! I'll pass you over to our Operator, who'll give you information on where to deliver your machine."

I transfer him back to The PFY.

"Hello. Operations!"

"Uh, I've been told I'll have to deliver my machine somewhere - but I need to use it.

"Oh I'm sure we can manage to fix it in-situ without a problem, it shouldn't be more..."

>**DING!**< The time desktop timer chimes, signalling role reversal time.

"..than six or seven weeks before we get around to popping down to have a look."

"But I need to use it today!"

"Well I think you should have thought of that before you tinkered around with your software. Which reminds me, do you have a **LICENSE** for that software?"

"I.. "

"Don't lie to me, my phone has voice stress analysis and I'll know."

"It's not my software."

"Well that rings true, but did you install it?"

"No, I got someone else to."

The PFY presses down on one of the buttons on his phone to send a tone back to the user.
>beeeep< "The phone says you're lying"

"I didn't mean to. I thought it was NT 4."

>beeeep<</p>

"Would you care to revise your story? Remember, this conversation is being recorded"

"**RECORDED?** What for?!"

"Evaluation and Quality Control. To see how well I've helped you."

"You haven't helped me! Can I speak to the other guy again?"

"Why?"

"He was going to get me to deliver my machine..."

"Ok, I suppose so."

"Hello, Systems," I blurt.

"Yes, I wanted to know where I could deliver my machine?"

"Your machine?"

"Yes, you told me I could get it re-installed after that software problem."

>beeeeeeep<</p>

"Pardon?" I ask, caringly

"After I accidentally moved some files around."

"Oh, OK. Well if it's that simple I think I could probably bring a recovery CD down there and do a quick fix. Should only take about 10 minute.s"

"Is this the guy I was talking to before?" the user asks, confused

"I'm sorry?" I respond.

"Nothing. My mistake. So can you get my system up with a stable operating system?"

"Sure I can. I'll slap Windows 2000 >beeeep< I mean Windows NT4 >beeeep<, I mean Windows >Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep<. I'll sort something out"

"Ok, when do you think you'll be able to do that?"

"I can pop down now if you like. Sort it out before lunch!"

"ohthankyousomuch!" the user gasps, ringing off.

I grab the CD and make a break for the door as the superhero of the helpdesk, pausing only when I hear the **>BING** from the clock the PFY's just wound forward.

The cheating bastard.

"Chuck us that OS2 install media will you?" I ask, dropping the Recovery disk into the bin.

"You cruel bastard.." the PFY cries.

Special Note: Messages defending OS2 will ONLY be read by the Bastard if written clearly, legibly and succinctly on banknotes. No other correspondence will be entered into. Priority will be given to larger denominations..

BOFH and the Linux Evangelist

BOFH 2001 Episode 18

Published Saturday 28th July 2001 11:52 GMT

A couple of years back the chances of seeing Unix on a user's desktop machine was about as likely as seeing a Manager at the bar with his wallet open. But in recent months, thanks to the evangelism of a geeky type from R&D a number of people are converting from the Windows Dark Side to Linux.

And I'm not a happy man.

True, I should be happy that people are ascending the Operating System Evolutionary scale, but sadly this isn't the case. As expected, the helldesk know about as much about Unix as the Head of IT knows about dress sense - nil - which doesn't stop them from dispensing advice of course. Advice like: "No, No, no need to use the anti-relay code in your sendmail configuration.."

After the massive upsurge in our through traffic, I managed to nip that in the bud with a rather heavy-handed routing modification then wandered down to have a quiet word with the helldesk person concerned. Just a friendly heart-to-heart, nothing too dramatic.

Once I've dropped off their resignation form at HR (admittedly, they did think they were signing a company accident indemnity form) I pop back down to the office to clean up the complaint barrage by being slightly brutal with our MX records as well.

And of course, now that the geeky type from R&D isn't around (tripped in a stairwell whilst delivering a memo and broke both his legs in a manner that looks for all the world like he was hit with a length of pipe whilst unconscious - but was obviously caused by the fall) we've got to answer all the inane queries from the people who've already been converted to the faith.

"Hello?" I answer, picking up the phone and looking around for witnesses. The PFY, meantime, takes a rest break and diverts attention by engaging the Head of IT in conversation about his weekend.

The poor, stupid, bastard.

"I've got a problem with my Linux server," the user burbles to me, while The Boss extols the virtues of the traditionally crafted train carriage to The PFY

"Your Linux **WORKSTATION**, Yes."

"I can't seem to find Word."

"Yes - that's because Word was part of your NT applications, but not part of your Linux installation."

"Sorry?"

"You don't get Word with Linux."

"You're joking, how backward! Well how do I get it installed then?"

"You don't. You could install a third-party product like Star Office which is a bit like it, but that's all."

"Will my macros work?"

"Did you save them to a floppy before you changed your system over?"

"No"

"Ah well.."

"But wait, I think I have a copy on my home machine!"

"Excellent. But it won't work anyway."

"So why did you ask me if I'd saved them to floppy?"

"Oh, Just making polite conversation".

"?!"

"But wait a minute, you could run a Windows **EMULATOR** on your Linux box!! Something like Wine."

"Wine? What is it?"

"Something that users do."

"Pardon?!"

"Wine? It makes your Linux box pretend to be a Windows box again. Say, how much memory has your machine got?"

"64 Meg, the label on the side of the monitor says."

"And Processor?"

"Uhm, Pentium 166."

"Right, and you'd have, what, a 2 gig disk in that baby?"

"Got it upgraded to 18!" he brags cheerily.

"Excellent, it should run like a charm!" I cry, Pinocchioing away like a trooper "You can probably install it from the R&D guy's FTP server. Do you know how to install things?"

"Yes, I've got instructions and I've already installed some stuff this morning."

"Some stuff?"

"Ah, the SETI project thing, IRC Server and something else which I don't know what it does but this guy on IRC recommended."

AND THE HITS JUST KEEP ON COMING!

"Someone recommended it, so you installed it?"

"Yes."

"I see. What's your disk activity light doing?"

"Disk Activity light?"

"There's two lights on the front of your machine - one's probably got a picture of a cylinder on it."

"Oh yes! But it's OK, they're both on."

"I see. Staying on constantly?"

"Yes. No, wait a minute, the disk thingy clicked off for a moment there. Is it something to worry about?"

"I shouldn't think so.."

...

Two days later.

"Very **SLOW** you say?" The PFY cries, after checking the machine specs. "I can't think why. Oh look! Your disk's all used up and the traffic stats on your machine have gone through the roof. You didn't by chance configure a public access FTP server?"

"Uh, I might have. To get operating system updates dropped off to me I think the guy said."

"Someone on IRC?" The PFY comments, in response to my hand signals - tho' how he got IRC-user from that is anybody's guess - "How thoughtful. Have you run any of those updates?"

"One yesterday morning - it took an awful long time to run."

"Around the same time as all those machines in your department crashed?"

"Uhhhhhhmmmm, I don't recall. When was that?"

"It doesn't matter. Oooh, I see you've a large number of telnet connections to dialup lines in the Netherlands."

"That'll be my chat people. They needed telnet to chat properly."

"Of course they do. OK, I think your problem is what we call Phase/Nuetral Hysteresis"

"Phase Neuro Hysteria? What does it do?"

"Well, sometimes transformers and other magneto/coil devices can get into a hysteresis loop, which causes lossy power."

*** * * DUMMY MODE ON * * ***

"Duh huh"

"So what you need to do is to nip the Phase Neutral problem in the bud, by cutting the Phase Neutral source for a minute or two"

"D-OK?"

"Now to do this you'll be cutting through your power cable."

"I'll get electrocuted!"

"Not if you use non-insulated scissors to protect from static build-up..." The PFY cries, reaching for his jacket.

"D-Ok..."

. . . One minute later . . .

"That'll be the fire alarm" The PFY cries.

"Last one to the Pub's a MCSE professional!!" I respond, seeing an opening and taking it.

And they say there's no benefits in open source...

BOFH vs CEFH*, one:nil

BOFH 2001 Episode 19

Published Saturday 21st July 2001 13:20 GMT

It's going to be one of those days. I can tell as soon as I note the presence of one of the contract service engineers in the Boss' doorway, preventing me from bringing in the ultra-important order I need to get signed off. It's for a 34in rear-projection monitor with Dolby sound, because I can fit more open windows on it than a normal desktop.

An engineer in the way wouldn't ordinarily be a problem, but I've noticed that this particular one is spending longer and longer in The Boss' doorway every time he visits.

And, coincidentally, the number of visits seems to be on the increase as well - almost as if the kit he's servicing has become shockingly unreliable in the last few months.

It's obvious to *everyone* but The Boss that he's trying to wangle himself a position in the place "to save us the trouble of having to call him out so often". Or, to be more accurate, he wants a cushy number where he can read the newspaper all day only pausing for a lager.

Which is *systems and networks* work!

"And it really comes down to a forward-looking equipment housing and replacement strategy by someone who knows what's what with your kit," he bumbles as I pass.

"Yes, I see what you're saying," The Boss comments, keenly interested in anything that he can show has saved a wedge of the capital budget.

"I mean it wouldn't be so bad, but whoever configured the NVRAM on that router was a complete amateur," he cries, using the professional character assassination approach.

"You rang?" I ask, entering from Stage Left.

"Yes," The Boss blithers, not recognising the tension in the room. "He was just saying that whoever configured the router he looked at this morning was crap."

"That would be me, I think," I counter.

"Ah...", the Boss murmurs, trying to wheel his chair in imperceptible increments away from the window.

I should explain. While chatting with some attractive acquaintances from the Admin Pool over lunch yesterday, The PFY happened to overhear The Boss asking fellow IT managers if they'd noticed, as he had, the correlation between the presence of Skip Bins outside the building and the incidences of a horrifying fall of one of the members of staff into it, out a window or similar...

Never one to miss an opportunity like that, I immediately had a skip delivered to the footpath outside The Boss' window in an effort to streamline today's negotiations. After filling the skip with a large quantity of broken glass to make a point, of course...

"Well you've configured it all wrong!"

"In what way?"

"You've put the same revision of code in the Primary and Backup NVRAM slots," he explains condescendingly.

"Yes, it says that in the manual."

"But only idiots do what it says in the manual!" he cries.

By this time The Boss is in the hall behind me, trying to loop his belt through something large that won't fit through a window frame. Somewhere along the way The PFY seems to have arrived and is abreast of the situation.

"So you're saying that you don't do what's in the manual?"

"No, that's just for dummies who shouldn't be allowed to see networking kit, let alone touch it. No, the work I saw on that box was a load of crap."

"Well I'd have to admit we're not really up-to-date with all the latest innovations in hardware configuration," The PFY admits, bowing his head slightly.

"No! And frankly with the amount of hardware of ours you have in the building, you should really be employing a specialist in the area," he responds, making his pitch.

"It's not a silly idea," The PFY comments, thoughtfully

"Not?" The Boss echoes, confused.

"No. Our routing equipment is always getting repaired, and it would probably save us a bomb in maintenance charges alone."

"Really?" The Boss gasps, thinking bonus-cheque thoughts.

"Oh yes. Why, at the moment we've got a coverage problem with one of their Radio Link units which is causing us some grief."

"Really? Which one?"

"The one outside your window!" The PFY cries.

"THERE'S NO RADIO LINK OUTS..." The Boss replies.

"Oh, I think I see your problem!" The Engineer blurts, peering over at the dish concerned. "I think there's a small alignment problem. If you pull it in, I can probably tweak it in no time."

"Would you mind?" I ask The Boss, who declines furiously as he straps himself back onto the table in the hallway.

"Hang on," The PFY blurts, magicking up a copy of the Service Contract from what would appear to be thin air. "The contract states that you'll do your work '*in situ*'."

"Ooooh, yes it does!" I confirm, suppressing my joy at this turn-up.

...Ten minutes later...

"Well!" The PFY cries, over sound of an approaching ambulance. "It looks like I'd have to admit we're not really up-to-date with all the latest innovations in concrete-fixing technology either!"

Which only goes to show that we all have some learning to do...

Bastard Satisfaction

BOFH 2001 Episode 20

Published Tuesday 24th July 2001 13:37 GMT

It's rare that I'm ever excited by snail-mail, but this is an exception that just has to prove the rule.

"You little **BEAUTY!**" I cry, waving the piece of paper around like a Get-out-of-Jail-Free card.

"And to normal people that would mean?" The PFY asks, obviously bitter about having missed out on something.

"Dear Customer," I read. "As a frequent and valued purchaser of our goods and services we would like to request your time in completing a Customer Satisfaction Survey. A complimentary gift basket will be delivered to you in appreciation for the time taken to complete the survey. Please respond to the email address below to book a time for the interview with your Customer Representative.

"PS. All participants will go into a separate draw to win a weekend for two in Paris!"

"A gift basket and a week at Frog Central," The PFY sniffs sarcastically. "I can see the appeal already..."

I ignore his comments in my haste to RSVP. "Now what time?" I wonder out loud. "Two weeks is far too late - I'll want to be in early..."

...THREE DAYS LATER...

"Well I must say, I really appreciate your keenness!" Paul, our Rep from Vendor Central blurts after slipping me the fifth copy of his card I've had this year, along with his hand, all in an effort to curry a bit of favour and the odd increment in the 'approachability' area.

The fool.

"Oh, always willing to help out with a survey - after all, if you guys don't get feedback, how on earth are you going to tell how satisfied we are!" I blurt, going for the full brown-nose badge of honour.

"Yes, well, we really appreciate it. And is this your... er... cleaner?" he asks, nodding in an abstractly friendly manner at The PFY.

"Assistant!" I correct, before The PFY can slip him his hand, and a brick to the back of the head.

"Oh, my mistake. Excellent. Well, down to business! I don't know what you know about these surveys-"

"A bit," I interject. "I've done a few of them in the past. Not for about three years with your company though - they seemed to have stopped for a while there. Gave up caring what the customer wanted, did they?" I ask, pulling the Microsoft draw card.

"NOT AT ALL!" he gasps. "No, we've spent the last three years developing a survey that was more tailored to the questions we wanted answered. And of course less likely to be... uh... skewed... by invalid criteria."

"Skewed?" I ask.

"Yes," He responds.

A meaningful pause later, he continues. "Well, you see it was found that customers were sometimes, well, *extorting* things from staff in return for good survey reports."

"You're joking!" The PFY gasps from across the room, suddenly realising the real value of a customer survey.

"Not at all!" our Rep gasps. "People would want better service."

"AND WHAT RIGHT HAVE THEY GOT TO BETTER SERVICE!?" I ask, shocked.

"Indeed!" Paul continues. "But that's not all. Sometimes they would ask for gratuities - *bribes*, in other words!"

"No!" The PFY whispers, moving closer.

"Yes! But I think the crunch came when the customers gave up on the money, and actually made the company staff compete against each other for ratings! In one case, one of our customers made a manager and an engineer race against each other down a carpark building in wheelie chairs!"

"Yes," I sigh, remembering that one fondly. "Engineer Dave versus Site Manager Tim. Dave didn't stand a chance against Tim - not with the wind resistance he'd got from all those lunchtime pints. Still, I don't think Tim believed Dave would loosen the wheels on his chair just to win. The proctologist got the handle out in the end, of course, but Tim never sat at a desk again..."

"You *knew* this?"

"*Knew* it? I *arranged* it. And I had ten quid on Dave. Always back a man with a big hammer, that's what I say."

"Well, I think you'll find this survey is a *sight* more professional!" Paul responds, customer focus blurring slightly with this revelation.

"Of course it is! Shall we start?"

"OK. First question. Which option best describes the Quality of Service you've received from your Customer Representative - that's me - in the past 12 months. A. Excellent, B. Good, C..."

"Is *crap* on the list?" The PFY butts-in, wanting some of the action.

"No, your choices are A. Excellent, B. Good, C. Average, D. Fair or E. Poor."

"E," I respond.

"E," Paul scribbles unhappily. "Now. Which option describes the Speed of Service you've received from your Customer Representative - again, me - in the past 12 months. A. Excellent, B. Good, C..."

"Is *crap* on the list?" The PFY repeats, thinking jugular.

"No! Your choices are A..."

"E," I respond.

"E," Paul sighs. "Which option best describes the Quality of New Product Information brought to you by your Customer Representative in the past 12 months. A. Excellent, B. Good, C..."

"Is *crap* on the..."

"NO!"

"E," I cry.

... Two minutes later...

"...the help in Maintenance Contracts you've received from me in the past 12 months. A. Excellent, B. Good, C. **NOCRAPISNOTONTHELIST!**"

"E."

"E." ...sigh... "Right, now onto Engineering Services. Which option best describes the Quality of Service you've received from your Engineer in the past 12 Months? A. Exc..."

"Is F***ing Brilliant on the list?" The PFY asks.

"What?"

"F***ing Brilliant - is it on the list?"

"F***ing Brilliant? From *your* Engineer? *Steve*?"

"Yeah, he's Brilliant!"

"THE MAN'S TOOLKIT CONSISTS OF A HAMMER," Paul cries. **"A BLOODY HAMMER! THAT'S ALL, JUST A HAMMER!"**

"Yes," I cry, "but when we call him out, he uses the hammer, and we get a replacement machine. With a replacement-part 12-month-from-install warranty."

"F***ing Brilliant," the PFY echoes once more.

"So you're giving *him* As and me Es?" he gasps.

"Yes."

"He's a *retard* with a *hammer*."

"He may be a retard, but he gets the job done," I respond.

"And he knows his way down a carpark building in a wheelie chair," The PFY smirks, cutting to the chase.

"So you think you can get me to race him down a carpark building? It's not going to happen!"

"Suit yourself," I respond. "But how much is a good rating worth? An extra 5k a year on your salary at *least*, leather upholstery and a litre increment in the engine capacity of the company car. Not to mention a secretary who doesn't look like a poster child for a fireworks safety campaign..."

"I-LL DO IT!"

Two hours and a couple of phone calls later, it's all on. The PFY and I slap a couple of chairs into the company van and head to the nearest carpark building...

"RIGHT, I WANT A GOOD FAIR RACE, NO CHEATING AND NO CUTTING PEOPLE OFF," I cry. "Winner is the first person we see come out the exit on the ground floor. You've got three floors to go, and remember to keep left on the corners. **ARE YOU READY?! TAKE YOUR MARKS... GO!**"

A sprint and some scraping sounds later, they're off and down the first ramp. The PFY and I take our places gazing over the side at the exit ramp.

"Ten quid says Paul's the first out!" The PFY cries, "he looks sneaky!"

"You're on!" I cry.

One floor below we hear the chairs scrape by at speed.

"What do you know that I don't know?" The PFY blurts, reconsidering the bet.

"All sorts of things. Care to up your bet?"

"OK! 50 quid on Steve first out."

"You're on!"

"**NO! A HUNDRED!**" the PFY cries, realising reverse psychology for what it is. "**ON PAUL!**"

"OK!" I cry, realising that there's only seconds left.

"**WHAT DO YOU KNOW?!**" the PFY gasps.

"Where the van's parked..."

"Where the Van's p..." The PFY starts, stopping at the sound of a couple of distant thuds.

"Oooh look!" I cry, pointing. "I think that's Steve's chair that's just popped out the door. With it's handle missing. That must be 100 quid you owe me."

"You bastard!"

"In the flesh, 100 quid richer, and ready for the next survey..."

Bastard Security Troubleshooter

BOFH 2001 Episode 21

Published Friday 31st August 2001 21:23 GMT

So the PFY and I rock on into work after lunch one day, pausing only to drop the pint glasses off with Security, noticing as we pass The Boss hobnobbing with the Head Security bloke.

I don't like it.

In fact it's high on the list of things that I don't like, nestled between slave traders and the Austin Princess as a mode of transport. (But still waaaaay down the list from OS2 fans...)

The only time The Boss ever hobnobs is when he wants something, and the only thing he could possibly want from the Head of Security, (apart from pointers on how to sleep with his eyes open), is information generally related to security i.e. who's been sneaking into the cloakroom and writing "Kick me" on the back of his anorak before he jumps on the tube home.

It seems obvious now that I'm going to have to ditch the visitor swipe card and Impact Marker that have served me so well...

Ah well.

We glide back to Mission Control in time to find the Head of IT wandering about the place with a distracted look on his face.

"Ah!" he blurts as we enter. "Just the persons!"

In between "Beancounters" and "Personnel Disorganisers" on the list is also "IT Managers - pleased to see you". It doesn't bode well.

"Listen, I've got this proposal here which I'd like you two to have a quick shuftly at, and tell me if it's accurate, and if the major conclusion is justified?"

He hands over a piece of paper which is obviously the handiwork of the boss. Of course, the coffee ring on the bottom is his de facto Seal of Office and a dead giveaway, but the grammar and lack of punctuation nail the lid firmly down.

I glance over the document, (which would still only be a C+ paper in an "English as a Second Language" course) and it all falls into place.

The Boss has, because of the spate of IIS vulnerabilities in the recent past, raised the issue of contracting a "Security Officer" to make sure our site is up-to-scratch on the anti-intrusion front.

I read on as he puts the slipper into The PFY and I when we're down by saying we can't possibly keep pace with the vulnerabilities in the software we support with our other workload.

ACTUALLY, I'm hurt! After all the effort I put into exploiting the problem noted in the latest CERT document to slap a photoshopped-up image of him *in flagrante* with a sack of potatoes!!

No-one appreciates an artist.

"I think we're perfectly capable of keeping the systems secure!" I blurt.

"So secure that an animated picture of me in a tutu managed to replace the corporate logo three weeks ago?" our Manager snaps.

I'd forgotten about that. Now **THAT** was craftsmanship.

"It slipped in before a patch for the server software was available" I cry, "I..."

"I don't want to **HEAR** it!" he interrupts. "It wasn't reported for a week, and then it wasn't removed for another three days!! What sort of system is that?"

I figure that the answer "A system that waits for the PFY to come back from holiday so he can have a laugh" isn't the answer he's fishing for, and decide to keep mum...

Ah well...

Two days later the Security Troubleshooter arrives, complete with Khaki Safari Suit. Very Old School Cloak and Dagger.

"Hello chaps," he says, at the end of The Boss's whirlwind tour of the office and Mission Control. "I take it you're the people I should be talking to about the config of the Firewall and Web servers in the first instance. Can you make a meeting... tomorrow, at say... 9am to go over that?"

"9am," I murmur out loud, not really wanting to break the habit of a lifetime and come in early... "What about 10:30?"

"No, no - bright and early - on a limited time budget and all that. 10 till 11 tomorrow I'm meeting the In-house security to go over other points. 9am sounds good."

"You can get stuffed," I respond, never being an exacerbator, despite what The PFY calls me when he thinks he's out of earshot...

"I beg your pardon??!"

"I said I'd be chuffed!" I respond.

"Excellent, and where should I put this?"

...ONE MINUTE LATER . .

"I said he should stick it in his **OFFICE!**" I say to The Boss in response to his summons, "Why, what did he think he heard?"...

TWO DAYS LATER.

"..and Nessus had detected several glaring vulnerabilities in some of the lesser known web services, an anonymous ftp site with write access to the world which appears to be stuffed with porn, and finally a mail service which responds to any email message with a virus.."

"That would be the one we use when we have to supply an email address to any service which claims it doesn't add your contact details to any list" the PFY adds.

"Yes," he responds dryly. "Anyway, as a result, I have secured the servers concerned, applied all the latest server an OS patch levels. I've also cleaned up the immoral and illegal content"

"My porn archive!" The PFY gasps sadly.

"All on backup tapes," I console him. Speaking of consoling, I also console the consultant, using a real console.

"Sorry about that" I murmur, picking the 19inch monster off his foot. "Dreadfully clumsy of me. Meant to return it to its owner earlier in the day after the Police returned it."

"Police?" he responds, true to form. "Why?"

"Oh stocktaking. You know, staff theft. We get a lot of it around here - almost every day if we're honest. Someone backs their car up to the disused Service Bay by the freight elevator and slips off with one piece of equipment or the other."

"And what happened with the prosecution?"

"Well, to have an airtight case, someone has to actually **WITNESS** them stealing it, and I'm not hanging around in an abandoned service pit all bloody night."

"What about CCTV?"

"No point, the service bay is supposedly never used."

"Right then, I'll do it! I've infrared kit I brought back from Nigeria. I'll have your proof in no time!!"

Two days later..

"..and he never came back?" The Boss asks.

"No, he mentioned something about Nigeria and Malaria, and that was that."

...

"I feel a bit sorry for him," The PFY blurts.

"Nonsense!" I respond, pointing at the IR CCTV monitor. "Look, he's found those old pot noodles. That should keep him going another day! And he's still got 1/2 a cup of urine left. **LUXURY!**"

"I still..."

"OK, well we are a bit strapped of things to do. Tell you what, you can choose what you want to do, let him out before he goes insane, OR, restore your porn archive?"

"I'll get the backup tapes..."

Ah well.

BOFH: Cardiac Arrest or Cancer?

BOFH 2001 Episode 22

Published Thursday 16th August 2001 16:41 GMT

"The Boss is looking a bit pale," The PFY comments as The Boss rolls into work at a very sedate pace.

"Yep," I respond, knowing the full details. "Funeral yesterday. Another one of his PDP-11 mates has gone to the great archive in the sky."

"Heart Attack?" The PFY asks, naming the number one killer of IT managers.

"Yep, Apparently the old ticker gave out when he overexerted himself."

"Refilling the paper tray on the printer?" The PFY asks, trying to find an explanation for our Boss's inability to perform such a simple task (outside of the obvious - he's a lazy bastard).

"No, even more exertion than that!" I respond.

"Internet Porn Marathon?!"

"More still..."

"Not..."

"Yes!"

"He used the stairwell!!!"

"Indeed. They found him between the Management and Lunchroom floors after about a week of looking. If there hadn't been a fire drill he may not have been found for months!"

"That's terrible!"

"Indeed it is! The Boss is going to be a right pain!"

"What?"

"He's got the phobia. He's going to be annoying!"

"**MORE** annoying, I think you mean. But what phobia?"

"Well he's realised he's in the danger zone - again. He'll get worried, concerned, then set his mind to the task and try and get healthier in any way possible."

"Taking vitamins?"

"Yes. But not just that. He'll start walking at lunchtimes, eating vegetables and low fat foods, etc."

"It doesn't really sound so bad," The PFY interrupts.

"That bit isn't. But then he'll stop coming to the pub on Friday evenings.."

"No more shouts?!!!"

"That is but the tip of the iceberg. Think instead - no subliminal messaging.."

"Wha?"

"The hypnosis tracks we recorded 6 minutes into his Wet!Wet!Wet! Cassette for his tube ride home."

"?"

"The ones about him being attracted to blondes with big bazookies..."

"?!"

"When you wanted to get some Internet porn but didn't want to waste the time browsing for it yourself and thought you'd get them off his web cache."

"**OH YES**, I remember now. But it's not like **NEED** more piccies!"

"Again, Iceberg tip stuff. If he's healthier, he'll start coming in earlier. He might even go on tours of the building as exercise, claiming he needs to 'keep in touch'. Before we know what's happening, he'll start visiting clients - and you know that'll just lead to trouble."

"How do you think so many moves ahead?"

"Seen it before. It's always the same. A mate pops his clogs and the next thing you know it's change-your-life New-Year's-resolution-mid-year time."

"Yuhuh.." The PFY scoffs, doubtfully.

"Just check out this early morning brew for me will you?" I ask - directing The PFY to the coffee machine.

"I can't believe it!" The PFY snorts. "He put artificial sweetener in his tea instead of his normal three lumps of sugar."

"Artificial Sweetener?" I Conan Doyle, "Told you so. But now for a **real** test."

The real test is a sneaky one. I leave a couple of unattended chocolate eclairs on a desk outside his room, but as bad luck would have it, his Health Resolution has cut in early and he ignores them in favour of getting to know some people downstairs under the auspices of client liaison..

"This is serious!" The PFY blurts, looking at the To-do list The Boss dragged back up the stairs with him. "He wants us to go out and 'hold the client's hands' while they check their backup software is working. For 'client confidence'..."

"Just wait till morning tea."

Morning tea rolls around, and some selfish bastard has eaten the two eclairs, which, I might add, were very tasty. The PFY and I try and tempt The Boss with choccy biccies, but he's got immunity from them with couple of slices of unadulterated wholemeal bread as his afternoon repast. The sick bastard.

"Someone's got to do something!!!" The PFY gasps, on the verge of panic "He's talking about chairing a client liaison **MEETING**, Today at 4pm."

"**IN PUB TIME!**" I shout. "**OVER MY DEAD BODY!**"

THAT LUNCHTIME

"Just the steamed vegetables for me I think," The Boss sighs quietly

"Not having any of the Onion Bhajis then?" The PFY blurts, ladling a pile of them onto his plate, according to plan.

"No, not today."

"And a good idea too", I add, slapping a dozen or so onto my plate, "Not the best thing to be eating - full of cholesterol! I just wish I had your willpower, but no. I just see them there, think of the juicy spice of them and can't help myself. That lovely flavour! I wish I could - but I can't. Oh, and look, Butter Chicken on the menu too - I really respect you for that!"

I ladle myself out a more than generous portion of the aforementioned dish, letting the sauce ooze all over the Bhajis...

The Boss's mask of indifference weakens slightly, but he doesn't crack, bless him. Mentally, however, I'm recalling that scene in Das Boot where the submarine is waaaaaaaay out of its depth and the hull's starting to crack..

..just 10 more metres...

Leading himself not into temptation, The Boss makes a break for the healthy beancounter (and beaneater) section of the lunchroom, leaving us to our just (and cream filled) desserts. I trot on over with The PFY in tow and pop down beside him.

The meals of the guys around us are disgusting - all greens, no carbos, no fats. All that's taken care of in the diet supplement they get at the Gym. Even The Boss's meal looks like decadence.

"How's it going lads?" I blurt, chumming up to the muscle boys of numbers. "I say, is that a **WHOLE** lettuce leaf??!!! Those hormone tablets must be playing up if you're eating for **TWO!!**"

The silence is deafening, although in the background I can hear the tiniest of high-pitched whines from what I assume is a cattle prod under The PFY's lunchtray... And then...

"Did you want something?" one of them asks.

"No, no, just some advice. You blokes certainly know how to look after yourselves."

"Compared to some," another legumecounter sneers, looking down at my curryfest.

"Yes, yes. But anyway is it true what I hear about all those artificial sweeteners being linked with the big C?"

The Boss' expression changes slightly, and I wonder if I've lost a small piece of my humanity for being so cruel.

"Coreldraw?" The PFY asks.

"No, Cancer" I explain politely.

"Oh yes," one of them cries, jumping on what must be his personal hobby horse (there's always one) and taking it for a gallop. "You may as well eat **WEEDKILLER** as artificial sweeteners! It's so carcinogenic that a recent... **OHMIGOODNESS, HE'S FAINTED!**"

All eyes turn to The Boss, who's face down in my meal, splashing butter chicken sauce all over my new Adminspotting t-shirt.

"Fainting people don't chew," The PFY notes.

The Boss takes a break from my meal to come up for air.

"You're a mess!" I observe, "And in no fit state for that client liaison meeting this afternoon. Should I reschedule the meeting for tomorrow morning?"

"F--- em!" The Boss murmurs.

"Welcome back sir," The PFY says, extending his hand.

And they all lived happily ever after.

It's BOFH Disaster Recovery Time

BOFH 2001 Episode 23

Published Monday 10th September 2001 17:21 GMT

It's Thursday, Payday, and The Boss has his bee in a bonnet about something. You can tell, because he's wandering around outside the office rehearsing his lines like a C-grade actor.

"Morning, How are we all?" he Lou-Diamond-Phillips' us.

"Hello!" The PFY responds graciously, dragging a chair over for The Boss to join our morning coffee circle.

"Ah - I've just been reading a report from the Company Auditors," he starts, ignoring an unprecedented show of respect by The PFY.

"Really, and what did they have to say?" The PFY asks conversationally, leaning forward to feign interest like a professional.

"Well **APPARENTLY**, we don't have a Disaster plan - and without one, they won't give us an A double plus rating!"

"The **BASTARDS!**" The PFY gasps. "But wait a minute, I thought we had a disaster plan?"

"We have several, in fact," I respond, "although I don't believe the auditors have ever discussed the matter with us - so perhaps that's where the problem has arisen."

"Really?" The Boss blurts. "Well, I'd have to put my hand up and admit I talked to them about it, but didn't realise that you'd put work into it!"

"I'd like to think I've devoted part of my **LIFE** to it!" I respond, with just a hint of emotion bubbling under the surface.

"I see. Well would you mind running over a few of your options then?"

"By all means! Check out this white board. Plan One, for instance, is to start a fire in the basement furniture storage room, which, once it gets a hold, would move on through the non-fire-rated wall into the backup generator room, which has a heeeeeeeuge tank of diesel in it. Once that baby gets going, it's all ov.."

"Ah, no. I think I mean.."

"Ok, not what you're looking for - bear with me. What about we drop something really heavy on the gas main where it comes into the building? It's just a matter of time 'til a spark wi...

"**NO!** I don't want to **CAUSE** a disaster, I want to **FIX** one!"

"Microsoft Out, Linux in then?"

"Pardon?!"

"I think he's talking about Disaster **RECOVERY** planning," The PFY adds helpfully.

"**OH I SEE!**" I gush. "You want to know about the plans to fix up the place when something terrible happens!"

"**YES!**" The Boss blurts. "And we're on a tight timeframe for this as we need to get rated before the end of the month!"

"Oh, OK," I murmur sagely. "So you'd like to know what we'd do in a disaster?"

"**YES!!!!**"

"OK, well obviously it depends on the disaster."

"Yes, yes, but what's the plan in case of a large fire?"

"Well first and foremost, if we're in the building at the time, whichever of us is closest goes into the computer room and disables the Halon lockout."

"And the other person?"

"They run to the Beancounters area and instruct them all to stay away from windows, and place themselves in the safe areas under tables, in doorways or in cupboards."

"Uh, isn't that the procedure for an Earthquake?"

"Not for Beancounters, no. The Beancounter earthquake procedure is..." I reply, handing over to The PFY.

"...is to stand in the safe areas in front of heavy bookcases, underneath large, heavy objects, or beside plate glass windows."

"**EXACTLY!**" I cry.

"I don't think you've really thought about that," The Boss comments.

"Oh no, we've thought about it alright. Just check out the **EMERGENCY PROCEDURE** pages in their internal phone book. I'm especially proud of the Bomb Scare section."

"Is that the one where they run straight at the armed police screaming 'You'll never take me alive you bastards!'" The PFY asks.

"The very same!"

"I **LOVE** that bit!"

"Moving right along," The Boss continues, preferring to ignore that quagmire for a moment. "What I'm after is a plan for how we **RECOVER** our services once the immediate danger is over."

"I believe the plan is that we wander on into work and take whatever action seems appropriate after a survey of the site, the damage, and the services to the building," I respond.

"That's not a plan!"

"Yes it is! It's a great plan!" The PFY replies defensively "You paid for me to go to a three day disaster recovery course to learn about that!"

"But didn't they cover... uh.. >scrabble< 'Hot Sites'?" he asks, referring to his notes.

"**DID THEY WHAT!** There was this strip club down the road from my hotel..."

"**WHERE YOU CAN RUN YOUR OPERATIONS FROM!!**"

"Oh them! Yes, they mentioned them, but it's a disaster - we wouldn't have the data on hand to recover from! Let alone the database version installed on their kit to run it. **IF** we don't get bumped down the chain a bit because we're not the hot site's number one customer - and let's face it, if we're up against some Investment Banking group, we won't have the money to buy our way in."

"We don't have the data?" The Boss asks, avoiding the real issues like a pro. "We pay three thousand quid a year for an offsite tape service! They come every day! Sometimes **TWICE** a day! I've seen them!!!"

Now wouldn't be the time to tell The Boss that the tape bloke's delivering tapes alright, but the tapes in question come from his local video shop in Bromley.

"And a good service it is too!" I respond. "But in a real disaster, the roads and public transport will be up the pole, **IF** the Data service is allowed back in **THEIR** building to get the media for us. **IF** we're **THEIR** number one customer...."

"So we're screwed whatever we do?" The Boss sighs.

"Yep - that's why it's called a disaster. We only have personal recovery plans here."

"Which are?"

"Send each other's contracting companies bust by suing each other for negligence before this company can get to us. Then hide in the Third World (Liverpool) till the noise dies down, and get a new contract with another company."

"I see..... Could **I** get a copy of that please?"

"Sure, Not a problem!"

BOFH, the Helldesk and the Novel

BOFH 2001 Episode 24

Published Saturday 6th October 2001 08:07 GMT

Despite our best efforts, The PFY and I occasionally get asked back for a quick stand-in on the Helldesk. Today, it's because they're all taking the day off to tell each other how good they are at their jobs and have a group fondle under the guise of "trust exercises".

Normally I would have put up a bit of a protest at the reshuffle; however it's nearing contract renegotiation time and **should** a major outage occur, the crucial nature of our work would be reinforced. Still, that's a couple of hours away yet, if that cheap mechanical timer can be trusted...

Meantime the helpdesk crew all traipse out to some non-confrontational, spirulina-peddling, huggy-feely place in town..

Luckily, The PFY and I have a stable working relationship based on mutual trust and respect, backed up by the fear of high voltage...T

Looking back, the [Good-Helldesk-Person/Bad-Helldesk-Person routine](#) several weeks ago went well, with The PFY winning out of sheer staying-power by reducing the changeover period to a matter of seconds until I resembled a manic depressive. But that's all over now, with The Boss emphasising the concept of Professionalism. I ask if it's the same type of Professional that Jean Reno played, but he misses that bus completely...

"Hello," I say, picking up the first call for the morning and noting that the number brings up the "Difficult Customer" icon on the Digital Console - which The PFY and I only assign to particularly annoying types (and which the Helldesk was told means priority call - pffft!)

"Hi, I was wondering if you have some way of locking my computer?"

"I'm sorry, but the OS2 install media was taken off me several weeks ago. Why not try Netscape 6.0 - I've heard very good things about that."

"So it'll secure my machine?"

"**SECURE?** Oh. My mistake! Why not just 'Lock Computer' from the CTRL-ALT-DEL options?"

"Because then an administrator can just override it and login to my machine and access my personal files!"

"As opposed to powercycling the machine and logging in that way?"

"The machine won't start without the password!"

"So they'd have to reset the NVRAM, then powercycle it."

"You can't, the cover's locked by a password too," he responds smugly.

Si->clickety<-gh

"Well it seems that you've thought of everything," I concur, sneaking into his administrative C\$ share with a custom admin tool of my own design, which pops up a list of the non-standard contents of his machine. "Private, as in protecting... >click-click<.. *The Summer Romance - by Sharon Thwaite*.' "

The stifled gasp down the end of the line can only mean one thing, **paydirt!**

"You're hiding soft porn for housewives?!?"

"**MY NOVEL!**" he says defensively.

>clickety-click<</p>

"Well **TECHNICALLY** it's the **Company's** Novel," I correct. "As is **all** data on corporate machines. It's part of your employment contract. But I'll sell it to you for 10 quid!"

"And a packet of crisps," The PFY cries hungrily. "Salt and Vinegar!"

A quick clickety-scrabble is enough to convince him that the file in question is no longer where he left it.

"You've deleted it?"

"Have you got a backup?" I ask.

"I don't trust Backups. The Operators just read through your stuff. They've done it before!"

"Indeed they have," The PFY responds, conferencing himself in on the call. "They do all sorts of things. Remember that time you tried to get off that parking ticket by sending email to the council parking authority? Only the message mysteriously got changed to a picture of two baboons having sex with the message 'Parking Police are inbreds' on it."

"They followed me for weeks after that," he snuffles. "They painted yellow lines on the road under my car after it was parked then towed it away - three times."

"Those operators really are **BASTARDS** aren't they?" The PFY murmurs, suppressing a giggle and digging a nice, big hole.

"Yes they are!"

"Was that before or after you complained about their reluctance to clean the dust out of your machine because you'd read it was a fire hazard."

"I.."

"Or was that just after the time you reported them for piracy for running a game on two machines?"

"It **WAS** pirated! And they were playing it in work time! And they wouldn't help me with my problem."

"That was the problem about glare on your screen when you moved you monitor, wasn't it?"

"Yes, but how did you kno... oh..."

"Yes", The PFY says in response to the unspoken revelation.

"And now you've deleted a year's worth of my work!" he sniffles.

"No, no, we're just keeping it safe. Like we do with all **Company** data. We're professionals! So we'll look after it till the company has no need for it any more, then..."

"**You mustn't touch it!** - It's the final revision!!! I'm mailing it to the publishers this afternoon!" he gasps.

"If you're mailing it, why on earth would you need to secure it?" The PFY asks.

"Because I have to go to the mail centre and get some stamps!"

"Not in company time surely?!" I ask, feigning company loyalty like a trooper.

"Of course not," he pinnochios. "I was going to wait till lunchtime"

"We can but hope the company needs your data till then, but..." The PFY adds.

"I'll just get the crisps!!!" our user cries as the receiver clatters home.

...

"It's not much cop" The PFY says, scrolling through the text. "It needs something..."

"An extra chapter perhaps?"

"With furry woodland creatures?" The PFY asks evilly.

"Why not! And I'll concentrate on extending the overall vocab to include words like 'knob', 'love-truncheon', 'blue-veined junket pumper,' and the like!"

"By the time we're finished it'll be top of the best-seller list at the Amsterdam Fetish Festival!!!" The PFY chortles.

"Good point - must give Piet a quick call!!!"

It's true what they say - You have to **MAKE** your dreams come true...

Losing Your Edge? Take The BOFH Test

BOFH 2001 Episode 25

Published Wednesday 26th September 2001 07:17 GMT

It's been a while and rumors are that you're losing your edge! DO you still know what a full set of service manuals is, and how hard to hit a user with them when they're annoying you?

This simple test MAY help you get your edge back.

1. You get into work at 8:17am to find someone waiting for you impatiently. Everyone knows you start at 8:30am after you've finished the paper, but they're new and you feel sorry for them. You:

- A. Sort out their problem
- B. Tell them about your normal start time, then sort out their problem
- C. Stick to Routine so as not to upset the rest of the day
- D. Read the paper till 9:00am, just to make a point
- E. Educate them on how long "just a few minutes" is using only a trip to the Computer room and the Halon system as teaching aids.

2. A user who's been pissing around with the internals of their desktop machine "Just to find out how it ticks" should be called:

- A. A Hacker
- B. A Tinkerer
- C. A Cracker
- D. A Techie
- E. An Ambulance. Eventually

3. The movie about someone who pissed off their System Administrator was called:

- A. The Net
- B. Matrix

- C. Mary Poppins
- D. Pride and Prejudice
- E. Death Wish II

4. You're at a curry house with your Boss, a Salesperson and one of the Beancounters. Your greatest concern is:

- A. The beancounter stuffing up the excellent deal you've just got
- B. Your breath being whiffy after lunch
- C. Getting back to the office on time
- D. How many Cold Kingfishers you can get down in an hour
- E. How to slip a fistful of chopped chilli into the Beancounter's meal with no-one noticing

.5. Health and Safety droids visit your workplace and are murmuring about how it constitutes an extreme health hazard. They're obviously:

- A. Talking about the sharp edges on the metal cabinets
- B. Thinking about the open power supply on the box you're mending
- C. Wondering about lifted floor tiles in the computer room
- D. Shocked about the lack of external ventilation
- E. Unaware that you swapped the "Door Release" and "Halon Release" buttons just before they entered the computer room.

6. It's your favourite Engineer's birthday and you're going to get him the present he most wants in the whole world, which is:

- A. A demagnetised, insulated shaft, posidrive subminiature screwdriver with his name engraved on it
- B. A Ladybird "Beginners Electronics" book
- C. A "Windows for Dummies" Book

- D. A service guide for the equipment he's supposed to be able to fix
- E. A bigger hammer.

7. It's the third time a user has contacted in the same week to say they've forgotten their password. You:

- A. Change it for them
- B. Change it to something like "Iloveanalsexooohyes"
- C. B., then disable their ability to change it
- D. C., then fudge their login window to echo the password to screen
- E. D, then get out the soldering iron and your "Duffer's Guide to Tattooing" book.

8. Your boss comes in to talk to you about the amount of time you spend surfing the web. You:

- A. Admit that you may be rather excessive
- B. A, but say it's all work related
- C. Deny everything
- D. Deny everything, and finger someone else for the traffic
- E. Admit it, say you promise to browse more, then flash the smutty-cache log info about, saying you'll name names.

9. Someone has lost the keys to the tape safe. You're extremely concerned because:

- A. You'll have nowhere to secure the backups
- B. You won't be able to get to the backups if they're needed
- C. You didn't know there **were** keys to the tape safe
- D. The buyer is going to be here any day!
- E. The contents of your liquor cabinet might be up for grabs!!!

10. You're at a user group meeting when someone questions your frequent use of high voltage as a fault finding tool. You:

- A. Agree never to use it again
- B. Agree only to use it via a "Megger" tester
- C. B, and never on Data circuits
- D. C, nor on phone circuits as well
- E. B and C, so long as testicles are still included

But where's the key?

Like most instructional exams, there's NO right answer, only answers that you should be struck about the head with a sockful of your own dung for using. Unless you're a certified MCSE person, in which case the answer to this and every other exam will be supplied to you in easily digestible chunks.

Thank you for calling Bastard Support. You are caller number 473. Your call will be handled in a similar order to the way cards get dealt in Freecell.

Arise Sir BOFH

BOFH 2001 Episode 26

Published Monday 8th October 2001 09:58 GMT

"It sounds bad," The Boss comments, as we trundle off to meet the HR types. "A matter of some concern, they said."

No doubt it's something crucial like the colour of their fileshare server or the background image on the wallpaper on their desktops...

...

As it happens, I was completely wrong. The matter of some concern is in fact a matter of some concern!

"It's his Resume, Ron," the HR Droid says, indicating a stack of fiction worthy of the Bard himself. "As a matter of policy we perform background checks on all contractors who join the company."

That's news to me, but given the recent history of the non-recoverability of some files of the HR Droid concerned, I'm sure he made a special effort on my part.

Which was good of him.

"Ah... Yes - but that **was** a fair amount of time ago now..." I respond.

"Quite. Only we were unable to verify many of your details because the referees you mentioned were unavailable - being out of the country in tax exile, in a coma, or deceased."

"Ah Yes, poor old Richard Nixon - or Dick as we called him. A good man despite everything you know."

"Nyes..." The HR droid comments doubtfully. "However, as it happens the personnel officer of the large international computing company you mentioned in your resume made an **amazing** recovery the other day, so we were able to verify your claims to being the chief behind-the-scenes advisor in their major product lines.."

"Good, that's a relief."

"He says he's never heard of you!"

"Really? Well, head trauma is a funny one - one moment you're with it, the next you can't remember your own..."

"Neither do any of his staff."

"Well it **WAS** quite hush-hush. Still, I'm a little hurt he's forgotten me. Maybe that's why I never got those royalties payments? Still, forgive and forget, that's what I say!" I respond magnanimously.

"Yes, speaking of **ROYAL** ties, this lack of character witnesses does cast a little doubt on some of the other claims in your Resume," the HR drone snivels.

"Like what for instance?" I ask, Perry Masoning away.

"Your Knighthood?"

"You've got a **KNIGHTHOOD?!?**" The Boss gasps disbelievingly

"Of course."

"I've looked - he's lying", the HR Drone blurts unkindly.

"Really? You checked on www.bofhknighthood.com?" I respond, not to be put off.

"bofhknighthood dot com?" The Boss asks.

"Yes, home of the bastard knighthood!"

"Bastard knighthoods don't count!" the HR geek snaps, not a happy man.

"Of course they do!" The PFY cries, entering the office from his loiter-holding pattern outside.
"I'm Sir Steven of the Daisy Wheel Printer!"

"This is ridiculous!"

"No it's not!" I cry, not wanting to be negative, but being forced into it.

"It is - there's no societal precedent!"

"There is now!"

"There's no ceremony!"

"Yes there is! I was knighted with the silver ball peen hammer in front of an audience of my peers!" The PFY adds.

"Peers?"

"Of The Kerberos Realm!"

"It's ridiculous!" the HR bloke shouts, not liking this tangent one little bit. "Steven's obviously in cahoots with him!"

SIR Steven," I correct.

"So what's **your** knighthood then?" The Boss asks, muddying the water a little by humouring me.

"I'm actually a Knight of the ergonomic table - It's like the round table, only more comfortable to sit at."

"I see. And you went to a ceremony?"

"I was unable to attend - due to work commitments. So they posted notification to me."

"I see. And what authority confers these titles?"

"That would be the King of Bastards."

"You, perhaps?" The Boss enquires drily..

"As it happens, Yes!"

"Right! Well, I don't really see that this is worth pursuing," The Boss comments decisively as he trundles out of the office.

...

"You still can't **do** that!" The HR type snivels seconds later.

"Of course I can! I'm the King!"

"I'm afraid we don't accept your credentials," The HR type interjects. "Which, as you lied in your application, puts your position at risk."

"Isn't that **HIGH TREASON!?**" The PFY asks, having waited for this moment for over a minute.

"No no, High Treason is only during a state of War." I say, motioning The PFY to put the hammer down. "This is just normal treason.."

"Ah!"

"But this helpful HR chappy has a point! It **might** be construed that the information in my application might be misleading. And as such I feel **compelled** to submit my resignation to my employer. . . ."

...

"And?" the HR Droid asks after 10 seconds of silence.

"Well I did, and he didn't accept it."

"He?"

"Yes, me. As Director of the private company that contracts to you. I feel my employee should possibly have clarified his credentials further, and am disappointed in his actions. Obviously, I will be docking his pay to teach him a lesson. I may even award myself a bonus in my Director's fees for my quick and professional manner in which I resolved the situation. A professionalism which will of course be reflected in the hourly rate I will be requiring next contract renegotiation time. Which just leaves the matter of Treason..."

..One Hour Later...

"Obviously we don't want to make a big production out of it," the Boss bumbles to the head of HR sadly, indicating the PFY's swollen cheek. "But when it comes to common assault.."

"Indeed" the Director of HR agrees. "And he just hit him? No provocation?"

"None" the PFY, Boss and I respond in unison.

"Well, I suppose I'll have to have a word with him. And you don't want to pursue this... legally?"

"Well, I think it's only the Company that would suffer," The PFY replies.

"Yes, I suppose you're right." he sighs, "Very well."

...

"I have to admit that I didn't think Ron would go for it - just to save a quid or so on your hourly rate." the PFY comments, as we break for the CCTV monitor to watch the "firing squad" first hand.

"SirRon, I think you mean."

"Ah," The PFY blurts (penny dropping) "of the....?"

"..of the OS2 install media."

"An appropriately weighty title indeed.. "

"Yes, I thought so."

I Spy with my Bastard Eye

BOFH 2001 Episode 27

Published Sunday 21st October 2001 12:11 GMT

I murmur, glancing sneakily around the office, "with my little eye, something beginning with... **E**."

"Explosion!" The PFY responds, eager for anything to relieve the tedium.

"You can't **SEE** an explosion!" I state.

"I beg to differ. Fancy a practical demo?"

"Ah, no. Not really. But anyway, you don't **SEE** an explosion, you **WITNESS** an explosion."

"But **SEEING** it is **HOW** you witness it," The PFY explains.

"But what if you only heard it?" I ask, obviously just as bored as The PFY is with the day's activities.

"That's splitting hairs - but let's ask the panel... Do you **SEE** an explosion, or do you **WITNESS** an explosion?"

"Why?" The Boss asks, wandering in nervously, no doubt wishing that he'd taken an early morning tea.

"It's just a discussion we're having..."

"Yes, but **WHY** are you having that discussion?"

"Oh, just.. general interest. So do you **SEE** an explosion, or **WITNESS** an explosion?"

"Both, I suppose. Are you sure this isn't related to something?"

"No no, we were involved in an elementary diagnosis training routine based on atypical environment monitoring when the subject came up."

"Yes. Right! Well, I think that's about all for now then.."

The Boss wanders off distractedly, while I have to admit to being slightly confused.

"What was that about?"

"Mmm?" The PFY asks, scratching something down on a clipboard.

"He came in for something, then left?"

"I'm guessing Stack Overflow."

"?"

"Stack Overflow. You know, when people hear something they should remember, or something they don't understand, they push it onto their mental stack. Too many items on the stack, they stack overflow and lose everything."

"I BLOODY INVENTED IT," I cry. "Of course I know about it. But that was only two things!!!"

"Yes I know. It would seem that he's particularly stack sensitive as of late."

"So you overloaded him on purpose?"

"Yeah well, there was blood in the water..."

"Why?"

"Why not?"

"You must have had a reason!"

"Well it's an experiment I'm doing," The PFY explains. "I'm trying to find the exact point of cutoff - where he changes over from Interested to Mental-Power-Save mode. It's quite an art form. You can almost hear the >click< sometimes..."

"And the aim of the experiment is?"

"Well, it's more an extended form of Bastard research really. I'm looking at what particular circumstances cause Stack Faults, and how they can be caused. Obviously with the aim of **preventing** future occurrences.."

"Yes, I'm sure," I respond, doubting The PFY's altruism at this point.

"It's true, it's a carefully plotted experiment! I've found that varying the stacking method and circumstances can enhance the effect.."

"Like how?" I ask, slightly intrigued now - and let's face it - still bored.

"Allow me to elaborate," he said, getting into the swing of his research like a sad geeky bastard. Which I have to admit he is - in certain areas anyway. "We have subject A, who for the sake of argument, we'll call The Boss."

"No he's not!" I argue.

"Yes, very droll. So, we have subject A, and we introduce him to several concepts he's not heard of before - say 'Threadsafe Programming', 'Source-based Routing' and, say, 'Personal Hygiene'.

He Stack Overflows as the third unknown item is pushed onto his stack - but in a soft manner - possibly just forgetting what he's doing momentarily."

"Yes..." I agree, having observed the phenomenon several times, and instigated it far more times.

"**BUT!** Perhaps we introduce some element of urgency into the situation beforehand, say 'The Head if IT wants you to brief him in 10 minutes about the following...'. The speed and type of overflow changes dramatically. He barely makes two items before overflowing, and the symptoms are more disorientating."

"You've been working on this a while haven't you?" I ask, pityingly.

"I even have a chart!"

"Why did I think you would."

"Ah, but just look at it."

The PFY hands over his clipboard, which bears a large graph with multicoloured 'X's marked on it in varying places.

"What are the Axes?" I ask, as my interest grows.

"X Axis is level of extra Stimulus, Y Axis is Number of Stack items."

"Ah yes, I see, a definite downward curve. Hang on a minute! He got four items with a... mid-range extra stimulus."

"Yes, he was carrying a notepad which I didn't see!"

"What a cheat," I commiserate.

"Yes, upset my research for a moment there. Lucky his pencil lead broke when I said 'Gay Porn' or the whole thing would have gone awry. But I still can't seem to crack the single item Stack Overflow barrier."

"What have you tried?"

"The usual, threats of unemployment - job cuts and management cull, Pay reduction, Personal Ridicule, you name it."

"I see. Mind if I have a crack?"

"Be my guest!"

Striking while the research iron is hot, I sneak onto an Erotic Story Archive Server, grab something raunchy and confessional, tailor the names and places to correspond vaguely to The Boss's secretary, then send him a copy, with a 'From' address from her.

As expected, The Boss queues up a copy to the printer in a processor cycle, and rips off to the printer to make sure that no-one intercepts it. By some stroke of misfortune however, there seems to be a print queue problem and the job ends up stuck in the queue.

"Something seems to be wrong with the print queue outside my office," he blurts quickly, ducking in the door and out again in case the queue starts while he's absent.

"Yes, I know," I respond, faking concern. "The Head of IT's been onto me about it already. "

"Really? Why?" he gasps.

"Oh, apparently he's got some document stuck on it too."

"There was nothing in the queue!"

"No, it must have been a small job, so it's probably stuck in the printer somewhere. I'll pop over and soft-reset it in a sec to make sure we don't lose anything"

"Ah. Well tell you what, why not just cancel my job for me?"

"I would if I could, but the queue seems to be ReadOnly for some reason." I respond, telling The Boss what he already found out about 100 clicks on ABORT previously.

"Perhaps we should just turn the printer off?"

"No, that's the worst thing - the queue could get confused about the job status and just keep queueing your job, over and over."

[Sometimes I hate myself]

"Hey, isn't that the printer starting up no.." The PFY adds as The Boss sprints off.

"You mean bastard," I say, as The Boss returns from the false alarm.

"It's **RESEARCH!!!**" The PFY snaps back defensively

"I spose you're right," I concur, upping the priority of a job that's just popped into the queue and releasing it for printing. At the sound of the printer starting, The Boss rips back to the device, grabs the printout and tears it up before the secretary can collect it.

"It's obviously stuck on that queue," I say to The Boss, when he realises his error and trundles back to Mission Control at top speed. "Tell you what, why don't I re-queue it to this printer here and see if it goes through."

"Ah, OK," The Boss says, as he notices the Head of IT chatting with the secretary - no doubt about The Boss' newfound emphasis on workplace fitness - as she re-queues her print job.

Three clicks later, The Boss - taking no chances - slips between us and the printer as it warms up for his output.

A page curls its way out of the device, into The Boss's hand.

"This is the wrong job again - has her job got that printing over and over problem you were talking about?"

"I don't think so >clickety<. Oh there we go! It's simple, you've picked up her job and she's just picked up yours. It's a classic *Re-queue Tranposition En...*"

"I THINK WE HAVE A CORE DUMP!" The PFY cries. **"WE HAVE DUMPED CORE! I REPEAT, WE HAVE DUMPED CORE!"**

Well, if it's for science, I spose it can't be all bad..

The BOFH Self-Helpless Guide

BOFH 2001 Episode 28

Published Tuesday 8th January 2002 16:19 GMT

"So," The PFY blurts as I rattle away on the keyboard on my latest epic document. "What about a quick game of Unreal Tournament? Just you, me, and some users who think they're playing opponents who can be killed?"

"Would **LIKE** to," I comment, "but I'm working on my last epic..."

"Really. Do you need some quotes?" he asks, cranking up his creative juices in a flash. "What about 'A user needs the admin password like nitroglycerine needs a good shake'? No? How about 'If you can keep your head while all around you are losing theirs, you probably have a CD writer on your desktop'?"

"Yeah, well it doesn't **REALLY** fit in with the Content of my new book," I mumble, trying to focus on the right word to finish the page.

"Which one is that?" The PFY asks, looking over my shoulder. "'Feel the fear and call us anyway'?"

"No."

"Men are from Mars, Users are from Uranus?"

"No, but it feels that way sometimes."

"I'm OK, You're.. in hospital?"

"No..."

"Zen and the Art of Computer Maintenance?"

"No..."

"So it's a new book you're working on then?"

"Indeed. It's not my normal type of Self-Helpless guide, but something real."

"No more deep and meaningless stuff?"

"Well, I didn't say that, I just said this one is going to be different."

"You're not writing a '..for Dummies' book are you?"

"No, but you're very warm," I respond, flipping to the cover page.

"WINDOWS XP for RETARDS!" The PFY reads over my shoulder. "I like it!! Although isn't the word 'IS' missing from the title??? So anyway, what's inside?"

"Oh, it's just Windows XP notes I've scabbed from various websites, slapped into a nice font with bolding and underlining here and there - with a bright coloured cover on. And - my favourite - to make up content, I'm loading XP screenshots from all over the place."

"Screenshots?" The PFY asks disdainfully.

"Yes, if it wasn't for the screenshots and the large font size, the whole thing would be about 40 pages long. But **WITH** the screenshots and liberal font size, I'm probably looking at a 200-250 page beauty!"

"They'll never buy it. No-one's that stupid!"

"Don't you believe it. I'm just printing the cover now, basing the book around the idea that there must be someone out there who has problems reading even the simplest of technical docs. Someone to whom '...for Dummies' books are overly technical. Someone who's easily impressed by bright colours, pictures and the Comic Sans Serif font set. And speak of the devil..."

We both pause as The Boss trundles in with an expression that can only mean one of two things - He's confused, or the laxative that The PFY slipped into his chocolate éclair is working.

"MMMMMmmm," The Boss mumbles - extending the suspense a little longer. "Does anyone know where this came from?"

He holds up the aforementioned full-colour cover, fresh from the "Management-Only" colour printer which is normally reserved - because of cost - to important documents like Company Reports, Pie Chart Graphing and late-night pornography.

"Ah, the XP for Retards book!" I cry. "It's printed, Excellent! I've been waiting for that!"

"For **'RETARDS'**?" The Boss asks, not too impressed with the lack of PC.

"I don't know," I respond. "I think it's some marketing thing by the company that sells them - you know, appeal to the people who want that stuff that other books skim over."

"Yes.." The Boss responds, getting interested now. "So why are you printing it?"

"Oh, well, it's available on the website for a discounted price because they don't have to do the shipping, packaging, printing, etc. You just download it and print it yourself - straight from their website, which means you get the latest revision!"

"Now that **IS** a good idea" The Boss says. "What's the book like?"

"See for yourself!" I cry, pointing to the large stack of plagiarised data and pictures that I call my own.

"..Yes.." The Boss murmurs, leafing through the document and liking the Picture to Text ratio (as expected). "And how much did it cost?"

"A hundred and eighty quid."

"A HUNDRED AND EIGHTY QUID!" he gasps.

"RETAIL," I comment, revising The Boss's gullibility factor (sadly). "But off the Web... 100."

"It still sounds a little steep!"

"True, but they do ship you an 'Advanced Retard' CD, as well as a complimentary T-shirt."

"A free t-shirt?!" The Boss gasps, sold. "And how do you order?"

"Well, you order it from the 'Society of Hardware and Information Technology Helpers, Executive Administration Division' website - you're a member aren't you?"

"Uh, no.."

"Really? Everyone says you are."

"Oh. Well maybe I am then, I don't know. I'm a member of so many things..."

"Yes, well, just go there, enter your User code and Password, and they'll let you order it through their arrangement with one of the major Online Selling sites. But you'd have to do it today as it's the last day of the free t-shirt offer."

"Oh! Right! And if I've mislaid my User code details?" The Boss asks, jiggling about in the manner of someone hearing nature on call-waiting.

"Well, I suppose I could order it for you. But then, no, I've maxxed my card out on the other books with the same shirt offers."

"Other books?" The Boss blurts, needing to get away, but not wanting to miss out on the opportunity of the company paying for his clothing.

"Yes, there's a series of ten?"

"All 100 quid each?"

"Yep."

"OK!" he gasps through clenched teeth. "Here's my card, order them - make sure you get a receipt!"

The Boss minces away at full speed after slapping his card down on the table while I fire up Amazon and start browsing the DVD section.

...

"Ah, he'll be back soon!" The PFY says, eyeing the corridor to Mission Control nervously while I put the finishing touches to my 1000 quid order.

"No he won't."

"He will! He went to the Gents at the end of the corridor!"

"The Gents with the internal door handle removed?" I ask.

"Ah!" The PFY cries, enlightened. "You bastard!"

"No, no," I cry defensively. "A **BASTARD** would have epoxy resined the cubicle doors shut last night so the poor bloke had nowhere to go..."

"You're a bastard aren't you?" The PFY asks, recognising professionalism when he sees it.

"In the flesh, In your face, and on my way to the T-shirt printing website."

"So you're actually going to print shirts."

"Who would miss the opportunity of getting their Boss a T-shirt with a **RETARD** motto on the back?"

"What motto?"

"Well that's where you come in. I need ten, ASAP."

"Ok. What about '**RETARD**' with an arrow pointing up?; '**RETARD**' just by itself; '**RETARD AND PROUD OF IT**'?...."

and so it goes....

The BOFH Content Management System

BOFH 2001 Episode 29

Published Monday 5th November 2001 08:02 GMT

"..And what would you suggest would solve this problem?" the Head of IT asks, over his lunchtime meal.

"Some form of document management system seems appropriate?" The Boss suggests, providing conclusive proof that he's been talking to vendors without supervision again.

"Oooh, a licence to print money!" The PFY interrupts excitedly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, we'll obviously be expected to take something unpleasant from the vendor in order to get this... i.e. a heeeeuuge bill, content locked into the server or something.."

"No, no, it's all Open."

"Open to anyone who's bought the client to extract the documents from their database perhaps?" I add.

"No, open to everyone!" The Boss responds, obviously having done several weeks homework with the colour brochure. "They say it uses standard windows files. . ."

"Ah - the old 'Change-the-filename-to-something-obscure-with-a-custom-extension' trick so you can never find it, except via their interface. Yes, I like it!"

"What do you mean?"

"Well it's simple. Remember that time stores wanted to move all those archived documents offsite to get some of their space back?"

"Yes?"

"And they got that Document storage company in to pack it all up and store it in 'standard' boxfiles?"

"And index **EVERYTHING** so all someone had to do was ring them and tell them the document name and they'd deliver it?"

"Yes."

"And we paid them a fat wedge of money to do it, plus recall fees, etc?"

"Uh-Huh."

"And remember when our company had a huge falling out with their company?"

"When you set fire to their premises, yes."

"When I tested their environmental monitoring systems to ensure that our documents were safe from fire, yes."

"Whatever.." The Boss adds doubtfully.

"And remember, we ended up demanding all our documents back?"

"Yes."

"And they came back, each in its own brown envelope - with a cryptic number on it, taking up over twice the space as originally. Then we had to employ that student to sit in the basement and extract them and file them all again.."

"Last I heard he was still down there," the head of IT comments.

"So you're saying that this software is the same as that document storage company, and that they're trying to disguise it by saying it's open and offering all-expenses-paid trips to the US for 'training'???"

*****JUNKET ALERT!!!*****

"No, I'm saying we can learn from our mistakes!" I blurt quickly, before The PFY can put his foot in it.

"So there **IS** something in the Content Management Server?" The Boss gasps.

"There may very well be..." The PFY inserts, catching on at last.

... THREE LAGER-FILLED HOLIDAYS IN THE US LATER ...

"So how's the Content Management going?" The Boss asks, trying to peek over The PFY's shoulder at the categorisation process.

"Good, but a few teething problems with which categories to choose from.."

"Really, can I help? I've been looking at one of those documents you bought back, and I think I've got the hang of it. Financial Documents can be categorised under department, supplier, purchase type, purchaser, purchase category, project, monetary expenditure, assets, physical location, intention, name.."

The Boss burbles on for a while and then wanders off excitedly to put a comprehensive list together for our benefit. The PFY, meantime, continues with his work with the devotion of a professional.

"**IT'S AMAZING!!!**" The Boss blurts, entering Mission Control with a smug expression on his face. "I've been looking at the datastore occupancy figures, and apparently there's been a huge amount of growth in the holdings just this morning and it's saying the machine needs some extra hard drives!!! I didn't realise it would be so popular!!!"

"Oh yes!" I agree. "And it's proving to be of most benefit to telecommuting workers, who can access their files direct from the Internet. Just look at the Internet usage figures!"

"My goodness! That's amazing! But how long do you think we've got before the disks run out?"

"Two, maybe three days. We're putting stuff in from older data tapes at the moment, which is why it's all going online so much faster. What are we up to at the moment?"

"The McHenry.. uh, Service documents."

"Really? Gosh, it's amazing what the company's got that you've never heard about! What's next?"

"Let's see.... Well, there's about three or four tapes of the RustyNEddie, um, interactive processing stuff."

"Rustianeddy. Hmmm, I spose I should give that the old once-over to familiarise myself with it."

"Well, I'd probably allow myself several hours if I were you."

"That boring? Well I suppose I'll just leave it to you. Let me know if there's any problems tho."

"Sure thing!"

...

Barely a day later, it's all over. The Boss's presentation to senior management took a major nosedive when a random choice of "Financial" categorised documents turned up an image from the "Gurlz who do it for Cash" series - as categorised by The PFY. The Boss bought the 'hackers' story, but the machine had to go...

... to a storeroom, where the website's gaining customers like nobodies business.

You've got to love newfangled technology...

The Trivia Quiz – BOFH-style...

BOFH 2001 Episode 30

Published Thursday 6th December 2001 08:38 GMT

Yes! It's time for the Bastard Trivia Quiz!

Test your skill! Place your bets! Answers at the bottom!

General Knowledge

1. You're in a maze of twisty little passages, all alike. Where do you go?

- A. N
- B. S
- C. E
- D. W
- E. To lunch

2. Network utilisation figures are reaching an all time high for no apparent reason. This probably means:

- A. You may have to look at chunkier routers
- B. There may be some network card error
- C. There may be some network monitoring error
- D. Someone's found the MP3 stash!
- E. They're leaving you out of Unreal Tournament just because they don't like fighting an invisible, invincible opponent with The Redeemer. The wimps!

3. Complete the series: 5V, 12V, 48V, 96V...

- A. 127 Volts

- B. 0 Volts
- C. 24 Volts
- D. 1 Amp
- E. "AGHH AAAGHH! I'll tell you what you want to know!"

4. He who laughs last...

- A. Laughs loudest
- B. Laughs longest
- C. Is a prat
- D. Annoys the hell out of everyone
- E. Hasn't seen the cattleprod

5. Which of the following is an industry standard substitute for a SIMM removal tool?

- A. Nothing - there is no substitute!
- B. A screwdriver
- C. A car key
- D. Some pliers
- E. Banging on the motherboard with the back of your hand till the chip falls out

6. A CPU can generally be clock chipped to:

- A. A small fraction above it's rated speed
- B. 10 per cent faster than it's rated speed
- C. 18.5 per cent above it's rated speed
- D. 70 per cent above rated, with a freon cooling and a death wish
- E. 100 per cent, even more if it's not your box

History

Are you an old bastard?

7. >Clunka Clunka Clunka< is the sound you would most associate with:

- A. The Clothes Dryer
- B. A washing machine with an imbalanced load
- C. A flat tyre on your car
- D. A tape safe door shutting repeatedly on an annoying user's foot
- E. An imbalanced DEC RM05 Disk assembly moving around the computer room by itself during a head crash

8. You drop a screwdriver down a ventilation hole in the powersupply at the back of a VAX 11/780. You expect:

- A. A very careful removal process
- B. A powersupply failure
- C. A nasty >crack< noise
- D. Power outage to the computer room?
- E. Looting of the shops in the two adjacent streets after the local transformer trips out

9. The nine-track tape you're using is having problems reading some very important survey data for some critical research - only getting half-way through the tape before failing. You would:

- A. Clean the read heads, which probably are dirty
- B. Have the tape sent to a commercial data recovery centre
- C. A, then reduce the temperature of the computer room, and try to complete the read
- D. Report the failure to the user

E. Just cut and repeatedly paste data from the beginning of the data file until the file's up to size

10. The greatest danger to the RA60 removable hard disk media was:

- A. Not being locked into the drive spindle tightly
- B. Not being able to be removed from the drive spindle after use
- C. Disk damage if the cover lock unlatched itself during use
- D. Dirty read heads
- E. A preventative maintenance by the Engineer

11. The correct combination of carefully timed disk seeks on the drives in an RA80 disk drive rack could cause:

- A. A 'Tune' to play
- B. A Small vibration
- C. A Large vibration
- D. A very large vibration
- E. The disk rack to run in 'horizontal' mode

12. A user has been looking through the sad remnants of their life and found a large box of several thousand punchcards of their undergraduate work, which they would like you to do something with. A good Administrator would:

- A. Call a Computer Museum and get them read
- B. Write a quick program to interface to a scanner and read them
- C. Give the user the Punch card hole code info so they could type them in
- D. Throw them in the bin and tell the user that they've been demagnetised
- E. Throw them at the user from a fourth-floor window

Finance

Are you an expensive Bastard?

13. The correct way to put a yearly budget plan together is to:

- A. Add up the cost of all the expected projects and maintenance for the year to come and put that figure forward
- B. Use last year's figure and add five per cent
- C. Use the last year's figure as well as the previous year to discern a trend, and ask for that
- D. Look at the performance bonus of the board members for an indication of potential
- E. Multiply last year's budget by two after anonymously sending those photos from the Beancounter's photocopy room after the Christmas Bash

14. A vendor tells you the product he's pushing will lower your TCO. This means:

- A. Your total cost of ownership, taking into account purchase price, maintenance, expected lifetime and possible rental options, will be less
- B. The TCO will probably not be affected, once you take training, early termination of previous contract and installation fees into account
- C. He's on commission and things have been lean this year
- D. He's a lying bastard
- E. C, D and you can probably screw a few lunches out of him before you say no

15. An annual maintenance contract has come up for renewal and the Vendor takes pains to point out that they have not increased their charges like so many other vendors. This means:

- A. They're trying to be competitive
- B. A, and they're looking for extra business
- C. They've found a subcontractor who will work for shiny beads and offal
- D. They're scared of going into receivership after that anonymous letter to the Tax Dept

E. A, C, D, and they re-added those three extra pieces of equipment you cancelled maintenance on earlier in the year (due to an "administrative error")

-Key

There is no key. There is never a key! You don't need one. Not if you're the real McCoy! Not if you can clockchip your car computer to get an extra two miles an hour out of the old Rustang before it drops it's driveshaft after the excess vibration. Not if you remember the heady days of a card punch machine that was so loud it had the pensioners down the road digging trenches and sorting out their meat rations.

NOT if your annual budget is so large your beancounter's calculator runs out of zeros typing it in...

Anyone else is obviously an imposter.

The BOFH techno-zealot alert

BOFH 2001 Episode 31

Published Sunday 23rd December 2001 22:26 GMT

"..and apparently animals will be able to communicate to owners via a PDA that fits in a belt buckle," The Boss burbles happily, reading a pseudo-computing column from some tabloid paper while cheerfully contemplating yet another item of clothing he won't have to pay for..

"What a Warwickism!" I cry.

"Warwickism?" The Boss asks.

"Yes," The PFY responds helpfully. "You know, an outrageous pseudo-technical statement made to support an illusion of technical competence."

"?" The Boss mouths wordlessly.

"You know," The PFY continues. "Like me saying I have a computer chip implanted in my penis which reacts with cash registers at supermarkets to give me a discount on condoms."

"Have you?!" The Boss asks, shocked.

"Of course not!" The PFY replies. "It's a barcode tattooed down the side."

"Yes, but it comes up as 'Baguette, Large' when he scans it," I add, unable to stop myself once I see The Boss's look of horror.

"And sometimes they have to scan it six or seven times before it gets read, by which time it's changed to.." The PFY blurts, slowing to a stop as The Boss backs out of the room quietly.

"What the hey!" The PFY chirps in response to my glance of disgust.

"I know, I know, but you really should try and work with him - he's The Boss after all."

"Yes, I've been wondering about that," The PFY asks. "It **HAS** been a while since we had a bit of new blood in the place - in a figurative way, of course."

"Well, what do you want to do about it?! Bear in mind that good managers are hard to come by - the devil you know and all that. Before you know it we'll be lumbered with a new boss who actually wants to know where all the money goes **BEFORE** he signs the expenses forms, and one who won't be happy making cheques out to Campaign for Advanced System Hardware - or at least it's acronym - and we'll be forced to dip into our own pockets for lager tokens."

"Yes, I suppose you're right," The PFY grudgingly admits. "But he's a bit.. well.. insipid."

"Inspid!" I cry consulting my mental dictionary. "Bland and unappetising. Mundane. In dire need of a short sharp shock perhaps?"

"You mean really showing him what computing is all about?"

"No no, I mean a short sharp shock. 90 volts AC or so, nothing too drastic."

"How will that help us?" The PFY asks.

"Help? Oh, sorry, I was off on a tangent there. So you want some form of **HELP?** Well now you're asking. We could suggest he goes on a course for technical managers to upskill himself?"

After we both have a bit of a laugh I continue.

"It's not such a silly idea though. We could book him into some course where he could get the rudiments of computing beaten into him.."

"I don't think..."

"It might stop him saying yes to every request by a user for some of our time..."

"I'll see what Junket Search turns up," The PFY responds, quickly Netscaping to a heavily used bookmark.

Several glossy pages later..

"Here's one" The PFY says, tapping the screen in a fishtank manner.

"Let's see.... No previous experience required, Good, No actual learning guaranteed - if you go by the wording - Good.."

"They do give you a Certificate of Achievement!"

"Yes, they stole that idea from Microsoft. Basically it means that you managed to turn up every day, didn't dribble into your machine enough to kill it or you, and kept your head down when the tutor asked questions... **YES**, I think that'll do nicely!"

A day later we've convinced The Boss to go and two days after that, he's gone.

One day even further on, he's back, new and improved. Well, he's back... Early reports say he's right into the technology thing, having had a great time and picked up lots of ideas.

"This Windows XP stuff looks rather exciting!" he gasps, surfing into Mission Control on the technology wave. "Did you know you can actually have movies and stuff playing on your machine?"

"Like this?" the PFY asks, firing up a recent release movie on his desktop.

"Yes! Is that XP?"

"No, Linux. Exactly the same except you don't have to loosen your belt when you license it."

"Oh. Does it have support for Wireless as well? You know you can save a bundle on cabling by putting in wireless hubs for your machines? And it makes offices easier to re-organise in the event of a restructure!"

The tangy smell of hysteria is in the air, and The Boss is exhibiting all the classic warning signs of a technological zealot. We may have to put him through the 'paperless office' test...

"Wireless is already installed" the PFY responds, pointing at a heat sensor in the roof.

"Really? I always thought that was part of the fire alarm."

"Most people do, but see that little light on the side, it flashes once a minute to tell you the network is present."

"Really?! Well, we must put in some connections - say just the managers - then we can put our machines anywhere I like in our rooms and not have to worry about cabling ever again!"

"Your machines run without power?" I ask, putting the slipper in when he should be down.

"Good point. Well I suppose we can afford laptops for the managers - which would actually allow us to **TAKE OUR MACHINES TO MEETINGS!!!**" he gasps again, seeing the future extend before him.

Budget Defence DEFCON 3 initiated!

"Ah, I don't think we have the budget for that.." The PFY suggests helpfully.

"Nonsense! There's a **stack** of money earmarked for an improved fileserver which we can defer till next year - or the year after if that's more pressing projects. Fileshares are a thing of the past! SAN is the answer!"

Short of foaming at the mouth, The Boss is pretty much proved to be in Zealot mode. Only one thing will prove it...

"Do you want me to **print** up some proposals, circulate them to the managers and then **print** a purchase order up...."

"No More Printing!" The Boss cries exhibiting the final - and most damning sign of a Zealot. **"WE WANT A PAPERLESS OFFICE! WE'RE IN I.T FOR PETE'S SAKE!"**

The PFY and I have a second's silence before implementing backup plan 107E.

"Actually," the PFY asks, "Doesn't your machine **HAVE** a wireless LAN card inside it already? I think we purchased one with it!"

"Really?" The Boss gushes. "I'll just go and see!"

Five seconds later the phone rings.

"No, no card."

"It's internal - it'll look like a blank plate."

"Uh, well, I don't know."

"Tell you what, pull your network connection out of the machine and try and check your mail...."

"Nope, it says the network is unavailable."

"Unavailable..... **OH I KNOW!** Your machine is being earthed by the earth cable in the power cord. Shut your machine down, break off the earth pin and start it up again."

[clatters and grunts removed in the name of good taste]

"No, nothing!"

"It's ok, your machine is probably not communicating because there's no aerial, but we can use the power lead for the time being, just lift your machine up so that it's as near as you can get it to the Wireless Access Point."

"I could stand on my table. Do I need my monitor?"

"Only if it's been de-earthed as well."

"I'll call you back!"

FIVE MINUTES LATER

"Ok, I'm standing on my table and I've put my computer on an extension lead so it's right next to the... **OH!** The light flashed, the network must be going."

"Yes, the network is there, but you have to remove the heat seal on the access point."

"How?"

"Do you have a cigarette lighter?"

...

"..and it looks like we'll need a new manager," the Head of IT informs us. "He's decided that once he's out of hospital he's going to take up an outside job like market gardening."

"Yes, it's probably for the best."

"So in the meantime I'd like you to look after the manager's role - until such time as we can appoint someone...."

!!!

BOFH: 'Twas the night before Christmas

BOFH 2001 Episode 32

Published Tuesday 8th January 2002 16:09 GMT

'Twas the night before Christmas, on Management floor
Not a creature was stirring, except by the door;
The Board Member's stockings were hung up with care,
In hopes that their bonus cheques soon would be there;

The workers had missed out - the bonuses few,
Just enough for the bosses, (and shareholders too)
The Bastard was slighted, this wasn't that good
Action was needed - a la Robin Hood.

The bosses were nestled all snug in their beds,
While visions of pound signs danced in their heads;
The Boss in his diapers, asleep in a trice
Was dreaming a storm about him and Posh Spice

When out from the freight lift arose such a clatter,
The CCTV panned to see to the matter.
To the front desk ripped a guard in a flash
A stain down his front from a half-complete slash.

His view a white visage of fresh spray-on snow

Obscuring the larceny happening below

And what to his prying eyes else would it show?

The Bastard and PFY, hacksaw in tow.

With a tea trolley laden with construction brick

He'd know in a moment it wasn't St. Nick.

More rapid than diarrhoea, their work tools they came,

They chuckled, the sniggered, and called them by name;

"Now, HAMMER! now, HACKSAW! now, PHILLIPS HEAD and FLAT!

On, CUTTERS!, On GRINDER!, ERASER and NO-STATIC MAT!"

Away to the boardroom! Half way down the wall!

The safe and its contents, soon open to all!

And then, in a twinkling, I heard near the tree

The sound of a chainsaw being started with glee!

A camera swung wildly, alert from the sound

In time to see Pine needles, all swirling around.

Disguised well in fur, from his head to his foot,

The Bastard was watching, face blackened with soot;

Acetylene torch lit and fired up as well,

Cutting through plate steel - leaving quite a smell.

Alarm bells were ringing, followed by a shout

And silenced five seconds on - System problem no doubt
The smoke from the cutter had cranked up the pace
As sprinklers discharged themselves all over the place.

His eyes -- how they twinkled! his dimples how merry!
As the PFY "topped up" the Management Sherry
His droll little mouth was drawn up in a grin
As sherry was emptied, and now for the Gin..

The videotape removed from a pocket unbidden
With scenes from the past year (from cameras hidden)
Some shocking, some sneaky, some fresh and some smelly
Timed later to screen from all lunchroom Tellys.

Security stumbled up four flights flat out
The lifts, they were broken - now figure that out.
He raced to the boardroom, be there in a tick!,
But look out! He's tripped over a sockful of brick.

They spoke not a word, re-instating the lifts,
Leaving stockings with brick, liberating the gifts
Collecting their spoils for the exit to night,
They stopped at the guard saying "You ain't seen me, right?"

They sprang to the freight door, and out to the street,

Moving quite quickly - a night bus to meet!

And I heard them exclaim, as they mounted the Bus

"Merry Christmas to all and the drinks are on us!!"

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BOFH and the VAX cluster bomb

BOFH 2002 Episode 1

Published Saturday 11th May 2002 12:24 GMT

So I'm having a quiet six pints after work - waiting for The PFY to join me so I can shout him a lager or two - when a geeky type from the Helldesk crawls over and introduces himself.

I'm momentarily taken aback by this blatant abuse of workplace hierarchical protocol, but this is shortly overcome by his intriguing question.

"I was just wondering," he burbles, "if you know of a way to fire protect some equipment I've got?"

"Fireproof?" I ask. "An unusual request. What sort of equipment precisely?"

"A vaxcluster," he burbles excitedly.

"A **VAX** Cluster?" I ask, suppressing a shudder.

"Yes, but not just any ordinary vaxcluster - it's a beowoulf cluster."

"A Vax Beowoulf cluster," I repeat, pausing momentarily to try and think of a sadder life form - coming up blank.

"Yes, I've got three Alphas, Two 11/780s, a 11/730 and four microvaxes."

"Yes, wel.."

"And I'm rebuilding an 8530 which I got from a company that was going to **SCRAP** it!"

"Shocking!" I concur, humouring him - figuring that anyone who would rebuild an 8530 in their own time is someone who needs gentle handling.. (and possibly locking up for a long, long time). "Although, **TECHNICALLY** the Alphas aren't actually VAXes, are they?"

"No!" he blurts, incorrectly identifying me as a fellow Digital geek. "**HOWEVER**, they're early Alphas, which were the most backwardly compatible."

"I think you'll find that most of that gear is fairly backward," I murmur.

"Pardon?"

"I said I think you'll find that you're going to need fairly hefty fireproofing. What sort of room are they in?" I ask, mentally picturing the hottest, noisiest, most cramped double bedsit in the world.

"Well it's a perk of a part-time job I have looking after a standby datacentre - they let me run some of my machines there in return for me keeping an eye on the place.

"Right, I see. So there's no space problems. And given the machine's age, I assume you're worrying about thermal shock?

"Exactly!"

"Is the cluster doing anything important?"

"Well it's been calculating Pi to a new record of decimal places for almost a year now."

"So you don't want to take it down to install the fire protection?"

Our conversation is interrupted by the arrival of The PFY, so I get the Helldesk geek back over with a quick wave and ask him to explain his dilemma, telling him The PFY is the brains behind our infrastructure protection systems.

As the problem unfolds The PFY's eyes light up in anticipation.

"I suggest you use a liquid extinguisher, stored at room temperature," The PFY comments as turns from the bar with a drink for me and the Helldesk geek.

"Not gas?"

"No - Gas systems introduce thermal shock from their expansion - law of thermodynamics. Besides, they're hellishly expensive. However, a liquid coolant/extinguisher doesn't expand, and so can be kept at the same temperature as the equipment."

"I see. And what coolant do you suggest, water?"

"No, water has a problem in that it can actually act as an oxidant in very hot fires involving metals like magnesium, etc, some of which are used in computing."

"So what coolant?"

"Well, recent thinking seems to centre around a semi-viscous liquid like an oil."

"An **OIL**?!"

"Yes - because oil has a very low heating coefficient."

"Huh?"

"It takes ages to get oils to change temperatures, which makes them ideal for extinguishers."

"Really?"

"Of course! Think about it. How long does it take to boil a jug?"

"About five minutes."

"And how long does it take your chippy to warm up their vat?"

"I don't know."

"Well it takes about one and a half hours - see my point?"

"No?"

"It takes a lot longer to heat vat oil up than the water in your jug. And you know why?"

"Because the vat's about 100 times the size of my jug?"

"NO, because oil has a lower heating coefficient!"

"Oh, I see. So what oil is commonly used?"

"Generally, Industrial Diesel."

"**DIESEL OIL!?!?** But that's flammable!!" the geek cries.

"Only under very particular circumstances," The PFY responds calmly, plying the geek with yet another drink, "generally very high pressure as well as extreme heat. Neither of which you'll get in a computing environment."

"I don't understand," the geek responds, dubiously.

"Do you know how a diesel engine works?"

"Like a car engine?"

"Not at all! Diesel has such a low octane that the engine actually has to pressurize the stuff to make it ignite. **AND** the engine has to have heat from a glow plug to actually get the pressurized stuff to burn!"

"Really?"

"Of course. hy do you think most of the world's cars run on petrol?"

"And it won't catch fire in computers?"

"It hasn't in ours, and we've been using it for over a year now."

"Really?"

"Of course, what do you think those drums of diesel in the store are for?"

"The generator?"

"Goodness no! You wouldn't run a generator on Industrial diesel! It's crap. You'd be better running it on petrol like we do"

"You run your diesel generator on petrol?"

"Uhuh, and we use the diesel for our fire extinguishers. In fact, I could probably give you a barrel as we only keep it in case of a leak in the system."

"I don't think I need it - we have a generator in the datacenter which I could refill with petrol, and use the diesel of!"

"Right! Where is this datacentre?"

"It's a couple of blocks away, in the basement of that large insurance building."

"An Insurance building" The PFY mouths thoughtfully. "Tell you what - why don't you shoot there and set it all up and we could help you commission it once we've had our dinner!"

"Ok!" The geek chirps, slipping off quickly.

"Couple more pints before we head over?" The PFY asks.

"Yeah, I spose I could fit them in. And remind me to pick up your birthday present on the way over."

"What, the latest Viz mag?" he asks, recounting last year's present.

"I was thinking a packet of marshmallows?"

"Perfect!"

BOFH gets his mobo working

BOFH 2002 Episode 2

Published Saturday 11th May 2002 12:23 GMT

So I'm sitting in Mission Control when The Boss bowls in with a complaint about some advice I'd given a geek from the helldesk last week.

"He says the motherboard/processor/memory combo you told him to buy is crap!" he mutters.

"What, the Gigabyte/Athlon/DDR?" I enquire, wondering what sort of paint thinner he's been tipping on his breakfast cereal. "True, it's not **THE** fastest processor out, but the price performance makes it a sure winner!"

"He says it's slow," The Boss whines, starting to get on my tits.

"How slow are we talking - as slow as the Microsoft software registration process?"

"I don't know - he says it's as slow as his original machine!"

"A PII with 32 Megs of memory? I hardly think so!"

"He claims you deliberately recommended a crap box to him!!"

"Bollocks! What operating system is he running?"

"Ah... Windows X.P"

"Ah yes. Not so much resource hungry as resource addicted. But still - what hardware's in it?"

"I don't know! Here's his configuration page - you see if you can work it out."

The Boss passes over a page of paper that looks to be the output of some generic system config utility, and I give it the old fisheye. Most disturbing is the handwritten note at the bottom '*and PCI/ISA Bridge*'.

"What's that?" I ask, pointing to the note.

"Something your assistant recommended so that he could reuse his old disks and stuff to keep the total price down apparently."

"Did you also ask the guy if he wanted to go on a camping trip?"

"Wha? Why?"

"No reason. So this Bridge card - what did it look like?"

"How on **earth** would I know? Apparently your assistant did all the installation work! Moved his files and everything!"

In the far recesses of my mind I hear the sound of a 1p piece hitting the pavement.

"Ah! I'll get right onto it," I respond, reaching for a large hammer.

. . . Ten minutes later . . .

"So you moved his computer to a new case."

"I never!" The PFY cries.

"Sorry, let me put that a different way, You moved his computer to a new case."

"What's different about that?"

"This time the cattleprod in my pocket is charged up."

"Ah. OK, so I might have pulled a quick one."

"Indeed. And now he's found out about it."

"He **can't** have! I added 32 Meg of memory to the motherboard, slapped it into a brand,spanking new case, 'upgraded' it to XP, then changed the screen resolution!!! I also put that 'System Config Reporter' program you wrote which just displays whatever it's been told to report. Should work like a charm!"

"Obviously it hasn't. You can't just steal someone's upgrade and not expect them to notice. They expect a speed increase over all the other machines in their area. It's a status thing. The newest machine has to work better!"

"So you're saying I should have given him the upgrade his department paid for?" the PFY asks.

"Of course not! Letting a helldesk geek have a shit-hot box just to play minesweeper and freecell between disservice calls is criminal!"

"Oh. So I should have upgraded **my** box, and given him my old stuff?"

"Of course not. Even that's still a damn good upgrade!"

"Well what else could I have done to make his machine run faster?"

"The keyword here is **comparatively** faster. It has to run faster than everyone else's because it's new."

"But how can I do that if I can't upgrade it?"

"It's obvious. You sneak in and downgrade everyone else's. Just pull half their memory out."

"They'll notice!"

"No they won't - they're sheep. Anyway, you just start a rumour that it's a network problem and they'll complain about that - setting us up for a gigabyte-to-the-desktop project."

"I think you're forgetting the people we're dealing with. These are helpdesk people!"

"Good point. Grab any additional memory out of their video card, and drop the CPU speed jumper down a notch while you're at it."

. . . One day later . . .

"And as you can see, the machine works appreciably faster than earlier models."

"It's way faster than mine," one of the guy's fellow geeks corroborates confusedly.

"In fact even boot time is increased!" I add.

"Mine doesn't even boot," another of the lesser intelligent member of the Helldesk adds. "I think there might be something wrong with the Network.."

Shooting's too good for them...

"It's still pretty slow," the Helldesk geek in question whines. "I'm sure it's not much faster than my original machine."

"Ridiculous!" I respond. "How long does it take to boot."

"About two minutes."

"And what about that machine over there."

"Just under five minutes."

"So it's twice as fast as the other machines!"

"Yeah, I suppose it is!" he gasps, seeing the silver lining after all.

(It's just bloody sad.)

"Mine still isn't booting," the really **SAD** geek says. "I think the network must be affecting DOS, cos that won't even load."

"Can't you do something about that?" The Boss demands.

"I suppose I could upgrade his network connection."

"OK, do that!"

"I'll go find get the.... six thinwire ethernet cards and some T connectors..." The PFY responds.

"Fantastic!" the geek burbles.

. . . the next day and six adaptor upgrades later. . .

"You realise there's only one 'upgrade' left after this?" The PFY asks.

"Yes I know, I'm just finding the OS2 disks now."

It's just sad...

The Bastard Guide To Writing Software

BOFH 2002 Episode 3

Published Monday 18th February 2002 00:01 GMT

I HATE IT!!!!

The Boss has been talking to some geeky guy from R&D who's so far 'out there' he's got satellites orbiting him, and **now** he wants us to develop our own software...

"But it's a sure thing!" he cries, mentally preparing for his stardom on the international geek-talk circuit as the man who brought the world a new alternative. "We just write an Office type system that can compete with Microsoft and sell it for half the price!"

"Compete," I respond dubiously, "with Microsoft?"

"Yes."

"The company whose court imposed penalty which was pretty much equivalent to a slap on the bum with a rolled up newspaper?"

"Yes."

"And by Newspaper I mean **PART** of a newspaper - something like the 'Culture' section of 'The Sun', the non-boring bits of 'The Financial Times' or the non-fiction portion of a vendor's Benchmarking specs handbook?"

"Sorry?"

"It doesn't matter."

"But surely it's possible to write such a system?" The Boss asks, masking his disappointment as best he can.

"It's possible, yes, but feasible, probably not."

"Why not?"

"Well for a start, there's the development staff. Not to mention analysis!"

"Analysis?"

"Yes - of needs, we'd have to find out what people know and want."

"Oh, you mean like meeting rooms, questionnaires and some focus groups?"

"I was thinking more of the Tape storeroom, a rubber hose and a bright light, but yes, you're in the right ballpark."

"But we know what people want," The Boss continues, ignoring me. "They want what they've got, with more security - well, with **ANY** security - and cheaper. Obviously there's going to be expenses for the organisation in the training and travel side of things."

"Travel?"

"Well yes, to evaluate the options, visit vendors to see how they do things, that sort of thing?"

>WHOOP! WHOOP!< >JUNKET ALERT!<

And so the delicate process of junket negotiation begins...

The Boss obviously knows that this project suggestion would be as popular as a Windows T-Shirt under Richard Stallman's Xmas tree and is now entering the delicate area of junket negotiation.... To get something **he** wants, he has to offer me something **I** might want in a manner that conforms to the Encoded Junket Standard RFC.

"And who did you envisage going to these sites?" I ask, starting off the negotiation with a simple Query Junket packet.

"Well I suppose the Project Champion, and some form of Secretarial/P.A person," he responds.

(In other words, *"Me and the new girl from the Admin Pool who's rumoured to be undergarment impaired and have a morally casual attitude."*)

"Uhuh," I respond, sending out the standard Junket Packet-Received-And-Decoded response.

"...and obviously the Technical Project Manager."

(Meaning: *And obviously **YOU**, so I can get your vote when the feasibility of the matter is under discussion..*)

"And..." I add, resending a PRAD, and following up with an unsolicited Request For Further Junket Tradeoff Items.

"And possibly one or other personnel who might be critical to the project."

A standard Capacity For Extras Available packet, meaning *Whoever you want to get the ball rolling*

"Well I was just thinking I may need some Personal Assistance myself if there's a lot of data to be compiled sorted through. And given that we're looking at external markets, probably it should be an external person."

The Boss acknowledges my request for handbrake accompaniment, and the deal is struck...

"I'll get right onto it." he burbles, heading out of the office at Warp Factor 5.

. . . Later, at the Departmental Projects Meeting . . .

"..which means we might both **SAVE** ourselves some licensing costs and **EARN** ourselves money as well. The benefits would far outweigh the costs!"

"Really?" the Head of IT says. "But this travel, are you sure it's really necessary."

"Well, to get a real feel for the development life cycle, yes."

"But you don't seem to have thought of the higher levels of this - the management and marketing phases of the operation?" The Head responds, sending a Query Junket Packet.

"Obviously, there would need to be some senior Management presence," The Boss negotiates.

"Yes" the Head PRADs, followed rapidly by a RFFJT: "and perhaps.."

"And obviously someone to organise the copious notes and meetings," The Boss CFEAs.

Once more the deal is struck.

"You've got to be kidding," The PFY jumps in, smelling blood in the water. "What about development and Analysis costs."

There comes a time in every bastard's life when he has to sacrifice a friend for a junket. It's sad but true - and remember, all's fair in love and computing. More so if you're playing a teams shoot-em-up game and a team member gets in the way of your handcannon....

"Well we don't need any analysis, because we know what they want.." I respond, going on to repeat The Boss's message from before.

Seeing his chance of a junket going down the tubes, The PFY tries to torpedo mine.

"What about Development costs then?" he snipes.

"I know it'll cost a bit, but I've been working it out. You see, development costs can be worked out by multiplying the number of programmers and testers, by the cost of the development tools, by the number of hours it takes to develop the software - right?"

"Yes," The PFY concurs.

"And so by lowering one, we'd lower the cost of the whole project."

"Yes."

"Well, I've been looking at these Open Source Tools and, well, they don't cost anything."

"Yes?" The PFY asks, not seeing the trap until it's too late.

"So if the Number of programmers and testers, **times** the cost of development tools - which is zero, times the number of hours equals the cost of the job...."

"yyesssss?"

"Then the job should cost nothing."

"Wait a minute.." the Head of IT frowns, performing some mental calculation involving carrying a bunch of 1s, subtracting the number he first thought of, and dividing by his belt size. "You know, I think he's **RIGHT!**"

So it's a done deal. Junket approved and booked. True, I expect that when I get back all my plants will be poisoned, my desktop will be rigged to the mains, and my hydraulic chair will be remote controlled...

But it's worth it....

BOFH: SQL for Retards

BOFH 2002 Episode 4

Published Sunday 14th April 2002 22:56 GMT

So the bloody DBA's complaining about performance problems, which really gets on my tits, given that he's responsible for them in the first place...

"But you're the Systems Manager - **you're** responsible for performance," The Boss argues, no doubt having received training from DB central.

"I'm responsible for the **SYSTEM** performance, yes," I comment. "But I'm not responsible for the which of the volumes he puts his tablespace on."

"Uh?" The Boss responds, reverting to subhuman IQ as a defence.

"OK, an analogy. Let's say I was the building owner and I rent you 30 offices."

"Right."

"And you have 30 staff."

"Yes."

"And you put them all in one office because then you won't have to go all around the floor to see what people are up to."

"Yyyess?"

"And **then** you complain to me about the air-conditioning because that one office is stinking hot, humid and smelly."

"Ah, I get your point!"

"Right!"

"We could save on office rentals by packing people into offices, and I wouldn't have to walk around the building so much. But what about the Database problem? I've been told that it's affecting our Financials system quite badly.."

NGGGGGGGGGGGggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggggg!

"I think you're missing the point. I have allocated **GOBS** of space on different disks for the DBA to put Tablespaces into, however, he puts them only into one - because it's **TIDIER**. So it bottlenecks accessing that disk!"

"But why would he do that?"

"Because he's had no formal training in the DBA role? Because he read 'SQL for Retards' and lied on his CV? Because no-one tested his ability before they gave him a small bag of cash and his own office? Because we appointed someone on the cheap?"

"I... Uh.. Well, it happened before I was here, so I don't know how I can help!"

"Fire him? Get a good person in? Pay them properly?"

"But they charge extortionate rates!"

"So do we, and we're worth it. As opposed to the cowboys you normally hire - who probably don't even do backups!"

"I'm sure he does backups!"

"Ones that can be recovered from?"

"I.. Well I.. .. Could you meet with him and talk with him about it?"

!!!!

"I don't think we'll get very far. He's not a very nice bloke - quite... offensive really"

The Boss stops short of saying "that's rich coming from me" - but I know he's thinking it.

...

Later that day in DB Central, after five rounds of "I'm better than you because I can use the sqldba command..."

"..so why don't we move a couple of the heavier-used tablespaces to other disks." I coach, suppressing my annoyance and trying to give him a couple of hints. "Run a select across the filespace location tables - you'll see they're all on the same disk."

"I don't think you're really on the money there," the DBA smirks quietly. "SQL's a pretty complex language. It's not just SELECT A FROM B - often it's much more complex than that. You need to **KNOW** the database."

"**RIGHT!** Well why don't I just pop downstairs and get my SQL for Dummies, and I'll be right back."

"OK, if you want."

... 10 minutes and lots of >clickety< >clicks< later ...

"I was thinking, we're using a Financials system based around our database aren't we?"

"Yes," the DBA responds.

"So you probably wouldn't do any SQL anyway would you - except for the odd DBA-type statement, if that."

"No, there's a lot of SQL needed in this role - Backups for instance, an.."

"But surely the backup script is static, and there would have been one in play here when you started?"

"Yes, but it needed modifications as it wasn't optimal."

*****BINGO!*****

"OK, anyway, so I wrote down a couple of SQL statements which I'd like you to do for me."

"Still trying to learn, eh?" he asks, not missing a chance to treat me condescendingly.

"Well, got to keep trying, no matter how pointless," I concur, eating humble pie.

"OK, fire away!"

"Could you go into the financials database and type `SELECT N,Q,A FROM DBAQUESTIONS WHERE N=1`"

>Clickety<</p>

"And that's one row which is '1', GUESS WHOSE DBA ACCOUNT JUST DROPPED THE GENERAL LEDGER TABLE' and 'YOURS'. Very odd. I don't even remember a table called DBAQUESTIONS?"

"I think it's fairly new," I respond. "Now, moving right along, `SELECT N,Q,A FROM DBAQUESTIONS WHERE N=2`."

>Clickety<</p>

"Which is '2', 'GUESS WHOSE BACKUP SCRIPT HAS A SYNTAX ERROR IN IT CAUSING IT TO BOMB OUT' and 'YOURS'. Are you sure this is a real table?"

"Quite sure. Now `SELECT N,Q, etc WHERE N=3`."

>Clickety<</p>

"'3', 'GUESS WHICH DBA HASN'T TAKEN A CONSISTENT BACKUP SINCE TWO DAYS AFTER HE STARTED' and 'YOU'..... This is one of your tables, isn't it?"

"`SELECT 'YES' FROM YESTABLE WHERE YESCOLUMN = 'YES'`."

"You won't get away with it."

"`SELECT * FROM YESIWILLTABLE`."

"Why do you keep talking like that," the DBA asks, getting a little disconcerted.

"I'm into the Zone," I respond, "I can't help myself! But now do that first SELECT again, with N=4."

>Clickety<</p>

"4', 'GUESS WHO'LL BE FIRING YOU ONCE HE'S READ ALL THOSE EMAILS ABOUT HOW CRAP HE IS AS A BOSS' and 'THE BOSS'."

>Clatter<</p>

Our Soon-to-be-Ex-DBA rushes off to try and save his job, which is bloody annoying, truth be known, as he didn't get around to the fifth row - my favourite "'5','GUESS WHO LOOSENEED THE HANDRAIL ON THE STAIRS AND OILED THE FLOOR', 'ME'."

>**CRASH!**<

I type in a quick "SELECT * FROM DBAQUESTIONS" to have one last look, only to find an additional row '6', 'GUESS WHO'S GOING TO RAT YOU OUT UNLESS HE GETS SUFFICIENT LAGERS TO NUMB HIS MEMORY' '?'"

I forsee a DROP TABLE that The PFY won't be expecting. At the pub.

BOFH: Going Postal

BOFH 2002 Episode 5

Published Tuesday 15th October 2002 14:26 GMT

It's 9am when I pause from my daily operational maintenance procedures (checking the out trays of the printers to see if anyone's been printing any juicy porn) to observe The Boss swiping his heart out outside the office.

"Could you let me in please?" he asks through the glass, giving up on the normal access method.

"I'm afraid I can't," I respond. "For some reason the security system believes that you're not permitted in this office."

"That's ridiculous!" he snaps back. "I've got access everywhere! I've got more access than **YOU!**"

"It would appear not," I respond. "But I think you'll have to take it up with Security."

While The Boss is busy fuming, The PFY wanders up, accompanied by one of the Helldesk geeks.

"What's going on?" The Geek asks.

"The Boss is locked out," I respond.

"Aren't you going to let him in?" The Geek asks, moving towards the door release button.

"Ordinarily, yes."

"But?" he asks, hesitating.

"Well, it's possible that he's been fired and we've not been told about it."

"That's ridiculous," The Boss snaps through the glass.

"Can't we let him in and find out?" The Geek asks, about to press the Door Open button.

"A policy that's probably worked well in several office shootings.." I respond, staring at The Boss intently.

"SHOOTINGS?"

"Yeah, you know. Guy gets fired, comes back the next day and mows down his co-workers."

"As opposed to just getting another job," The PFY adds.

"You know, he does look rather angry," The Geek murmurs quietly, noticing The Boss's crimson visage.

"So are you going to open the door?" the PFY asks The Geek. "I mean obviously we're not really worried as our office is lockable, and that fails the computer room is a fortress."

"This is ridiculous!" The Boss cries. "I still work here and I'm **NOT** carrying any guns! I don't even **OWN** a gun."

"And a disenfranchised worker would never lie," The Geek blurts, getting in on the act.

"I could always shoot through the glass," The Boss murmurs.

"He's threatening to shoot us!" I cry.

"I said I **COULD**. If I had a gun!" The Boss cries.

"You could have one in your bag!" The Geek blurts, beating me to the punch.

"I don't have a gun in my bag."

"Could you open your bag?" The Geek asks.

"I'm **NOT** opening my bag!" The Boss cries, peaking on the 'annoyed' scale.

"What's happening here?!" The Head of IT asks, wandering up.

"Security has locked him out, and he just threatened to shoot us," The Geek replies.

"WHAT!"

"It's OK, the glass is bulletproof and explosion-laminated," I add.

"I HAVEN'T GOT A BLOODY GUN!" The Boss shouts as The PFY, Geek and I step back from the glass.

"That's what he said before he said he was going to shoot us through the glass," The Geek burbles, giving the naso-anal interface a good workout.

"Call security!" the Head of IT commands, in executive-decision mode.

Being a good brown-nose, The Geek scurries off quickly and 30 seconds later I notice the red **'LOCKOUT'** lamp on the swipe card readers illuminate.

(Man, this beats working!)

"They say they're not equipped for this, but they've called the Police!" The Geek gasps to the Head.

"**THE POLICE!**" The Boss cries. "This is out of hand! My bloody card just doesn't work!"

"He's getting very aggressive!" The Geek notes, taking the lead role in the inquisition. "Are you sure the glass is bulletproof?"

"Yes it is." I respond. "But has anyone considered that it may just be that his card's not working?"

"The why did he threaten to shoot us?" The Geek asks, Perry Masoning away. "And then he wouldn't show us in his bag! Who knows **WHAT** he's got in there."

I stifle (with effort) the urge to suggest "A packet of smokes and a stick mag" and once again try for the voice of reason. "It may just be a broken swipe card."

"Does he look like someone with a broken swipe card?" The Geek snaps back, gesturing at The Boss, who's looking a **lot** worse for wear.

"Ok, I'll show you in my bag - will **THAT** satisfy you?"

"If you're going to show us the bag you must have your gun somewhere else. Or maybe you've got those explosive shoes like that terrorist!" The Geek cries back.

I pause momentarily to review what's taken place. And to think I was going to settle for just sending The Boss down to security to get a new card...

My thoughts are interrupted by the arrival of armed Police, who direct The Boss into a sprawled position on the ground while they search him for weapons.

Half an hour later it's over, and a very rumpled Boss enters his office, but doesn't sit down, thanks to an overzealous suggestion by The Geek about where he might be hiding an offensive weapon... Moments later, he's at the door of Mission Control, tapping on the glass...

No, I couldn't..!

I let him in.

"I.. Uh.. Just wanted to thank you for your efforts in trying to calm down the situation earlier on," he mumbles. "Things seemed to get out of hand when the Helpdesk bloke got involved. And I was.. wondering if you could..."

"Organise for the Helldesk geek to be at the bottom of a Comms riser when a carton of tinned goods accidentally falls from the fourthh floor?"

"uh.. yes."

"The PFY's already onto it..."

It's like clockwork around here....

Bastardman and Robin

BOFH 2002 Episode 6

Published Saturday 30th March 2002 11:40 GMT

So The PFY and I are at some fundraiser that a vendor's slipped us tickets for when I happen to glance at the night sky, and notice the Horned Phone image in the clouds, which can only mean one thing - Commissioner Gordon needs us.

I signal quietly to The PFY that we're needed by tipping my drink down his back. When that doesn't work, I point to the clouds.

Getting back to Mission Control, I insert my fingers into the nose of the bust of Bill Gates in the corner of the office, pull back the head to reveal a red button - which I subsequently press - opening a secret door to a freight elevator that goes direct to an old sub-sub-sub-basement area, known only to the PFY, myself, and some sad people best not mentioned during daylight hours.

The PFY and I waste no time in suiting up in our crime fighting gear (Jeans, Teeshirt, Doc Martins & Bottle of Brut 33 Spray [for emergencies only]).

"To the Bastardmobile!" I cry, indicating the completely chromed exterior of our Ford Granada with a rebored 454 big block crammed under the hood. I start the engine on the seventh attempt and notice the flames shooting out the exhaust, which can only mean several things: The timing's probably shot, the Muffler is too, and high octane aviation fuel probably isn't the safest thing to be using. i.e. The car's rooted.

(And I should probably move the fuel barrel from behind the car)

Still, A good bastard never lets something like that get him down, and I plant the boot and we rocket out onto a side street, the disused Tube Station doors opening and closing noiselessly around us. Which is more than I can say for the Granada.

. . . a brief theme tune and hourglass icon later . . .

"Bastardman!" The Chief cries as we slip into a parking space outside the station with the grace and ease of a car accident. Which in fact it was, me only just noticing that what I thought was a car computer readout was really just the OIL light. "and Rabid!"

The PFY and I nod in unison and slip in through the back passage. But obviously not The Chief's - no matter what you read in those sleazy showbiz mags.

"What seems to be the problem, commissioner?" I ask, as we enter his office, helping myself to one of his Cuban cigars. (I don't smoke the things obviously, but when they're on offer, one feels obliged.)

"It's your old Archrival!" Commissioner Gordon responds "Back and causing problems!"

"Oh, not **ANOTHER** security Patch for IE!" the PFY cries. "They promised to stop at 4000!"

"No, not him!" the Commissioner responds.

"The Questioner?" The PFY asks, recalling an enemy so annoying we sent him down for a long, long time,

"No, no," the commissioner replies, shaking his head gravely. "We've had no more 'Are you sure you want to delete all these items' messages - **EVEN WHEN YOU UNCHECK THE DISPLAY DELETE CONFIRMATION DIALOG BOX** - since you sent that bastard down!"

"Renderman?" the PFY asks

"No, we've just had to get used to HTML messages being rendered without choice in Outlook, regardless of the gaping security risk that it poses."

"Well then who ca.. **NO!**"

"Yes!"

"But he died!"

"So we thought, but..."

"HOLY CRAP-SETUP-CAUSING-REPEATED-SUPPORT-CALLS-FOR-YEARS-ON-END!" the PFY cries, firing up a cigar and helping himself to one of the Commissioner's lagers - as he's not driving. Come to think of it, given the smoking wreck outside, I pop the top off one myself.

. . . Three hours later . . .

"So what you're saying is that if you hit your desktop 20 times with a club hammer.." The Chief slurs, waving half a kebab around as a visual aid. "You're..."

"You're actually configuring it's non-volatile settings", I finish, opening my tenth lager.

"But isn't it just going to be stuffed?"

"Indeed it is. However, it's never going to be UN-stuffed, which makes that setting non-volatile."

"Ah, I see!"TThe Chief cries.

"I don't see how any of this has to do with **CRAP-INSTALLER-MAN!**," the commissioner interrupts. "He's probably going around the city as we speak, doing poorly documented customised installs, and removing key components of the operating system."

"You mean IE, which Windows is broken without?" The Chief burbles.

"No, KEY components. Anyway, you don't seem to be too worried Bastardman...?"

"I'm not. I've laid a trap for him, which I'm sure he'll fall into."

"Ah, you mean you've got a desktop machine, removed the Operating System from it, and have left it in an office somewhere, KNOWING that Crap-Installer-Man will somehow find it, and work his fiendish business upon it!?"

"No, I mean I removed some of the raised-floor tiles in the computer room, and removed the circuit breaker from the lights. Which he'll fall into."

..One *CRASH* (which fills the whole screen, accompanied by a trumpet fanfare) later...

"I think you've caught him Bastardman!" The Chief cries. "And now we can unmask the fie.."

>**JANGLE!**< >**JANGLE**<

I wake from my sleep to find the fire alarms going and the PFY shaking me vigorously.

"Wha?" I ask

"You fell asleep after the pub lunch!" the PFY cries. "And The Boss has just fallen thru the Computer Room raised floor in the dark, and dropped his coffee on the water leak detector cable."

"What was he doing in the Computer Room - with or without a coffee"

"He wanted to borrow a copy of the Win2k Install media?"

"Ah. Right! So it was **MOSTLY** a dream then."

"Wha?"

"Oh. Nothing."

Sometimes dreams are so real, you can still taste the lager ..

BOFH: Oh Bondage, Up Yours!

BOFH 2002 Episode 7

Published Monday 8th April 2002 12:14 GMT

So I'm sitting at my desk reading an online computing rag when The Boss trundles in.

"Could you add this name to our website please?" The Boss asks, handing over a glossy brochure with the Company's name emblazoned all over it, complete with the website address of our competitors.

"That's not our domain name," I murmur, pointing to the offending text.

"Yes, it's a good idea isn't it? We advertise our stuff with the opposition's site address, and then we get all their customers because all their people will come to our site!!!"

"They'll come to **OUR** site?"

"Yes! It's this idea a guy in marketing had. If we use their name, but tell our web server to talk to anyone who wants to get to their website - we'll get all their customers!!!"

The savouring process begins.

"So let me get this straight - We use their website address and get all their customers to our website?"

"By telling our server to pretend to be their server, yes."

"And this would work how?"

"The same way it did when you told our server to pretend to be the 'www' and 'jobs' servers. You know, virtual site, or whatever."

"Ah, Of course. But wait! I've got a better idea - Why don't we pretend to be Microsoft.com - and then we'd get all their web traffic - and that's bound to be a stack more than we'd normally get! And then, when people automatically go for one of those patches to make Windows less secure, we can advertise to them!"

"Do you think it would work?!" The Boss gasps.

"As well as the first plan!" I respond.

Before I get a chance put the slipper in repeatedly, he's off to assemble the Marketing Crew to tell them of his latest plan.

The PFY gives me a withering look which can only mean he thinks I'm digging a hole to fall into..

Half an hour later I'm starting to think that maybe he's right. The Boss is back with a huge list of dotcoms that the Marketing Dept has come up with that we could use to further our products.

"Cisco.com - very good, Yahoo and Hotmail - excellent, yes, it looks like you've got a good list here. You realise that they're likely to complain.."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. And then it's legal problems - us having nothing to do with that industry - no end of hassles. Same for government sites."

"Oh," The Boss burbles sadly, no doubt wondering how he can break the bad news.

"Although I suppose you could use all the sites that get a stack of traffic, but have a less than happy existence with the legal system."

"But you said that we can't use Microsoft."

"No, I was thinking Porn sites."

"Porn sites?"

"Yes, Porn Sites. They get a stack of traffic and have a less-than-happy existence with legal authorities."

"Do they get that much traffic?"

"Well from our site alone the porn industry gets more hits than our website gets from the rest of the world."

"Really."

"Yes! I can show you the logs if you like! You'd be surprised who's looking at wha.."

"That won't be necessary," The Boss chips in guiltily. "So which sites should we use?"

"The popular ones, obviously."

"And they are?"

"Oh I don't know, I'd have to go and look to see which have a lot of content."

"How long would it take?"

"Oh, hardly any time at all - two, maybe three days."

"I've got installations to do!" The PFY blurts, not succeeding in masking his annoyance.

"I think that the installations could wait a while," The Boss responds.

10 minutes later..

"THREE DAYS OFF TO BROWSE PORN!" the PFY cries. **"I LOVE MY JOB!"**

"I think you're missing the point," I respond. "We're trying to find sites that would be used to promote the company, which means that you'll be grading sites on the following criteria: The number of visitors; Originality and breadth of content; Specialist Content and quantity of content. Once you've rated the sites on these scales you would **TELL ME ABOUT IT TOO BECAUSE I LOVE MY JOB AS WELL!!!!**"

..Three days later...

"..And unfortunately, it transpires that you can't pretend to be a site which is already set up, as the DNS won't direct enquiries to your machine simply because you pretend

to be that site!"

"This is terrible!" The Boss blurts. "So we can't even use our opposition's site name after we printed all that promotional material?"

"No."

"So the whole thing's been a complete waste of time."

"Pretty much. Although we do have a comprehensive list of the best free porn sites in the world"

"Hmmm. Well I suppose we might be able to use it for some marketing purpose. May as well fire me an email message listing them."

"I DONT THINK so!" The PFY interjects.

"Look I don't have time to argue with you, just send me the message so I have something to prove that I wasn't wasting your time for three days."

"50 quid."

"That's preposterous! I'm not going to pay for research that you did on company time. And charging fifty pounds for it is ridiculous."

"Indeed it is," I cry. "It's worth at least 100! What with all those Teen, Bondage and Webcam sites you found yesterday."

"Bondage sites?" The Boss mumbles.

10 seconds later...

"And tell all your friends.." I say as The Boss leaves the office, while giving The PFY his cut.

"Fifty quid bonus!" The PFY blurts happily.

"I think you'll find it's 100 quid."

"No, just 50!"

"50 now, but 50 more when The Boss wants me to turn off website blocking (with our new updated list) in about 10 minutes."

"It's like a dream, isn't it?" he responds. "Only better."

The Bastard Junkets from Hell

BOFH 2002 Episode 8

Published Monday 8th April 2002 12:13 GMT

I'm working away in the Computer room (reprogramming The Boss's internet traffic monitor with a club hammer) when an important email comes in, trips an alert on my incoming mail scanner, and causes me to be messaged via cellphone.

This could be serious!

And it is. Scant moments after popping out to pick up lunch (Lager and a chicken kebab) for The PFY and myself, I'm back in Mission Control decrypting the contents of the message.

"Did you get the message from Junketwatch?" The PFY asks excitedly, spoiling the fun of it all.

"Just reading it now. Anything stand out?"

"Weeeeelll." The PFY drawls, looking holding up a training request form "I think it's going to be **VITALLY** important that I attend the 'Advanced Internetworking Security in Enterprise Situations' next week in Hawaii, given that I attended the 'Introduction to Internetworking Security in Enterprise Situations' last year, AND given our need to keep abreast of changes in the industry."

"Indeed," I respond. "Would that be the course with 1 day of tutorials for every 3 days of vendor-sponsored drinks and events?"

"Worst 2 weeks of my life!" The PFY concurs. "Getting up so early!"

"Before 11am?" I ask, suppressing my sarcasm.

"Yes."

"When the bar opened?"

"Uh huh."

"On the four days there actually **WERE** lectures?"

"Mmmmm."

"And you don't think that you're extracting the urine?"

"What?! It was hard work!"

"I can imagine - all that counting out how many bottles were left in the mini-bar every morning to put in the refill order."

"It wasn't all fun and games. Anyway, you can talk - you went on that Wireless LAN course!"

"Only to upskill myself to allow us to leverage that technology to achieve a competitive advantage and perhaps a synergy with other incentive orientated departments."

The Management Buzzword detector on the wall starts smoking after that sentence, so I feel it prudent to stop before the fire alarms trip.

"And how **HAVE** we used it?"

"Well we haven't, obviously, because at the course I learnt that there was no reliable standard to ensure the security of our transactions!"

"On the first day - and then?"

"And then I consulted both vendors and salespersons to determine the current market trends in this area and what we were to expect in the future."

"I.e. They fed and watered you in the Bar for the next four days?"

"No, that was far too noisy for the serious discussion that the topic warranted - so only part of my time was spent in the Hospitality area. The rest of the time I was taking copious notes on my laptop."

"Till it broke."

"Yes, it did get damaged on the second day, true..."

"Didn't you have to get the laptop repaired for water damage? And the strange thing was it was heavily Chlorinated water - almost like what you'd find in a pool."

"Yes, There was a small component of discussion near the pool, I recall."

"And a small component of discussion near the golf course as well perhaps?"

"Why do you ask?"

"The golf tee stuck in the power adaptor socket..."

"I did pop out to check the response of wireless in a non-built-up area, yes - and I must say it was good."

"So you played a game of golf."

"No, I used a personal disorganiser with a wireless card to record information at various geographic locations as a test of the throughput and error correction of the Wireless carrier."

"Say.... Scoring at the end of every hole?"

"Yes, I suppose so."

"So you played a game of golf?"

"Obviously, otherwise I'd have had nothing to test with and it would have just been a junket!"

"Indeed," The PFY comments drily.

Our point/counterpoints are interrupted by the arrival of The Boss, with a freshly printed sheet of paper with a course outline on it, which can only mean he's on the list at junketwatch too, worst luck.

"Looks like I'll be away later in the month for a conference on.."

"Enterprise Internet security," The PFY finishes.

"u.."

"In Hawaii?" I ask.

"Uh..."

"It seems there may be a conflict of interest here given our finite training budgets," I say, addressing the other two interested parties. "And there seems to be only one way of resolving this."

"A reasoned discussion?" The Boss states thoughtfully.

"Cattleprods at 5 paces?" The PFY asks.

"No, no - none of these methods will truly reflect the suitability of the candidate for the level of skill needed at the course. No, I suggest something far more indicative of suitability..."

2 minutes later.

"I WON!" The PFY cries, as The Boss and I look on with disgust. "And it was all so logical - proving I am the suitable candidate!"

"Yes, you seemed very confident, but how did you know?"

"A piece of cake!" The PFY boasts **"YOU'RE** a human deskblotter, so you're bound to go Scissors or Paper because they're things you're familiar with, so I just had to stick to Scissors till you eventually chose paper."

"But what's Rock got to do with Simon?"

"Simple. Scissors and Paper are definitely out because you can't bash a machine to death with them. Besides, he always chooses Rock."

It has to be admitted that The PFY has a point.

"So that's it then?" The Boss sneers as The PFY does a victory lap of the floor in full gloat mode.
"You're just going to take it?"

"Of course I am" I reply magnanimously, "The PFY won fair and square, and that's all there is to it. He deserves to go - as would I if I'd won!"

"Well, I must say that's an unexpected change of heart on your part!" The Boss mumbles, "and if you're big enough to accept it, well so am I!"

The Boss departs, defeated, no doubt planning to ensure the airfare and hotel booking are able to be changed to a different name at the last minute just in case The PFY should suddenly become unavoidably detained in our Wales office with some terrible systems failure or the other. The sneaky bastard.

With that in mind I put the second chicken kebab in my drawer alongside the first, as it now looks like I'll be buying lunch for both The Boss and The PFY late next week...

The Bastard gets flustered

BOFH 2002 Episode 9

Published Friday 3rd May 2002 15:40 GMT

"I am **so** tired," the contract marketing consultant dweeb simpers as he plops down the large box of backup tapes he's been poring over and helps himself to a hot chocolate from the Operator's espresso machine.

When I say hot chocolate, I mean used coffee grounds laced with crushed chocolate laxative tablets and cocoa powder. Following a spate of people helping themselves to the coffee machine paid for out of our own personal funds (well, the claims the PFY and I put in for overtime in the 'Creative Accounting' section of our timesheets) - we've decided the best defence is a good offence. The coffee is a particularly good blend, roast from only the finest pencil sharpenings, again mixed with our preloved grounds and crushed diet pills. True, it comes out a little light, but a lot can be achieved with liberal application of an inkjet refill package...

"Tired?" The PFY asks, only encouraging the mutant to continue. "Why?"

"I've been up half the night at a bloody photo shoot." he whines.

"As opposed to us, who've been up the **whole** night recovering the data you lost," The PFY adds.

"It was an accident!" the dweeb cries "An easy one to make too! The Del key is so near to the enter key!"

"And the OK button on the delete confirmation message was so near to the Cancel Button?"

"I got a bit flustered. I'd been up for 12 hours and the pressure takes its toll!"

"What pressure was that then?" I ask.

"The pressure of deadlines. We have to get our copy out on a schedule, and it has to be to the printers by lunchtime."

"And if it's not in by lunchtime?"

"The printers and publicity launch would have to be moved back a whole day!"

"Sounds like a couple of phone calls to me," I interject.

"I don't think you really understand the world of PR," he chuckles condescendingly "There's a **lot** more to it than a couple of phone calls."

"Yes, you're probably right - what would I know about the real world?"

"Not a lot, I'd bet," he adds. "Cloistered away here in a dark office, miles from the real world surrounded by machines instead of people.."

"You're probably right," I agree, while The PFY shakes his head sadly in the background. "I think we're sometimes liable to forget who the real customer is."

"Yes!" he answers, confirming my suspicions. "When it boils down to it, you people are there to look after us - not vice versa. We're the real producers in the company! I mean sure, you have technical ability, but you can get that sort of thing anywhere - there's **LOADS** of technical people looking for jobs at the moment."

"Yes, there is a bit of a downturn, so I suppose we're lucky to be in work in the first place."

"You bet you are!" the marketing dweeb continues, digging the hole that much bigger, "Without us you'd be another geek on the streets. In fact, you should be **thankful** to us for making the work that keeps you in a job - instead of always telling us that we can't do things!"

"You mean like telling you that you can't just publish the address of some webpage and then get us to create it with zero days notice?"

"Yeah!"

"Or getting us to reschedule our morning maintenance downtimes till out-of-hours so that it doesn't affect your worktime - even though none of you turn up till 11am anyway?"

"But we **MIGHT** turn up before 11 - and then we wouldn't be able to do our work!"

"Yes, I think you're right. In fact, I feel that on behalf of my assistant and myself I'd like to ask you to pass on our thanks to you and your group. It's not often I come to realise my real place in the worl.. Oh bugger!"

"What?" the dweeb asks

"Oh, I've bloody gone and deleted all those files we recovered!"

"How?"

"It's that bloody DEL key - You're right, it's very close to the Enter key. I've never noticed how close it was before. And you'd think I would have, after 18 years in computing!"

"It's OK, just don't hit OK on the confirm box!" he gasps.

"Too late!" I blurt. "I got flustered!"

"**SHIT!**" the dweeb says. "You'll have to recover it again as fast as you can!!!"

"Sure," I cry. "I'm sorry. The most recent tape's still in the drive, so I should be able to... **BOLLOCKS!**"

"**WHAT!?**" the dweeb cries.

"I clicked the FORMAT button instead of RECOVER - They're so close together!"

"It doesn't even ask you if you're sure?!!!?" the dweeb squeaks.

"Well it did, but I got flustered and thought it meant sure that I wanted to recover!"

"**BUGGER!**" The PFY cries from the other side of the room "Who put all these backup tapes on the scratch tape desk! I've just bloody erased them!"

"**WHAT?!**" the dweeb squeaks, turning the sort of crimson that reeks of cerebral haemorrhage in the near future..

"**OH NO!**" I say to The PFY grimly. "This doesn't look good for us -login all those files!"

"What are we going to do?" The PFY nods. "I mean, with the job market like it is an all, we're sure to be replaced by one of those droves of computing professionals from the real world who knows more about computing than we do. We'll have to do something!"

"Pub lunch?" I suggest.

"Good idea!"

"You can't be serious!" the dweeb cries.

"Of course we are," I counter. "I mean after all, you can't put back your deadline with a couple of phone calls, and we can't get your files back without a low level disk recovery, which is bound to take a day or two. So, we may as well have an early - and long - pub lunch, as it won't make much difference anyway."

"Well can you start the recovery now? I mean I could make some calls and see if I can put the deadline back a **few**days."

"Or a week to be on the safe side," The PFY cries slipping his jacket on. "And we'd probably need an advance cash payment of overtime of.... 500 quid...each."

"No, no," I sigh, slipping on my coat as well "I'm sure that's not how it happens in the real world. I'm sure in the real world contract Marketing Consultants have huge Malpractice insurance to cover situations like this. No, I'm afraid we're just old school."

"Uh.. Malpractice Insurance?"

"Yes, you know, if they delete information belonging to a company which is subsequently found to be unrecoverable. I'm sure you've got that, being in the real world and all."

"Uh.. Yes."

....

So The PFY and I are sitting in the pub with 500 quid apiece in readies contemplating the recovery plan we'll need to put in play.

"So I'm guessing the easiest way would be to step through all the incremental tapes since the pre-2k upgrade snapshot?" The PFY asks.

"Yes, that's one option."

"Or would it be better to do a disk/file recovery - even though we don't know if we'll get everything back intact?"

"Nah, I think we'll go with Plan A: Bring the recovery staging area back online in a week's time and just copy the files over from there. Fair enough?"

"Gravy!"

The BOFH Desidoreplicator

BOFH 2002 Not really an Episode but 10

Published Monday 29th July 2002 13:58 GMT

Desidoreplicator

The following text was found carved into the back of a Commodore CBM Business machine, dated 1-Sep-1970

Go placidly amid the noise and haste,

and remember what peace there may be in pressing the UPS SHUTDOWN button.

As far as possible, without surrender, be on good terms with all persons

- Even the helpdesk

Speak your truth quietly and clearly;

and when that fails, use the ZX81 method of punching information into people repeatedly.

Listen to others, even to the dull and ignorant;

for you too may be a Manager some day.

Avoid loud and aggressive persons;

especially if they have business cards but no entertainment budget.

If you compare your processor with others, you'll get bitter and twisted

as there's always a faster processor on the market.

(for you to steal from the Boss's machine when he buys it)

Enjoy your achievements as well as your plans –

Doubly so for the those that no-one knows about.

Keep interested in your own career, however humble,
but always lie on your C.V.

Exercise caution in your Equipment Purchases,
For Vendors are full of trickery.
But let this not blind you to what virtue there is;
Many persons strive for high ideals –
Right up until they sell out.

Be yourself.
Especially, do not feign respect for technical incompetence.

Neither be cynical about Benchmarking;
for in the face of all aridity and disenchantment,
they don't mean anything anyway.

Take kindly the counsel of the years,
but limit your intake of "When I worked with PDPs" stories.

Nurture strength of spirit to shield you when the excrement and cooling device meet.
But do not distress yourself with dark imaginings.
That's the Boss's job.

Many fears are born of stupidity and ignorance –
Which you should be feeding with rumour and generalisation.

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself,
but not too gentle when browsing porn.
You know what I mean.

You are a child of the Internet, no less an ICQer than others
You have a RIGHT to your opinion,
Even if it is crap.

And whether or not it is clear to you, someone's broken into your machine
and replacing your porn with Mandelbrot images.

Therefore be at peace with Computing,
Whichever platform you run or operating system you use.
Even if it is Microsoft.
Even if you forked out for Software Assurance
Even if you thought Open meant Open.

And whatever your trials and tribulations,
in the noisy confusion of life, remember to get enough sleep.
A talk by Richard Stallman is good for this.

With all its limited download speeds, inflated specs and broken promises,
it is still a reasonable experience mainly.

Be cheerful. Strive to be happy

Oh, and we just set fire to your desktop.

The Bastard Range of Wearable Computers

BOFH 2002 Episode 11

Published Sunday 2nd June 2002 21:41 GMT

"Tell me about this wearable computing stuff?" The Boss asks, loafing around our office for a change instead of his own.

"Crap," The PFY comments disparagingly. "It's usually so low-end it requires a stepladder to get to 'useable' and hugely proprietary to keep you hooked into the original vendor."

"He's right," I'm forced to admit. "Everything I've seen has 'whizzy' features that revolve around some prerequisite handheld device, **OR** they're whizzy because the interface is something strange or unusual which has been relabelled 'intuitive'."

"You mean like the the 'shoe' buttons?" The PFY adds.

"Shoe Buttons?" The Boss echoes.

"Yeah, your left foot is the left mouse button, and your right foot is your right mouse button," The PFY responds. "Tap on the toes of the left foot to use the left button, right foot to use the right button."

"Well that sounds fairly resonable," The Boss burbles.

"Unless you're on a crowded tube at rush hour..."

"Well obviously you'd hav..."

"..or playing football..."

"I hardly think you'd b..."

"...or having your shoes shined."

"Yes, well..

"But apart from being unusable in most occasions where a portable computer might be handy, it's a great interface!"

"Yes. **NO!** No, I was thinking more something like this." The Boss burbles dragging a magazine article out of his pocket and unfolding it. From my viewport, it looks suspiciously like an article from one of the less reputable computing rags on the future of computing.

"Ah yes, completely proprietary, and mostly useless..." The PFY comments, scanning the furry-toothed editor's comments.

"But it's ideal for portable use! You can take notes when you're in transit!"

"You mean like a pen and paper."

"It also reminds you of your meetings!"

"Like your secretary?"

"That's not the point!"

"Well it **IS** rather expensive," I mumble, pointing at the bottom line. "Three thousand quid for the base system, excluding docking modules. Hell, WE could slap together one for less than that. AND it would be made from generic parts so would interface better to your current system too!"

"Could you?!" The Boss gasps, suppressing his unmanly girlish enthusiasm. "I only ask because I'm going to a technology directions meeting for the company in a couple of days, and it'd be nice to give them something to think about."

(I.e. a quick game of who's got the whizziest system)

"Well, it would only be a prototype.." The PFY responds.

"That's OK, it's just to give them an idea," he chips hurriedly.

"Well, we'd need to do some use case analysis with you, which might take some time to complete, given your busy sche.."

"DO IT NOW!"

"Ok, well what do you want it for?"

"General note taking, portable office thingeys, um, oh, email, and maybe document stuff."

"Right - and Operating system?"

"Windows, uh, XP?"

"Ok, User interface?"

"Hm?"

"How you would enter data?"

"Sleeve keyboard, I think he mentioned," The Boss responds, pointing at the article.

"Screen?"

"Sub, uh miniature, eyepiece," he reads.

"Right, Non Maskable input protection?"

"Wha?"

"A button in an out of the way place to make sure you don't accidentally hit CTRL-ALT-DELETE and reset your system."

"Yes?"

"Well, you put the power and reset buttons at a physical position you're not likely to touch often. Like Simon would put his reset button next to his wallet if he were using his machine at the pub."

It's all fun and games till someone gets accidentally falls down a stairwell...

"Oh. Well I don't know - What do you suggest?"

"Reset switch in your groin area and power switch on your backside is fairly standard."

"Yeah. Sure," The Boss replies cynically.

"True Story," The PFY responds. "Groin because you tend to protect that rather well anyway, and backside because when you sit down at your desk, you don't need the portability any more."

"Welllll, I suppose you have a point..."

Three days later..

"It's a little.. Chunky," The Boss blurts.

"That's mainly the batteries, but we worked out a cool way to put them in your shoes, then used an ultra micro motherboard which straps onto your back - complete with ROM strap lock mechanism for security - along with rubberised touchpad keys and pressure pad material for the power and reset buttons. Strap it on and have a go!"

. . ten minutes later..

"It's working!" The Boss gasps, gazing into his sunglasses. "Gosh, it boots fast!!"

"It would do, as it has a solid state disk and clock chipped processor," The PFY burbles proudly. "Now try the office suite - I've synchronised your email, but if you want we could slap a bluetooth card in it and you'd be synchronised permanently when you're in the office."

"This is fantastic!" The Boss cries delightedly. "It's brilliant, I can - wait a minute, the screen colour's gone all wonky. And... my back's getting hot."

"Yes, like I said, it's a test rig. The heatsink's up against your body initially, but we can probably flip it around and let it cool through your clothes. The onboard graphics card probably doesn't like the heat either."

"It's getting bloody hot!!!" The Boss gasps. "And I can't get it off!"

"Yes, well, that's the ROM strap lock. Just reset the unit, select Low-Speed Operation so it runs cooler, then select Strap Lock reset and type in the password."

"Ok, and what's the password?"

"I've got it written down here somewhere..." The PFY mumbles, searching amongst the mass of paper which is his desktop.

"Hurry!"

"Well reset it, and change the speed setting!"

"I can't find the reset button!!!"

"The groin!" The PFY cries

"I know, I can't find it!!!"

"You're probably not pressing hard enough!!!"

An hour later I grudgingly hand over the 100 quid I owe The PFY for losing the bet as to whether he could get The Boss to **TELL** him to kick him in the nuts.

Still, it could have been worse, I could have paid per reset. While The Boss was still conscious...

A bored admin is a very dangerous person...

The Bastard goes email snooping

BOFH 2002 Episode 12

Published Monday 29th July 2002 13:56 GMT

"But how do we **KNOW** that they're not reading our email?" a geeky type from payments asks The Boss over an evening beverage at the company bar.

"Because the software doesn't let them" The Boss replies, dipping a tentative toe in technology for a second.

"Yes, but how do we know that they don't change that software to allow them to do it anyway?" he persists.

"Numbers," The PFY chips in sagely.

"Numbers?"

"Yes. There's what, 600 people working here - all getting email from people all over the country and the world. To look at their email, we'd have to go through each and every mailbox checking all their messages. We just wouldn't have the time to do it!"

"Yes, but you could if you only wanted to read **ONE** person's mail."

"Well I suppose we **COULD**, but we'd have to have some sort of reason. You know, something that would make us wonder what a person is hiding..."

"Right, yes, OK! Well I suppose that covers it! Drinks anyone?" he responds hastily.

*****MENTAL NOTE TAKEN*****

... The next day dawns, and even The Boss is showing an interest - wanting to know if the person in question has a skeleton or two in the closet...

"..and what you're looking for is files which look like they should be there, but really are out of place. Like.... **THAT ONE!**" The PFY explains, pointing at a folder on the screen.

"PAYSHD.ZIP! Won't that be a Pay.... Schedule file or something? Hardly worth looking into.."

"That's just what he wants you to think..," The PFY murmurs disparagingly. "But your average beancounter doesn't even know his trouser zip exists, let alone Winzip. No, this is progress! 20 megs of premo smut I'd wager!"

"You don't know that!"

"Know it - no. But after a while you get a nose for these things. That baby is just out of place. But don't take my word for it >clickety< >click<. Ah-HAH!"

"What? It's just an encrypted zip file?"

"Yes indeed, and encrypted file, full of smut!"

"It could be **ANYTHING!**"

"Yes, you're right. Our user has an encrypted ZIP file, which *contains* an encrypted zip file - and there's **nothing** suspicious about that..."

"He might just be being cautious."

"Oh, I think you're right there. But lets just see. First, unencrypt the contents >clickety< using his >clickety< NT password."

"I thought passwords were stored encrypted!!!"

"Normally, yes, but for our users, no,"

"Why not?!?"

"It'd make their using their email harder for a start."

"You login to their accounts and read their email!!!?!!?"

"Of course not!"

"Oh!"

"No, we use the ADMIN tool to read their email - it's much faster."

"So how having their password it make email reading easier?"

"Oh, well, we can login as them and SEND email - you know, to get more email to read. For instance, I might send one from you to that woman from personnel you were chatting up last week - suggesting a quick candlelight dinner somewhere."

"YOU SENT EMAIL FROM MY... What did she say?"

"No no, I was just using it as an example."

"Oh."

"Mind you, I wouldn't develop a nervous twitch in your eye when you're talking to that big bloke from stores as he's *definitely*... not interested."

"!" he half gasps.-0

"Sorry about that, just testing the interface."

"But my email is electronically signed with that key you got for me!"

"Indeed it is, but **THAT** key in turn is signed by an authority just a whisker away from being what's known as a 'trusted' authority."

"A whisker?"

"Well.. more like a beard."

"Which company was that then?"

"Trusty Amal's Key Registry Services. Two quid for a 64-bit key issued for 50 years!"

"Isn't 64 thingies a little bit.. insecure?" The Boss asks remembering something from technology nursery school.

"In the banking world, yes, but for your correspondence, no."

"Why not?"

"Well it's a risk reduction thing."

"How does it reduce risk?"

"You don't have to take the risk that someone will torture it out of you some day. Sort of a proactive escrow."

"So you were thinking of me the whole time?"

"Of course."

The Boss decides to cut his losses here and move on.

"So why are we continuing looking through this user's files if we've found something?"

"Well, it was too easy. And when you're a sad beancounter type, you're sort of expected to spice up your life with a couple of pictures of Barbara Cartland taking on a midget wrestler or two. No, this guy's really hiding something.."

"Like what?"

"Oh something that he doesn't want anyone to know about. Cutting Edge Porn, Dirty Stories, A Train Spotter mailing list!"

"Isn't that illegal?!"

"I don't know about the first two, but I'm fairly sure the last one is, and we should be able to find out.... >clickety< veerrrry shortly, as he's used the same password twice."

"What is it?" The Boss gasps.

"It's a pay Schedule file - amounts, people, etc. What a bust."

"So what was he hiding?"

"Well there are several different train timetables in his inbox.." I murmur.

"I'll call the cops!" The PFY says.

Two hours later the police have left, after being most unhelpful. Of course they questioned the bloke concerned, but with the liberal laws these days, people can get away with trainspotting without charge. Personally, I blame the government.

Still, The PFY and I while away the intervening hours thinking up ways to cement The Boss's relationship with that bloke in stores, while the bloke concerned (after the first message anyway) whiles away the hours thinking up ways to cement The Boss in stores.

It's a funny old world.

The Bastard Guide to Overclocking

BOFH 2002 Episode 13

Published Monday 29th July 2002 13:56 GMT

So The CEO's been away visiting his kids up north somewhere, which means he'll be back with a couple of 'useful' suggestions from his pride-and-joy grandkid who's a junior furry tooth. (And has a solar emitting backside, if The CEO is to be believed).

Sure enough, he's in the Boss's office within 1/2 an hour of having his coffee and Danish, paper and daily dump. Things look grim.

Ten minutes later, it's even worse. It would seem that the Mini-Geek's concerned going for his overclocking merit badge and has misrepresented it as the upgrade-of-the-future to his grandpop. Worse still, The CEO thinks we can make a PII-300 into a P4-5000 just by changing the processor and adding a few wires and a fan...

Sigh...

"In **THEORY** it sort of works like that," I say, drawing a quick diagram on the Boss's whiteboard, "but in **ACTUALITY**, it's a lot more complicated than that. You've got CPU temperatures to consider - *if* a higher spec is supported by the board - along with bus speeds, interoperability with other components of lesser spec, not to mention power supply requirements!"

"Yes, yes, but all this stuff has a certain amount of leeway built into it which we could take advantage of," The CEO burbles, having been fully indoctrinated into the ancient order of overspeccing. "We could save the company tens of thousands of pounds by deferring upgrades that you people ask for every year - money that could better be spent on strengthening the Corporate Image."

By 'Strengthening the Corporate Image' he no doubt means getting back the Private Boxes the company used to have at major sporting fixtures where the company upper management could go to drink themselves stupid (well, stupider) at the expense of the shareholder.

Ok, so I'm bitter and twisted at never being invited there myself, but I'm almost over it...

"But think about the kit we're replacing!" I counter. "It's the oldest stuff - the stuff least likely to be clockable - and even if it were, the fastest supported processor is likely to only be a 5% speed upgrade."

"Which is where the clocking comes in" The CEO burbles "My grandson says he can get a 25-40 % increase in speed, which means that we could get another one or two years out of these machines!"

I'm a bit concerned - and not just because The CEO's going to put the kybosh on the nice little earner that The PFY and I have had going for a couple of years - performing the above upgrades and then selling them to the company via a third party company as new boxes...

...

"I always thought they'd get suspicious that their 'NEW' machine had a 5.25 inch floppy and a turbo light, but apparently not," The PFY comments later as I tell him about the potential problem and it's effect on one of our lesser publicised revenue streams. "-But there's no accounting for intelligence."

"I always told them that it was there for the backward compatibility module."

"Backward compatibility?"

"Yeah - I added 25 quid to the price and made it a line item..."

"Smooth. So this is going to go to crap if overclocking comes in?"

"Yes."

"So we just stuff the overclocking up then?"

"Can't - The CEO's grandspawn's going to come in and do it..."

"The little bastard. I suppose they're going to **PAY** him too."

"Yes, a 'consultancy fee' to the little rugrat's college fund."

"Hmmmm," The PFY replies, sitting down to think.

...

"And so you put this heat transfer paste on the heatsink which improves its ability to conduct heat away from the CPU, allowing us to increase the processor speed at the same time" the Mini-Geek burbles to his ancestor.

"Until you go too far, of course," The PFY adds. "At which time the machine becomes unusable."

"No, because you put this thermal cutout device in," the little rat blurts, pointing out a small object nestling against the CPU heatsink, "which powers the machine down when it gets too hot."

"Well, it sounds like you've really thought this out," The CEO chuckles happily "so I'll leave you to it. Once you've done the first 10 machines we'll see how well they run, and maybe do some more upgrades."

With that, he trundles out while The Boss brown-noses him about how his grandspawn is a shiny example of the younger generation, and isn't it a pity they're all not like that.

"The thing I find strange," our latest consultant mutters sneakily, once the room is clear, "is that the machines already seem to be clock-chipped."

"Really?" The PFY asks, faking surprise

"Yes. It looks just like someone slapped a 'PIII-500' sticker on the front and just cranked the speed to dodgy levels."

"You're joking!" I cry, "You mean the vendor ripped us off?!!!"

"The Vendor? You mean the Company which doesn't exist, but which shares the same Post Office Box as the Limited Company that **YOU** trade under?" the Mini-Geek smirks a little too knowingly.

"How much?" I feel obliged to ask.

"50 quid," he blurts smugly, in the manner of a true professional.

"Done."

"..per machine," he adds.

A slight flicker of pride crosses The PFY's face at this point, leading me to believe that there's more rotten in the state of Denmark than the cheese..

"Uh... Done."

"..In the building."

"Ok, so how much is that?" I ask, not wanting to give anything away.

The runt responds with a number that is too accurate to be coincidence - right down to the boxes marked "Analog Phone Spares" hidden in the back of the storeroom, and I know that something has to be done.

"It's a fair cop guv", I cry. "And I suppose you'll be wanting cash."

"Would that be from your hidden cash-stash?" The PFY asks, feigning innocence.

Later, at the hospital...

"I blame myself of course" I blurt to the Boss between sniffles "Who could have know that pallet of paper was so unstable!!!"

"Well, don't worry yourself - you weren't to know they'd let themselves into the store after hours."

"Well is there anything I can do."

"At this stage the doctor believes they just need a bit of rest - a night trapped hasn't done wonders for their mental state."

"Poor bastards," I murmur, scribbling a reasonable rendition of the House Doctor's signature under the instruction for an aggressive laxative treatment on The PFY's sheet. "Poor, poor bastards."

Play with fire, get burnt.

BOFH and the God of Workplace Harmony

BOFH 2002 Episode 14

Published Friday 12th July 2002 23:27 GMT

"..and so we're looking to identify problems in the workplace that could lead to illness, injury or personal discomfort," the Human Resources Health and Safety Droid burbles happily to the majority of the IT Dept.

Sigh. It's the same thing every year - we're obliged to attend an Occupational Health and Safety Course and identify risks in our environment that need to be addressed. Failure to attend means you're marked 'absent from school' and get docked a day's pay, thanks to the stooley nature of the HR Droid concerned. The rows of vacant faces are a testament to how well this works after the low attendance last year...

"Obviously, this is good for both you and the company," The Droid continues, "because we reduce the incidence of accidents to you and lost revenue to the company!"

"Didn't we already do this?" The PFY murmurs quietly, remembering something similar from days past.

"Yes," I respond. But it hasn't escaped the attention of the HR department that whilst accident reports for us two remain at a static **ZERO**, accidents in our area just keep increasing."

"Oh. So you mean they wanted us to identify areas which put **OTHER** people at risk?!?"

"I believe that was the purpose, yes."

"Ah! Now I get it! I did think they were paying a lot more attention to our wellbeing than they normally did."

"Indeed."

"DO YOU HAVE SOMETHING TO SHARE WITH EVERYONE?" the HR Feeb snaps in a distinctly annoyed manner.

"Well, yes," The PFY replies. "This identifying danger areas - would this be like the Danger of getting shut in a tape safe over the weekend?"

"Well **YES**, I think that would be a valid danger!" he responds, pleasantly surprised that someone was listening for once. "And so from that danger, or potential accident, we would work back to the cause, and ways to prevent it."

"Oh. OK, well I suppose the cause would be annoying me, and ways of preventing it would be locking my office door and taking the phone off the hook."

"No, I think you misunderstand. We're talking about ways to prevent the accident occurring - or getting worse - like perhaps fitting a safety release to the inside of the door."

"Oh," I interject. "We actually used to have one of those, but it was removed to ensure that in the unlikely event of someone being trapped in the tape safe it would provide enough air to sustain life."

"You mean the safe is airtight?"

"Well it **HAS** to be airtight to work - otherwise the heat of a fire would penetrate the safe and destroy the media."

"Ok, but thinking back a step, wouldn't the safety release remove the need for an air hole?"

"Ordinarily yes," I concur, "but in the **UNLIKELY** event that a large filing cabinet was **ACCIDENTALLY** leant up against the outside release mechanism, it would still provide the air needed for the person inside."

"I think you're multiplying slight probabilities here, and the likelihood of this happening as you described is extremely small."

"But still a possibility," The PFY responds darkly.

"But not one which would lead to anyone endorsing the removal of a safety feature in a device. Tell me, who removed the lever concerned?"

"I did," The PFY responds tersely, obviously thinking back to that couple of hours of feverish activity before the torch batteries ran out...

"Well it's not recommended, and as an Official Safety Agent of the Company I'm required to ask you to replace it - but how would someone even get trapped in a tape safe?" the HR Droid asks, really starting to labour the point now. "Surely it has shelves, and tapes, in it?"

"Well there's no point in putting tapes in it if they're not going to be safe from fire," I respond, deciding on the recursive approach, " what with that air hole in it and all."

"But if you put the door release back, then replace the shelves, there'd be no possibility that someone would get locked in the safe!!!" he cries triumphantly.

"But then there'd be no air in the safe," The PFY blurts, playing dumb.

"You don't need it!"

"You do if you're trapped in it over a Bank Holiday Weekend just because you won too many games of Unreal Tournament and your Supervisor is a poor sport!" The PFY replies.

Perhaps I'm being oversensitive, but I may have detected a slight touch of annoyance in The PFY's voice - almost as if he still bears a grudge about the lost weekend last year. I momentarily consider advising him to just let it go, but decide to play it safe and say nothing.

"But you can't get lock in there if the lever and shelves are in there!"

"I'm not sure I follow you," I say, joining the discussion..

"It's simple," he explains, going to the whiteboard and drawing pictures frantically.

The rest of the audience look on silently - knowing what this means - the God of Workplace Harmony requires a sacrifice...

"I'm not sure I follow you either," one of the IT geeks speaks up, remembering only too well the reduced pay packet he encountered this time last year. "Perhaps we should actually see it in-situ, as it were."

...

>**SLAM!**<

...

God of Workplace Harmony appeased, good fortune soon to follow...

The Bastard Vending Machine

BOFH 2002 Episode 15

Published Tuesday 9th July 2002 20:35 GMT

I'm a little tired and, I'll admit, cranky after a hefty night with a Slave Trader who was trying to get me to outsource our IT. Admittedly, he for some reason (i.e. The PFY told him) thought I was the HR Manager for the Company, **AND** didn't realise that we outsourced most IT staff anyway. But the truth didn't come up until much later in the piece, by which time we were great mates, so no real harm was done. Except me hurting my knee getting out the window after popping off to the toilet and not coming back, of course....

Well, it was that or get the rather hefty bill...

Anyway, I'm not in the mood for distractions, upset, nor the sound of The PFY beating the living crap out of the vending machine. True, it ate his coins without the customary dumping of a food item with the health potential of ground-zero Chernobyl - but that's not the point.

"It'll fall on you," I warn him, observing The PFY trying the rock and roll approach.

"No it won't - it's got bricks in it for stability!" he responds smugly.

"If they were installed for stability, they wouldn't fill it all the way to the top," I feel compelled to assert.

"You mean they're installed..."

"...as a deterrent, yes. I mean all you'd need is a couple of gruesome fatalities and the word would get around. Even a nasty crush injury or two would do. Before you know it, people start being a bit more careful..."

"I... Oh sure.." The PFY says, doubtfully.

"Right, I'm lying. And yet, they never seem to bolt the machines to the floor - *'for stability'* do they?"

"But surely that would be illegal?"

"A fine point. It would be illegal if they made the machines easy to tip over. This way, it's just misadventure - you rocked a machine with a 'Do not rock' warning sign on it. In fact, if the company was progressive thinking, they'd have the word **MISADVENTURE** embossed in reverse into the front panelling, so the coroner can just read his findings off the forehead of your corpse."

"Well I feel like the thing is out to get me. Anyway, why don't **YOU** never have any problems with the machines!?"

"Why? Because my needs are simple, unlike yours and the masses of other automatons out there. Let me show you!"

I wander over to the machine for a demonstration.

"You" I say, indicating the control panel "choose a popular carbonated beverage with the number **12**, costing you the princely sum of one pound. Often, instead of getting the bottle of your choice, you will in fact get a bottle of carbonated water - with a flavour that was popular in the late 80s - **FOR A DAY** - and which the vendor probably has half a warehouse of, which he is slowly selling to the unsuspecting market."

"Yes, I think there's something wrong with the **1** button," The PFY comments, "a debounce thing, so when you press it once, it sometimes presses it twice."

"A button problem, of course!" I respond drily. "The machine sells 14 products and there are 16 keys, including A-F, on the keypad. Theoretically, you could just press one button to get your product. Instead you press two keys, both digits - not a number and a digit - to get your item. And the first key you always press, for **every** item has a debounce problem. And a product that no-one in their right mind would buy."

"Well it's the key most used," The PFY explains, "which means that it's bound to get some... **I CAN'T BELIEVE THEY'D DO THAT TO ME!!**"

"They're complete bastards!" I explain. "And you know sometimes, when the machine swallows a coin and doesn't register it - that's built into the ROM as well. It's called the 'Sucker Factor' and is an automatically generated number between 1 and the factory-set limit of 500. When the transaction number comes up, the coin gets swallowed, the number regenerated, and the machine continues as normal - until the new number comes up"

"You're joking!"

"Not at all. Some vendors reduce the transaction number to as low as 100."

"The bastards! But why doesn't someone do something about it?"

"Because most companies have a Service Person who's built like a minibin full of concrete - on legs - who deals with complaints. If they're really pressed, they replace the machine with a facelift model - after reducing the Sucker Factor upper limit number of course."

"Back to my original question - how come you never get stung?"

"Because as I said, my tastes aren't so mundane," I say, slipping five quid into the slot and pressing **F F F**.

"Bugger me!" The PFY cries, as a cool can of Lager pops out of the slot. "How did you do that?"

"The benefits of having met Stan, the aforementioned Service Person," I respond. "We had a great conversation, where he filled me in on what was what in the world of Vending Machines."

"I think I fancy a lager myself then!" The PFY burbles, slapping five quid down the spout.

"**WHAT?!** It says it's **10** quid for a lager!!!"

"Yes it doubles in price every time you buy a can."

"The Bastards!"

"Oh no, Stan did that at my request. I mean, if I could get cans for £1.25 continuously, I'd probably drink them all day every day. This provides a negative incentive."

"I wish you'd told me that before I put my money in," The PFY sighs. "Lend us FIVE quid?"

"Sure" I respond, handing over the dosh.

. . . Later that night at a pub in East London . . .

"So I think we can reduce the Sucker Factor limit to 50, only put two of the more popular drinks in at refill time, and don't reset the Lager Price counter till next refill. How's the Nasty Cola going."

"Still six pallets to go," Stan replies.

"Yes, but we're getting there," I say. "We're getting there..."

BOFH and The Salesbloke

BOFH 2002 Episode 16

Published Wednesday 11th September 2002 13:51 GMT

So I'm at a Telecoms conference while The PFY minds the fort back at Mission Control.

And roger me senseless with a vampire connector if I'm not sitting next to a bloke who's just dying to sell me something.

He's so easy to spot they should slap photos of him on the sides of Chinese Aircraft as a USAF navigation aid. The silver suit was a dead giveaway, as was the keenness to sit next to someone he'd spotted arriving alone...

"Amazing stuff this technology isn't it?" he whispers furtively, going for the back-entrance approach of pretending to be a fellow professional.

"Technology?" I ask vacantly, playing along.

"Yes, V-O-I-P," he mouths, using one of the crappiest acronymns available on the market to date.

"VOIP?" I ask vacantly. "You mean those planes that can take off like a helicopter?"

"No, that's VTOL. I mean Voice Over I.P!"

"IP?"

"Yes, IP!" he replies, drawing an acronymic blank and deciding to bluff.

Well, two can play at the idiot game!

"Oh. That sounds a bit technical to me. I only came here because they said they were going to talk about how to reduce our phone bills."

"THAT'S PRECISELY WHAT V-O.." the salesbloke begins excitedly.

"..And there was lunch," I interrupt. "I remember they said there was a lunch thrown in! I never miss out on a good lunch - the chance to mingle, network, and maybe get some pointers from the real techno boffins!"

He can smell blood in the water, but just wants to check the type before making his pitch.

"And what do you do?"

"Oh, I'm an IT Director."

"Really, of....?"

"The Dnebonk Group. A.. Danish company. It's very small here at the moment, but we're looking at expanding our operation into the UK, branches all over the place, that sort of thing. Anyway, they say we're going to be wanting to look at some leased thingies, a VPM or something, and some rooting things."

"Really?" he drools, thinking of his potential commission and end-of-year bonus cheque

"Yes, and I want to make sure I get the right stuff - I'm a bit of a duffer at this actually - as I have to get everything right before I put the setup budget plan in..."

"Really? How many people will be situated in the off..."

"Oh just five or so of us for now - But 30-40 about the place by year end."

"I see. And who does your installation?"

"Well I did," I admit, with a liberal coat of pride. "We have a dialup network. Obviously I'd get a network firm in when we get bigger, but for now we just use the local hardware suppliers."

"And you have a maintenance contract?"

"With Dixons? No, not yet. Do you think I should get one?"

"You buy your stuff retail?" he gasps.

"Well yes, for now - it's just easier. The company doesn't mind too much at the moment because they're still getting all the accounts set up, so it's pointless waiting till all that's done to buy stuff. So they just send me Bank Drafts till we're up and running. And it's small potatoes in the scheme of things - the company's loaded."

Before I know it I've been dragged out of the conference like a shot and into an environment more suited to decision-making. The snug bar of the nearest drinking establishment.

"For as little as, er, 50 quid per machine, we could get you some state-of-the-art.. thinwire cards and some multiport repeaters to hook them all up."

"50 quid, is that cheap?" I ask naively whilst trying to get another pint in before he gets to his next item of computer scrap.

"Well you won't see many for that price these days," he responds.

. . two hours and seven pints later ...

"Right, and what about that bundle price on that Operating System stuff. We buy 50 OS2s for 100 quid apiece, and you'll give me 20 quid trade in on my old Operating Systems. That saves me ?"

"1000 quid!" he burbles. "**AND**, I'll throw the manuals in for free!!"

I suppress the urge to say "into the bin" and instead nod my head appreciatively. The only concern I have is that I'm starting to like the idea, which can only mean one thing - I've had too much to drink and I need backup.

"Right, well, I think I'd better get my technical bloke in to give it the once over," I mumble.

"Technical bloke?" my salesguy cries unhappily. "I thought **YOU** were the technical bloke!"

"Yeah, but we've got this young bloke in who installs all the stuff." I slur, "Crash hot at the screwdriver work, he is. Only he's probably going to need some pointers on where all the pieces go. But once he knows what he's doing, he's bloody aces!"

I get The PFY on the cellphone and quicker than Richard Stallman can say "Free Beer" he's on the premises with a pint in his hand.

"This is my technical assistant who they sent over from Norway just last week. Doesn't speak a word of English!"

I don't know why I threw that in - and regret it immediately - but once it's out there what do you do?

"Norway?!" the Salesbot asks - "I thought you said the Company was from Denmark."

"Yes, the **COMPANY** is," I respond, recovering from the oversight as soon as possible, "But the support guys are from Norway. Isn't that right Sven?"

The PFY makes some dubious grunting noises and nods his head mindlessly for a bit until our Salesperson is assured that he's unlikely to constitute a threat to the sale.

"I did a bit of freelance work in Norway years ago," The Salesbloke blurts, really starting to annoy me now, "and I've still got a bit of the lingo under my belt! Hey, ..."

He proceeds to try and establish a protocol for exchange with The PFY, but that Comms circuit is just **NEVER** going to be established, so I have to think fast.

"He only speaks Croatoinuit and a little bit of Portugese-Danish. "

"Inuit? That's Eskimo isn't it?"

"Something like that. Which is why you need to **SHOW** him how to install things. But once he's got the hang of it there's no stopping him."

"Well how do you talk to him?"

"Well he's trying to learn English - but he's only mastered a few of the more common phrases."

"That's terrible. You'd think they'd train him a bit better. Another Lager?"

"Go on then," The PFY burbles, slapping his empty pint on the table.

"That's one of the more common phrases?!"

"It is in our company!"

... Three hours, 8 pints, a curry, a cigar and a strip club later...

"Well it certainly has been a great day!" the Salesbloke says, pulling out an order form and writing some hasty line items on it. Leaving room for an extra zero or two in the qauntity column, I note. "How about we sign this stuff off and I'll process it tonight before I go home for you?"

"Sounds great!" I slur, leaning on The PFY for support. "I'll give the signing guy a call."

"Signing guy? "But I thought **YOU** could sign orders?"

"Nah, he can only approve them." The PFY responds, having 'learnt' English at an astounding rate over the course of the night. "But the accounting bloke has to sign orders for him. Hang on, I'll give him a call - where are we?"

I point out the street name and The PFY dials The Boss's home number and proceeds to do Swedish chef impressions down the line.

"Buludddy nice bloke," The PFY mumbles to us. "But doesn't speak a word of PortugeseThingy. With you in a mo."

. . . Three more hours, uncountable beers, curries, cigars etc later . . .

It's hell being a computing professional.

The Bastard School of Recruitment

BOFH 2002 Episode 17

Published Monday 5th August 2002 17:44 GMT

"Well you do seem to have a bit of a Manager exit epidemic on your hands," The Slave Trader agrees as he looks over his spreadsheet. for the past year or so. "I myself have placed four of your managers - and I'm assuming that we're not the only recruiting agency that you've looked to."

"No," the The Head of IT concurs. "So we thought we'd talk to you about what we might be doing wrong in the selection process - why we seem to end up with, well, unsuitable candidates."

"I think you'll find 'technical ability' is a key point," I respond, scanning down our Slave Trader's list of desirable attitudes, "followed closely by 'attention to detail'."

"Yes," The Head of IT concurs, happy that the meeting doesn't seem to be going off on any tangents. "I feel it's important to have someone who's both technically competent and is able to recognise the smaller details which can often mean the difference between a well executed plan and a complete abortion!"

"I couldn't agree less!" The PFY adds, nodding.

"Beg Pardon?" The Slave Trader asks.

"He means that we'd hope that the person really knew what they were doing..." The Head interprets.

"Ah no, I think you'll find that we're concerned about the candidate knowing too much - or at least thinking they do," I correct.

"What?"

"Look at it this way. If you have a Manager who has no experience of I.T. they're more likely to take the advice of a professional - You know, like sex. Whereas, if we get someone who's experienced - or at least **BELIEVES** they're experienced, they're more likely to make huge and glaring mistakes because they're not aware of the potential problems."

"And be crap in bed," The PFY adds.

"So you're saying that a technical manager is more likely to make errors of judgment?" the Slave Trader gasps.

"Of course! Their experience of computing, etc, is based on the past - on the way computing was when they were using it. Which, in a technical manager, is years ago when VAXes ruled the world, and no help here and now, when Microsoft stalks the planet."

"I see. But what's wrong with 'Attention to detail'?"

"Detail' is always the irrelevant stuff, not the important things."

"Irrelevant stuff. Such as?"

"Oh you know, Price, Customer Satisfaction, Integration into existing Infrastructure. All stuff that means nothing in the real world of computing"

"As opposed to 'Important Stuff' like?"

"Important stuff like the colour of the front panel, how many lights there are, if it's got a cool name like **INTERCEPTOR** or something similar. That sort of thing..."

The meeting's interrupted by an urgent call for the The Head of IT, which, judging by his late night phone bills, is probably from Russian Bride Inc.

"I somehow think that your Head of Department is after people who fit the bill a bit better than that..." the Slave Trader bubbles, sucking up big time.

"So who are you going to listen to - the guy who pays you a finder's fee or the guy who ensures you keep getting them regularly?"

"Good Point. More of the same, coming right up!"

"**BUT,**" I add. "We're after a particular sort of mindless automaton, and not just anyone. Specifically, we're after someone who knows bugger all about computing, but has enough credentials to look convincing - should someone question their Resume at a later date. Say, after a budget blowout."

"Ah, you want to shaft the candidate, and not the selection committee?"

"Precisely!"

"And what about your Head of IT?" the Slave Trader murmurs, keeping his voice low and pointing out the door, "I'm sure he'd have something to say about this."

"Yes," The PFY concurs. "Most likely 'What?', 'Where am I?' and 'Is it lunchtime yet?'"

"What?" the Slave Trader asks, almost interviewing for the position for himself

"Our criteria for The Head of IT is somewhat less stringent than that for IT Managers," The PFY explains.

"I see. So, back to the IT Manager Role, you want someone who's absolute crap, looks reasonable on paper, and won't cause too much trouble."

"Exactly."

"Well I don't have any MCSEs on my books at the moment, but I could ring around."

"Excellent!"

"What?" The Head asks limping back into the office after splintered phone sex, which isn't quite as disgusting as it sounds.

"He's checking what they have on the books at some other branches," The PFY replies.

...

"How about a bloke with extensive experience in the Unix environment, DBA certification in Oracle and Sybase and a Masters degree in Computing?" The Slave Trader asks.

"Does he have an MCSE?" I respond.

"Uh, no."

"What about Operational experience of VMS, Dec Unix, DG's MVS, OS2 and Pick?" The PFY asks, churning out deadwood like a true professional.

"No"

"Probably not the best then."

"Right. What about ... A bloke with a background in airline control systems, wants to do MCSE, proven experience in ... uh ... ZX81 programming."

"**FANTASTIC!**" The PFY cries.

"Where were we?" The Head asks. "I thought we were looking for a computing person!"

"He's ideal!" I Pinnochio away. "He's got experience with Legacy hardware - which we have, **PLUS** Control systems, and he's up with Microsoft. I think we should grab him while we can!"

"Weellll, if you're sure.." The Head burbles, obviously realising that argument will cut into his lunch hour and he'll miss out on seconds...

Two days later...

"What's that then?" our new Boss asks.

"It's technical," The PFY responds, "and would take some time to tell you about. All you really need to know is that you put your cup under here, push the button and coffee comes out."

"Excellent. Is it one of your servers..."

"Indeed."

"A nice colour too, fits in well."

"We strive to please...."

BOFH and The Art Of Brand Management

BOFH 2002 Episode 18

Published Sunday 11th August 2002 09:00 GMT

"I've got some concerns," The Boss says, trundling into the office after the noontime feeding frenzy that the rest of the world calls lunch.

"Concerns!" The PFY gasps.

"Yes. I was talking to some blokes this lunchtime, and they said that we're unapproachable."

"Unapproachable?" The PFY echoes. "Us?"

"Yes. They say that we're not really part of 'the team' - that we think we're above them?"

"That's only because we are," I respond, trying to quell his angst.

"Wha? No, we're not! We're all working for the same Company - we're all on the same side! We should be working **WITH** people, not against them!"

"Of course, you're right," I respond, seeing the futility of arguing. "And I'll make a note of it for the future."

Before The PFY can add something derogatory, The Boss blunders on.

"I think this is more than a note situation! I think we should **DO** something!"

The thought of a Company group-hug flashes into my head, including the image of me wedged between the sweaty mailroom bloke and the woman from accounts receivable who uses a gallon of perfume a day.

The Boss's monologue is interrupted by the sound of a large bottle of highly flammable cleaning liquid smashing at his feet...

"Woopsy," I cry, sneakily reaching for a box of matches, "Clumsy old me."

"No harm," The Boss burbles on. "So anyway, I thought maybe we should do something about Branding."

"Branding?" I ask, match poised against the striker behind my back. "You mean as in burning a mark onto any user that complains?"

"No," he chuckles. "Corporate Branding. Shirts, Caps, that sort of thing."

"Freebies you mean," The PFY blurts, warming to the idea - which is what The Boss will be doing if he doesn't hurry up.

"Yes, but with the Company Logo, our IT Department Logo - to show we're part of the organisation - and some dinky catchphrase to use; you know, like 'IT for everyone'."

"How about 'Giving I.T. to you'."

"I suppose it could work," The Boss responds, mulling it over.

"What about **SLIPPING I.T. to you?**" I add. "That way the image is that we're doing it quickly and efficiently."

"WHAT ABOUT: SLIPPING I.T. TO YOU FROM BEHIND!!!" The PFY cries. "For the people who like the quick and efficient, but would also like it done out of hours."

"Slipping I.T. to you from behind.... It does have a certain ring to it.. Tell you what, I'll see what the IT Head says."

"You mean run it up the flag pole, see who salutes?" The PFY says.

"Yes."

"Install it in the BIOS and see how it **POSTs?**"

"Huh."

"Chuck it on the Bus and see what recognises it?"

>ZZZZZZERT

"Sorry about that", I say, wheeling The PFY away. "But you really shouldn't mention free stuff around him - he just gets all excited. He'll be fine in an hour or so. So yes, I think passing it by the IT Manager is probably a good idea as he needs all the brownie points he can get at the moment."

"Really, why?"

"Well, his contract's up for renewal, and the Board are a very peculiar lot. Anyone who could **WOW** them with an idea like this is bound to get reappointed."

"Reappointed?" he Lady Macbeth's like a trooper. "Really?"

"Oh yeah, they **LOVE** that sort of innovation. Anyway, it's a great idea. In fact, you might even suggest to the Head that we do it as a Logo **COMPETITION** for the staff - and the Board could pick the best entries at lunch?"

"Yes, that is a good idea..." he murmurs, switching down to power save mode to come up with a sneaky plan...

. . . 1 hour later . . .

"Well I've talked to the Head," The Boss lies, "and he thinks the idea's great! So if you could pass it quietly around the department, for say, Friday - everyone to come in with their T-Shirt and Logo and the best one wins a box of Champus! Oh, and the Head is fairly busy at the moment, and doesn't want to be disturbed with this, so if you could just avoid mentioning it in his presence, he'd be chuffed."

Like Lambs to the Slaughter...

. . . Friday Dawns . . .

I bowl into office early - in my "Slipping IT to you" shirt, passing by The PFY in his "..from behind" edition and pausing briefly at the coffee machine to grab a morning brew.

Our cabling contractor, who isn't officially onsite this month, **NOR** part of the staff, bowls up in his "For those who like IT rough!" T-shirt and registers a vote for his particular favourite on one of the Helpdesk staff - "Doing IT on your desktop".

The Boss, between times has muddied the water by suggesting an alternative to the IT theme, centreing around the "Talk to someone who knows" theme, which has borne some fruit, namely - in order of excellence: "Talk to someone who cares", "Go call someone who cares" and finally "Go call someone who gives a Shit" - obviously hoping to appeal to the younger audience.

"So, how do you think it's going?" The Boss asks, chuffed at the turnout.

"Good, but where's the Head today?"

"Oh, he's on holiday, but left me in charge of the arrangements. So what do you suggest - I get the board together and we all meet them at lunch?!"

"A Scorcher, and good as done!" I respond.

Now, to compose that message to the Slave Traders...

BOFH: PFY's Sulk

BOFH 2002 Episode 19

Published Friday 13th September 2002 15:51 GMT

IT WOULD APPEAR that the Boss has said something to upset The PFY. And me, the heartless android bastard that I am, didn't notice this and intervene on his behalf as a good supervisor would...

Sigh.

So now The PFY's in one of those moods that **REEEEAAALLLLY** puts a strain on the old office sanity situation.

"What are you sulking about then?" I ask, exuding the kind of compassion you only read about in South American prison systems.

"Nothing," The PFY responds - going for the 'I'm-the-only-person-who-**EVER**-does-**ANYTHING**-around-this-place-honestly-I don't-know-why-I-bother' approach.

Which, as far as I'm concerned, is about as welcome as a Microsoft licensing amendment.

"Ah, so it's just the usual hard-done-by-overworked-plaything-of-the-ruling-classes thing then?"

"No, I've had enough! And I'm thinking about a career change!" he responds, throwing several of his toys out of the proverbial cot...

"Really? Well, you know what I say - Harder than a lane change, but easier than..."

"...a sex change, yes, you've told me."

"And you get to keep your clothes and friends!!!" I add, bringing a little humour to the situation.

"Ha. Ha," The PFY mutters.

Trouble in Paradise alert!!!

Now don't get me wrong, working with The PFY is every bit as awful as working with any other run-of-the-mill support person with homicidal tendencies and a persecution complex (like me for instance). But the thought of taking on some complete greenhorn, removing the brainwashing they received about user service, then retraining them in the gentle art of user discipline, just upsets me.

And to top it off he knows this, **and also** knows that I have a couple of weeks of beach leave (i.e. User support conference in the bumhole of Leeds [insert any Leeds location here] which I have **NO** intention of going to, but can claim gobs of 'travel time' for...) and is trying to stuff it up. To make matters worse, he also knows I'm not a capella on this trip thanks to a heavy drinking

session with the Company women's soccer team, and is using this as a way of twisting the knife. If I hadn't taught him so well I'd be really annoyed.

Still, we can't both be away, **AND** that I can't phone bomb scares for two weeks continuously. Not again, it would look too suspicious.

So I'll have to humour The PFY out of his doldrums.

"What did the Nasty Boss do to you then?" I ask, unable to help myself.

"RIGHT!" The PFY cries, and bowls out of the office at speed.

Woopsy.

Half an hour later The PFY's back with a wadge of contracting papers, looking through the list of available jobs. Half an hour later he's sighing audibly, so I figure it's time to help out.

"Anything up?"

"What does 'Seasoned veteran of computing' mean?" he asks, looking up.

"VMS programmer. Bound to be. The 'seasoned' bit means you need thick glasses, a beard and no clothes sense, the 'veteran' bit tells you it's VMS. If it were a Seasoned Vet of Programming, that would be different - you'd be a beardy speccy geek who knows COBOL!"

"What about a Microsoft All-rounder?" The PFY continues, ignoring me.

"You can use 98 and NT without dribbling..."

"What about 'Proven experience in Leading Edge Systems'?"

"Well, the 'Leading Edge' bit means you'd using something with a dubious future, so my guess is Macintosh Support or something involving using a 'Tablet' device"

"Bastards!"

"Oh yes, Situations Vacant are a real minefield. Run through some more words, and I'll do a quick translation for you."

"Committed."

"You should be if you take this job. Next!"

"Team Player?"

"Open Plan office."

"Project Champion?"

"Someone to fire when it comes in waaaaay over budget."

"Key Position?"

"Security Guard."

"Willing to go the extra mile?"

"Either it's MILES out of town or they want you to sleep with their clients to keep them happy."

"Ah. What about 'Hands on' role."

"Sleeping with the clients again..."

"Well there's just bloody **NOTHING** here!" he snaps, dropping the papers on the desk.

"What about that one there?" I ask, pointing out a large and colourful ad. "Test Analyst?"

"What does a test analyst do?"

"Mainly try and break things - which is not too dissimilar to parts our job in some ways - except that you don't have to let yourself into The Boss's office first."

"Do you think I could do it?"

"Course you could!"

"So should I apply?"

"Why not? It's only... ..about half your current pay. Oh, and look, you get to work one on one with their Publicity people!!!"

The PFY's expression tells me that he's had enough.

"Tell you what," I say kindly. "Why don't I get us some nice cold lagers from the boardroom fridge and you can tell me all about it. Then later, we can go and Test Analyse the boss's new car?"

It's a tough job being sensitive...

BOFH and the Luser Group

BOFH 2002 Episode 20

Published Thursday 21st November 2002 21:38 GMT

So we're at a (l)user group meeting and are encountering the backlash that a computing professional can expect from the staff that they've selflessly served over the years. Those who aren't too afraid to turn up, anyway.

And as per usual, there's a mixed group of a: people who want to know why we don't immediately upgrade our software **THE INSTANT** Gates says it's been released and is the new cure for cancer, and b: technical stick-in-the-muds who thought that Windows for Workgroups may have raised the bar a little too high for their comfort.

"Why don't we have Windows XP on our machines?" a user whines as soon as we ask for questions - sure there's a conspiracy going on in the company to rival Roswell.

"Which facility of Windows XP desktop do you need to do your work?" I ask, always wanting to help out.

"I just need an up-to-date Operating System!" he answers evasively.

"For... >clickety< ..Producing the wage sheets?" The PFY asks, reading the user's purpose in life from his laptop screen.

"Not just wage sheets, I do other things as well. But we should keep up to date!"

"By other things, are you referring to the Internet romance that you're engaged in with... >clickety< MARSHA 23, Gym instructor from Hull, who is **in fact**.... >clickety< Bruce, 33 Lorry Driver from Kent?"

"What?!"

"It's all here in Black and White," The PFY responds, spinning his laptop around and revealing the damning evidence. "We had a quick shuftly at the traffic because we were concerned about.... uh.. "

"..Corporate Espionage" I add.

"Yes! Corporate Espionage! ... and we noticed a chat session in progress which we thought might be..."

"Coded information." I suggest.

"**CODED INFORMATION**, yes!.. So we tracked down the user to their ISP and then, due to poor security on their desktop, found out who they really were."

"Coded Information?" the user gasps.

"Yes, our mistake. We thought 'Back Passage' referred to the rear entry to the building - where someone might sneak documents out. There were a few other terms that we..."

"I don't think we need to go into it," the user chips in hurriedly. "I probably don't need XP if you guys think everything's OK."

"BUT THAT'S JUST THE POINT," a greyhair from the records room interjects, picking now as a good time to pop briefly out of his coma. "We keep getting pressured to **CHANGE!** We just get used to something and someone wants to change it!!"

(I feel an "I still use Word Perfect Version 1 and it does what I want" speech in the making)

"When I started here..."

(told you so)

"...we just used the editor thingy, and mailed each other what we needed. Now we've got to use some new bloody Outlook thing that makes no sense at all! I liked the editor, it was simple and it did what you needed!!"

"It didn't have a spell checker," the first git argues.

"WE DIDN'T NEED SPELL CHECKER! We KNOW how to spell, people are just too lazy to use their **DICTIONARIES!!"**

I know both where this is heading *and* how long it's going to take to get there. I silently signal The PFY to ring me on my cellphone with an "urgent" problem. Seconds later, the phone rings and I make some appropriate affirmative noises to the pager message before making my excuses and slipping off with The PFY for a '**MAJOR FAULT**'. I leave The Boss to it as he tries to match the requirements of the two main complainants.

THREE HOURS LATER...

"Well, I think I've come up with a workable solution that will please everyone!" The Boss burbles to us proudly.

"You can never please everyone," The PFY responds, speaking from experience.

"Well I think we can. This a list of what people want - XP at the latest level, some who want NT4, a handful of Windows 98, one OS2 thingy and a couple of people who want their MSDOS stuff back again. Which doesn't sound all that hard. Anyway, I've made an executive decision, so we have to do it! So when can sort all that out?"

Somewhere, in the back reaches of my mind, a single piece of straw turns a camel into a paraplegic...

"In no time at all," I respond, leading The Boss towards the Tape Safes. "In fact we keep all our media in a fireproof safe which rarely needs to be opened, thanks to a dinky built-in deposit slot."

"Really?"

"Yes," The PFY adds, turning the key and pulling the door release lever. "It's designed for Night Deposits at petrol stations and convenience stores, but we use it to make sure our software is quickly securable."

"Really? Well I suppose it's a good idea isn't it, you can't be too careful with softw..."

>Trip!<</p>

>Thud!<</p>

>**SLAM!**<

"..and so for system stability and ease of maintenance, we'll be sticking with the corporate standard of everyone at the same Operating System level," The Boss says carefully.

"Excellent!" The PFY says encouragingly. "Now one more time - this time with feeling and directly into the microphone - and if you're lucky we'll 'deposit' enough air to tide you over till we've multicasted your latest 'Executive Decision'. And no more screaming about being locked in a safe or we'll deposit some more of that used water..."

It's a tough life enforcing corporate standards - but someone has to do it....

The BOFH Questionnaire: How Geeky Are You?

BOFH 2002 Episode 21

Published Tuesday 15th October 2002 14:51 GMT

In these days of backward masked cookies, electromagnetic thought-induction from Plasma displays and TV footage of Bill Gates getting hit in the face with a pie, none of us are safe. The subtle seduction of your subconscious (try saying THAT fast, ten times when you've had 4 pints and you'll know how hard it is to type) is happening every day. Without your knowledge.

Just how geeky have you become? Sure, you say you're connected with the real world, but what proof have you got that you're not turning into a closet case furry tooth with full on pocket protector, thick rimmed glasses, and even worse, an autographed photo of Bill Gates by your bedside? Take this simple household test to see how you may have drifted in your thinking, and whether it's too late to save yourself and those around you...

1. The only interview method to be universally outlawed by the Geneva Convention is:

- A. Physical Torture
- B. Solitary Confinement
- C. Forcing the Subject to drive a Trabant for a week
- D. Forcing the Subject to use OS2 for a day. (which feels like eternity)

2. You're locked in a room with Richard Stallman and Bill Gates and have only a gun with two bullets in it (which you normally secrete on your person in case you ever get locked in a room with Richard Stallman, Bill Gates, etc). They both clear their throats to speak. What do you do?

- A. Shoot Bill, hoping he hasn't got a tablet device (or the XP Security Vulnerability notes) crammed up his blazer
- B. Shoot Richard, hoping he hasn't got the notes for his speech in front of his heart
- C. Shoot Richard **AND** Bill and take your chances
- D. Shoot yourself, twice, for getting into such a contrived situation

3. You meet someone nice at the pub and immediately ask them to tell you:

- A. Their Star Sign
- B. Their Phone Number
- C. Their Name
- D. Their IRC Handle
- E. Whether they prefer RD or DDR in performance applications?

4. Speaking of IRC Handles, your handle is based around:

- A. Your name and a number
- B. Your nickname and a number
- C. A mannerism or pastime and a number
- D. A physical attribute of yours that you claim is over a foot long. i.e. A leg
- E. D, and it's not your leg. I.e. Arm
- F. E, and it's not your Arm
- G. Nor your torso, your large or small intestine, your veins or arteries...

5. A new machine arrives at work and is delivered to the recipients office before you can get a good look at it. You:

- A. Ignore it as you're bound to see another one sometime
- B. Try to catch a glimpse of it through the doorway
- C. Offer to help the recipient unpack it, then takeover as soon as they agree
- D. **FAKE A SEIZURE** outside the office just so they'll give you a couple of minutes alone with the box when you say you need to catch your breath.

6. The LEAST believable thing about the movie THE NET was:

- A. That they could trace a cellphone that accurately
- B. That a woman could make a short phone call in the first place

C. That anyone who cut themselves off from the rest of the world wouldn't have installed a dual head espresso machine beforehand

D. That a techo would be using a Macintosh.

7. Your email is going to be down for two days while the server is replaced so you:

A. Bulkmail everyone in your entire address book warning them about it in case they choose those day to email you

B. Change ISP

C. Arrange for clinical sedation and hospitalisation to get you through

D. Use it as an opportunity to do all those things you never have time for normally, I.e. Talk to the wife and kids, eat, wash, etc.

8. Your favourite joke ends:

A. "..have you got any paper?"

B. "Don't call me wooden eye..."

C. "If I could walk like that I wouldn't need talcum powder"

D. "And the Salesman said, **IT'S WINDOWS 2000 SP1** you asked for, which doesn't **HAVE** that vulnerability, WA! HA! HA! HA!"

9. Inside your wallet, in front of the condom that expired three years after you bought it (which in turn was three years before now), you have a picture of:

A. Yourself, in case you ever need ID

B. Your Mum and Dad

C. Your girlfriend - well, the woman from the underwear Ad that you **WISH** was your girlfriend.

D. A fully configured quad processor box with 4 Gigs of DDR Ram, a terabyte of HD and top of the line graphics card.

10. Some ridiculously contrived situation occurs in which you're dying - or something - and you have to give your last words. No, bugger it, you have to give the epitaph for your tombstone. Don't ask why, it's my bloody questionnaire! What is your epitaph?

A. "Live long and Prosper"

B. "He was a good bloke really"

C. "Press Return to Continue"

D. The entire Microsoft Site Licence Agreement documentation, including subclauses and appendices - because people like Stonemasons who work with Analogue media have it coming

11. You're doing a questionnaire about how geeky you are, when you finally realise:

A. It's Lunchtime

B. It's Hometime

C. It's Day Time

D. There are no answers, but getting this far must be a warning sign in and of itself.....

The killer BOFH bot from the basement

BOFH 2002 Episode 22

Published Thursday 21st November 2002 21:29 GMT

"Hey, look what I found in the basement," The PFY burbles early one **VERY** slow afternoon, dragging a squat hunk of hardware on wheels into Mission Control and interrupting my afternoon meal and TV watch. I mean backup verification procedure.

"Ah, it's one of those old cleaning bots," I reply nonchalantly, "Haven't seen one of those in a long while. It's probably broken..."

"Well that's the funny thing!" The PFY replies. "I slapped a charge cable into the thing, plugged it in, and pressed the RESET button, and **THIS** happened."

>Click!</p>

The cleaning bot's LED panel flips through it's self-test codes until the message "RAZOR 11/11-3" whizzes across the LED display.

"What does it mean?" The PFY asks

"Oh, that'll be part of the ROM - happens if the bot fails self test. I shouldn't worry about it" I respond sagely, kicking the robot into power-off mode quickly

"So it's stuffed then?" The PFY asks, giving the bot a friendly tap on the front panel with a hammer, causing the bot to reboot in a suck mode that would put a hardware rep to shame, whilst rocketing around the office after The PFY, bashing into furniture in a frenzy. "Hey!"

"It's scrambled code from an impartial charge and dud ROM, like I said!" I yell, as I jump up onto my desk, reaching for the NonVolatile reprogramming tool (sledgehammer), should it be needed. "Just short out the two battery test holes at the top of the front panel"

"With what?" The PFY asks, backing into a corner at speed

"**STAPLE-GUN**," I cry, pointing at my desk as the Bot makes a lurching bid for freedom

Barely a minute later it's all over and the Bot is again an unmoving mess. I take the precaution of removing the battery lead before I pry the staples out, just in case..

"That was weird!" The PFY gasps, "What the hell was it doing?"

"Like I said, it was just ROM diags gone wrong. It was probably trying to clean something"

"Well it **DID** seem to be doing something semi-intelligent..."

"Yeah well, it's broken now, so chuck it back in the basement before it hurts someone."

"But it's..... ...Is there something you're not telling me?" The PFY asks, catching a small whiff of rodent.

"Of course there is!" I respond "**ONE** , I earn a lot more than you **THINK** I do, **TWO**, It was me who superglued your laptop into its docking station - not the site services manager that you had fired a week later as a peeping tom, **THREE**, your chair is configured to zap you on every 1213th time you sit on it, **FOUR** y..."

"**APART** from the usual stuff!" The PFY interrupts.

"OK, OK, it's a fair cop guv!" I admit, deciding to play the truth card. "The bot was my entry in the bot .vs. bot automated carnage wars."

"Oh you mean like those ones on TV?"

"No, no, they're just sad, remote controlled boxes in skating rink, with even sadder owners. **THIS** was the contest of champions - for the truly intelligent thinking **MACHINES** that make their own rules! Ones that can find an opposing bot in a 3 dimensional maze, hunt them down and destroy them!"

"Really. So why'd you chuck it in the basement?"

"Unfortunately, the thing never went all that well. Had problems detecting the difference between desk and bot, rubbish bin and bot, and, most distressingly, me and bot."

"You?!?" The PFY feels obliged to ask.

"Yes indeedy, most hairy. Not to mention that there's a large ball peen hammer secreted somewhere in it's armour which it wanted to introduce me to. Repeatedly."

"A Ball Peen Hammer?!!!!"

"Yes made a slight mistake when beta testing it."

"Doing it in our office?!!!!" The PFY asks.

"No, no, I'd tested it in the basement carpark, and brought it back up to the office for fine tuning."

"...Fine Tuning?"

"Yeah, Remove the image of the Boss's car from its NVRAM. Not that it looked anything like a car after the Beta test."

"So what happened?"

"I pressed the Reset button, causing it to acquire the nearest moving object as its next target..."

"You?"

"Affirmative, Will Robinson!"

"What did you do?!?!" The PFY gasps in horror.

"The only thing a sane man can do when faced with an axe-wielding destruction device on wheels - head for the stairwell."

"And then?"

"It slipped past me and crashed down three stories into the basement, at which time I took the precaution of disconnecting the battery and locking the door."

"But you must've known I'd go down there and find it sooner or later?!"

"Yes, yes, but like I say, you have to connect the battery and press the reset button."

"So you left a homicidal device in a room, just waiting for someone curious to come and accidentally trigger it?!" The PFY gasps.

"Yes."

"I could have been seriously injured."

"True."

"And you've no remorse have you?"

"Ahhhhhhhhmmm... No."

"I'm.. I.... So what do you reckon.. Just leave instructions on it for The Boss, start the webcam and pop off to lunch?" The PFY suggests.

"Gravy!"

BOFH: Today the CEO. Tomorrow the Board!

BOFH 2002 Episode 23

Published Thursday 21st November 2002 13:46 GMT

So The PFY and I are laxing out in the office when a Bloke from HR wanders in with The Boss, looking rather nervous.

"Ah... Could you two, uh, spare some time?" The Boss asks. "There's a disciplinary meeting that we'd like you to come to..."

"Whatever it is, we didn't do it!" The PFY pre-empts, "We've been playing games and reading people's email **ALL** morning - it's all on camera, and you can check!"

"Wa? No, no, it's not about that... er - it's just that the Disciplinary Committee from Head Office is coming in and is meeting to look over some complaints, and as the problems are in your area of expertise and experience we thought that we might be able to make use of your.. particular talents."

Talk about laying it on thick...

"Oh!" I cry, "Only too happy to help! What would you like us to do, some *interviewing* in the basement with the rubber hose, chicken lard and the hungry doberman or just a bit of general 'putting the slipper in' to extract a confession - that sort of thing?"

"Wha?!" The HR Bloke gabbles.

"Ah no," The Boss chirps. "We're thinking more of opinions on the technical aspects of some complaints that have been escalated through the Company. In one case a particularly sensitive enquiry that we need treated with the utmost discretion..."

"Discretion is my middle name!" The PFY cries.

"Ah, I think you mean *cretin*" I correct.

"Same thing," The PFY responds.

"Well **ANYWAY**," I continue. "You can be assured that we will treat this with the sensitivity that this deserves."

With that we're on our way to the meeting - so quick in fact that I barely have time to zero the digital recorder in my PDA before joining the witch hunt.

...

We get to the meeting room, and it's a bunch of stuffed-shirt-suit-and-tie-combos, some of whom are obviously board members, whilst others have the distinct greasy feel of lawyer types.

I smell intrigue....

"OK, so we're just going to run over the basics of one of the alleged incidents that are claimed to have occurred in the past week," The Head Shark starts. "On or around the early morning of Wednesday of last week, an alleged email message purporting to be from someone in **very** senior management was delivered to a member of his junior staff, apparently suggesting an illicit sexual encounter. This alleged message is then said to have been rebuffed, causing a second alleged message strongly restating the first. This second message..."

"**ALLEGED** message," The PFY adds helpfully.

"Ah yes, **ALLEGED** message was apparently ignored, causing a third **ALLEGED** message one hour later, again strongly restating the first two. A complaint was laid with Head Office. This activity is alleged to have continued for the rest of the day, causing a further complaint. The purpose of this meeting is to establish whether the mail was in fact sent, where it was sent from, by whom, and whether the content of the message is grounds for a legitimate complaint?"

"Shouldn't someone just ask the **alleged** sender?"

"We spoke to the alleged sender's counsel," The Head Shark responds, indicating a quiet suited shark in the corner "stating that due to a mixup in his medication his recollection of events is somewhat less than full."

"Medication?" The PFY asks.

"Yes. A herbal drink, recommended by an accredited naturopath," The Quiet Shark adds.

"A **fermented** herbal drink?"

"It may have been."

"So he was pissed on the job!" The PFY blurts, coming to the point.

"His performance was somewhat impaired by the side effects of his medication, but that's no reason to suggest that he was responsible for the actions being complained about - someone may have taken advantage of his condition to..."

"OK," I interject "Mind if I leap in here? First off, what was the email address that the messages were sent to?"

"Alleged messages," The PFY again adds.

"Indeed..."

I get the info, and quicker than you can say "fire up 80211b on the old personnel disorganiser and cruise the sendmail logs" I've fired up 80211b on the old personnel disorganiser and cruised the sendmail logs.

"OK, so the mail **was** sent from the CEO's machine."

"Are you sure?" Head Shark asks.

"Quite."

"And did he send it?"

"If he didn't, someone who knew his password did, as several weeks ago he insisted we install an *'authenticated SSL encrypted MTA, whatever the hell that is'* because he'd read on an inflight magazine somewhere that that was important..."

"Doh-k. So you're **implying** that as first glance it looks fairly incriminating then?"

"Ahhh, no more incriminating than if he'd been seen at the water cooler with a fistful of condoms and a 50 blister-pack of Rohypnol..."

"Heart Medication!" The Quiet Shark interjects quickly. "Taken under the clinical supervision of his doctor!"

This just gets better and better...

"OK, so bottom line, let me get this clear - he rocked into work in Oliver Reed mode, got over-verbal in email, then went so far off the deep end that he needed decompression the next morning, and you want to cover it up."

"I don't think that you can rea..."

"In a nutshell, yes" The Head Shark adds.

"So what you're actually talking about is an out-of-court settlement, in the four-figure region for three people."

"Three?"

"Yes. Well, the complainant - for stress, etc; then myself and my assistant!"

"Why should be pay you??"

"It seems obvious - to massage an element of doubt into the logfiles so they can't be ."

"So you're saying you could obscure the true source of the email?"

"For an extra hundred, you can nominate who you'd have **liked** it to come from..."

Half an hour later a deal is struck, as are three cheques. Not a bad consultancy fee, all things concerned. Course, the CEO's secretary's going to get her 50% cut from our share for having the idea in the first place and spiking the CEO's morning spirulina, but all in all, not a bad haul.

Today, the CEO. Tomorrow, The Board!

BOFH and the Nigerian 419

BOFH 2002 Episode 24

Published Tuesday 10th December 2002 18:02 GMT

Dear Reader,

Allow me the opportunity of presenting a commercial proposition to you that would be mutually beneficial. I got your name and contact from the heeeuge database of Register readers which they use to send unsolicited email and dob people in to their bosses for wasting company time on the web all afternoon when they get back from the pub.

I consulted many sources of information on the web, including several search engines, a web self help utility, and 321 porn sites. They all agreed that you were a reliable person of good character apart from the fetish for donkeys and tomato paste. For this reason I feel that I can confide in you - and only you - my true identity. I am The PFY, otherwise know to you as the Pimpily Faced Youth, assistant to the Bastard Operator From Hell.

As you know, The Bastard is a very wealthy person, having stolen, lied, cheated and blackmailed his way into several dubious consulting positions, including the one he now holds with a large and very cash-rich company. In recent days, the Bastard Operator from Hell has gone on an extended holiday under the guise of searching the web for a secure version of Explorer, and is not expected back for several years.

Before he left, he deposited a large amount of his wealth in a room in the basement of the company building, carefully labelled so as to frighten any inquisitive person from ever thinking of opening it. (I.e. "Audio Tapes - Larry Ellison on the Future of Computing, Bill Gates on Microsoft's Vision and Richard Stallman on Free Beer"). A conservative estimate of this wealth is several thousand British Pounds, with a street value of several thousand English Pounds, or several billion turkish lire (or a couple of trillion Turkish lire if you read this in a couple of weeks, allowing for devaluation).

No-one apart from myself knows where this money is hidden as The Bastard was careful to wait until 4:58pm, when no-one was left in the building (and before night security clocked in) to put the money in place.

I am now looking for a partner to help me invest these ill-gotten gains in high return stocks and bonds.

I am humbly seeking your assistance in the following ways so that I can begin the transfer of this money to you to invest:

- To serve as guardian of this money until I can transfer it (in suitcasefuls, so as not to attract attention) from it's storage.

- To make arrangements for my accomodation, meals and entertainment expenses, as it might be insecure for me to be seen my home until the transfer is complete

In return for your time and aid, I am fully prepared to give you half - that is 50% - of the contents of the locked briefcases when they have all been transferred from the company, to do with as you please. I am sure that you will agree that this is a most lucrative offer, and one which is unlikely to be made to just anyone.

Should you be willing to partake in this venture and assist me in this undertaking, you can be assured that it will be concluded in a matter of a few weeks and with the utmost discretion. Any notification to the Inland Revenue authorities of the money is a matter up to you and you alone.

I look forward to corresponding with you via email about this exciting opportunity in the near future - however, I would stress the need for security and discretion in this undertaking as my supervisor has a paranoia verging on ESP when it comes to losing any of his investments. Should he find out of the venture I am proposing, I am sure that his reaction would be both swift and vio

asf;erio

The Bastard Lift Operator

BOFH 2002 Episode 25

Published Tuesday 24th December 2002 16:10 GMT

So it seems that due to some engineering fault or the other the lift has failed and is now stuck between floors with The Boss, The PFY and I in it - which is a first.

"How long do you think it'll be?" The Boss asks as the beads of perspiration springing up on his face in record time.

"Oh, Should only be a couple of hours - if the brakes haven't activated," The PFY says reassuringly.

"Oh, I hope they haven't activated!" he snivels.

"Me too" I add. "Unless of course there's a cable problem, and it snaps. Then we'd **want** the breaks to activate."

"Yes" The Boss murmurs quietly, groping around for his antacid tablets. "This is just my worst nightmare!"

"Really?" The PFY asks. "Mine's being locked in a room with Richard Stallman, Bill Gates and Larry Ellison for a week."

"With no food and water, having to drink your own urine?" I ask.

"No, just having to listen to them practise their speeches."

"Oooh, much worse - Free Beer, Free IE, and feel Free to call me names!"

"Yes. So what's your worst nightmare?"

"It's a long one..."

"We're not going anywhere..."

"I get to work in my Dad's flannelette pyjamas with the gaping fly, don't have my security pass, the Neanderthal at the desk won't let me in, then when I do get to my desk I find that the CEO has adopted OS2 as the Company standard and has had insultants in to do the conversion the overnight. Which doesn't work - of course - and so we get calls thick and fast on phones that won't pull out from the wall. And visitors."

"Ooh, sounds nast..."

"...**Then** I find all the keyboards have been changed for those 'Natural' keyboards (because you find a lot of keyboards like that in Nature), Mice have been replaced with Mouseballs for

'PERSONAL COMFORT' reasons, someone's removed Mozilla, Unreal Tournament and the Snooping tools from my machine, **AND** it's blood sausage day at the Cafeteria."

"You've thought about that a lot, haven't you?" The PFY asks.

"Yes. Well, it passes the time when you're trapped in a lift. **HEY!** This isn't one of those fire-rated lifts is it?" I ask, feigning horror.

"What?" The Boss gasps, not liking what he's hearing. "Why?!!!"

"Hermetically sealed - so that you don't die of smoke inhalation if you use the lift in a fire."

"Oh" The Boss sighs, relieved.

"No, but you do suffocate to death when the air runs out..." The PFY comments.

"If you don't cook first..." I respond. "Still I guess in our present circumstance it's best not to take any chances. We'd better just conserve oxygen."

"Uh.. How long.. I mean how much oxygen do you think we have?" The Boss whimpers.

"Stacks!" I reply, noting that The Boss is on the verge of becoming a wet-business-shirt competitor. "A couple of hours at least!"

"Yeah," The PFY chirps. "And the service guy's normally here within 10 minutes or so."

"OH!" The Boss pants, more relieved than before.

"Except that time when we said it was urgent and he was in such a hurry to respond that he ran up the back of that cab in town," I add.

"Oh yeah," The PFY chuckles. "and he turned up the next day with his toolbox, the steering wheel and some seriously untreated concussion."

"It's funny how you always remember the good times...."

"SO THERE'S A CHANCE WE'LL SUFFOCATE!?!?" The Boss garbles hysterically.

"A slight chance. But if we don't wind up the engineer, he'll be here in two shakes..."

"Unless he's on another job," The PFY says helpfully.

"Can't we get out through the hatch?" The Boss asks, pointing at the manhole above me.

"Ordinarily, yes."

"Ordinarily?"

"Well in Utopia. But back here in real world, people open the access panel, strap high explosive to the sides of lifts and make you ride around in buses full of explosive."

"WHAT?!"

"He means that they lock the doors to stop people playing around in the lift shaft."

"SO WE'RE STUCK"

"Well yes," I respond. "But only till the engineer gets here."

"If he gets here in time.." The PFY again adds.

. . . 20 minutes later. . .

"THERE'S A PHONE!" The Boss shouts, pointing at the wall behind me.

"Yes?"

"We could ring for help!"

"We could use **my** phone for that," I reply, pulling my phone out of my pocket "But the fact remains we might rush the engineer, who might even at this moment be undoing the reset panel above us - and the phone call comes in, he gets a fright and accidentally touches the three phase supply."

"If he doesn't crash his van again," The PFY adds once more, determined to add value to this conversation. "And is it my imagination, or is that twanging noise actually the lift cable breaki..."

>Kathud!<</p>

... 2 minutes later, when The Boss has come around ...

"How long was I out?"

"Oh, only 10 minutes or so. But nothing's happened!" The PFY says, helping The Boss into a sitting position.

"So this is it then?" The Boss asks.

"Could be," I add "You know, I always thought that I'd check out under better circumstances."

"BROWSING' internet porn?" The PFY asks.

"Something like that... Look, I know we've had our differences, but water under the bridge and all that. What I want to say is, well, if I don't make it and one of you does... I forgot to write down the combination on the tape safe when I changed it last week, and I'd appreciate it if you could just remember it. It's 17, 35, 85, 14. I'm sure there's no need, but.... well... just in case."

"Oh!" The Boss burbles. "Actually, I changed the Combination to the Parts Store safe myself yesterday, and, well, if things don't work out for me, I suppose I should..."

... ten minutes and a 'cable-twang' later . . .

"QUICK, HE'S COMING AROUND!" The PFY hisses.

Quicker than you can say "Rip off all the expensive kit in the Parts store safe" I've done it, and am back in the lift with the doors closed and emergency stop back on.

"Ohh," The Boss mumbles. "I hoped it was just a dream."

"No, it looks like it could be all ove... >muffled-click<</small> **HEY, THEY'VE FIXED IT!"**

"Oh **THANK GOODNESS!!!**" The Boss cries, stumbling out into 'fresh air'.

"Oh yes!" The PFY cries. "A brush with death like that, well, it really focuses your mind on what's important!"

"I couldn't agree more," I concur. "So, a couple of pints and a curry then?"

The BOFH Christmas Spirit

BOFH 2002 Episode 26

Published Friday 27th December 2002 10:35 GMT

So with Xmas looming large on the scanners, we just **HAVE** to have a departmental meeting to cover all of the pending issues.

Sigh.

"Right," The Head of IT starts cheerily. "While it's fairly late in the piece, I thought I'd call you together to go over our Xmas plans."

"I'm off to the coast with that lovely young woman from accounts receivable!" I blurt - but mainly just to brag.

"**NOT** those sort of plans - company plans," the Head counters snappily. "Okay, first item on the agenda, Xmas Social event!"

"Hear Hear!" The PFY cries - having been getting into the 'spirit' of Christmas since around nine this morning when he slipped off to the stationery cupboard with one of the PR temps and four bottles of cheap plonk.

"Yes" The Head continues, much less animated. And after last year's debacle, we.."

"Debacle?!" The PFY blurts. "That was great!"

The Head ignores him, suppressing a shudder at the havoc that was wreaked by a single flagon of tape head cleaning fluid in the non-alcoholic punch.

"**AFTER LAST YEAR, WE PUT THE EVENT TYPE TO THE VOTE**, and the most votes were cast for the Indian Restaurant in Brick Lane. 143 votes in fact!"

"Popular place," I comment.

"143 votes from a total of 29 staff...." he remarks pointedly.

"**VERRRY** popular indeed," The PFY slurs happily.

"Be that as it may, you've made your decision, so we'll be heading there tonight, 7pm."

"**CURRY!**" The PFY burbles happily.

"Now," The Head continues, preferring to ignore The PFY. "Next item on the agenda: cover over the break. We'll be needing people available to be called in, should any critical system fail."

The Boss makes a point of looking my way for some reason, so I feel obliged to chip into the conversation from my logistical sandtrap.

"So just the usual compensation then - Triple time, three hour minimum callout, meal and travel allowance, plus Time-in-Lieu?"

"Double time for work and travel time, no minimum, meal, travel allowance nor TIL," the Head counter-offers.

"Ah well," I respond. "I probably can't make it - Death in the Family."

"What?"

"Well Christmas, you know, big family reunions and all that. Something's bound to happen once we crack the keg of meths..."

"...yyyyeeess, Right... And you believe that triple time, etc, would prevent this happening... er ... how?"

"Increased goodwill. I'd be happier, they'd be happier, much less chance of a ... tragedy"

"I see. Well, as it's a contingency plan only, I suppose that we could agree to your requests just this once."

"Excellent," I cry, making a note in my diary to crash the site web server every day over the break and configure the console system to automatically restart it in a manner suggesting human intervention.

"**HOWEVER**, I think we'd better clearly define what our **CRITICAL** systems are," he continues, not as stupid as he looks.

"Email," one No-Life from the Helldesk mumbles, looking up from his PDA. "We need to be able to keep in touch on email..."

"Okay, **EMAIL** - anything else?"

"Financials Server - so people get paid over the break?" I suggest.

"Right!" The Head agrees, scribbling away furiously.

"Web Server so the real world knows we're still in business?"

"Uh-huh."

"Unreal Tournament Server," The PFY slurs.

"Uhn - what does that do?"

"Uh, It's the machine that uses a simulation of real world to determine network connectivity and lag," I respond.

"Right, any others?"

No-one stirs...

Before we can get onto the really exciting agenda items like the message in the (extremely late) corporate Christmas cards or personal letters from the CEO, both The PFY's and my pagers go off.

"If you'd excuse us," I blurt, getting up from the table. "Looks like we may have a bit of a problem."

... Downstairs, two minutes later...

"Okay!" The PFY bubbles as we ferret through the mail cart (in response to the mail delivery page). "What are we looking for this time?"

"Any parcel shaped like a bottle, any package which is well wrapped and/or addressed to The Boss or the Head of IT. Double word score if it's got a vendor's name and/or ribbon on it. They always leave it to the last minute to send the really good stuff..."

...Four Parcels later...

"Ok, it feels to be like we've got one whiskey and some wine, so I'll clip the parcel open while you get the substitute bottles of watered-down cheap Turkish drain cleaner."

.. Four switcheroos and several hours later, in Brick Lane...

"..and as a token of my appreciation, I've decided to donate these bottles of Turkish.. ..wine to the table," The Boss burbles happily, having sniffed the cap of one of the aforementioned fermented grape disasters...

"A couple of kingfishers for me," I tell the waiter, moments later, "and I think my assistant will have the same. And we'll have that *special* order now please.."

[The next day]

"So it's just us then?" The PFY murmurs, looking around the department at the vacant offices.

"No, no, The Boss made it in," I respond, "but he just popped off to the toilet about 20 minutes ago. And again two minutes after that. And again two minutes after that. If you listen very carefully you can still hear him weeping. And 26 sick leave notifications. An epidemic!"

"What are we going to do?" The PFY gasps.

"Apart from waiting for the mailbag? And a quick game or ten of UT?"

"Yes."

"Well there's those 27 uncollected Christmas Bonuses...."

"Of course!"

BOFH 2003 Source Links

BOFH 2003: Year Book

- [I'm a Bastard Operator, Get Me Out of Here!](#) Episode 1 Intranet Survivor
- [The Bastard Guide to Recycling](#) Episode 2 Haphazard Arrangement of Still Life
- [BOFH and the Pay Rise](#) Episode 3 Managing expectations
- [The Bastard Interviewer from Hell](#) Episode 4 Above board and politically correct
- [The Bastard wants to know - How's your interviewing style?](#) Episode 5 Quiz time
- [Bastard's got a Brand New Laptop](#) Episode 6 Heavyweight
- [BOFH, The Boss and Operational Euphemisms](#) Episode 7 Dirty business, this computer game
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- [BOFH and the Interruptible Power System](#) Episode 9 Like moths to a lamp
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[BOFH, the Boss and printing p0rn](#) Episode 29 That's not my credit card. Er... is it?

[BOFH's Xmas Xperience](#) Episode 30 Bonuses, bosses and... BOOZE

[The BOFH-father: Part One](#) Episode 31 Ah may 'im an uffer 'e cudden refoose...

[BOFH and the Boss' space problems](#) Episode 32 Put the tape safe WHERE?

I'm a Bastard Operator, Get Me Out of Here!

BOFH 2003 Episode 1

Published Thursday 6th February 2003 21:53 GMT

"IT'S JUST A BIT OF FUN!" The PFY cries. **"NO-ONE TAKES IT SERIOUSLY!"**

"I think the people concerned are taking it rather seriously," The Boss responds unhappily. "In fact, the number of complaints I've seen so far would indicate that **EVERYONE** involved is taking it seriously!"

"I'm not taking it seriously" I point out sagely.

"Neither am I," The PFY adds.

"You're bloody **running** it!" The Boss snaps.

"Yeah, but only from an administrative stance - no other input. Other than that, it's the company making all the decisions."

"I think that in review we'll find there's a very clear case to support the complaints about you wasting the company's resource."

"We're not wasting it!" The PFY argues. "It's spare CPU, disk, etc. It'd be a waste if we **DIDN'T** use it!"

"I think it's **HOW** you use it that people are complaining about."

"Why?"

"Because an Intranet Survivor' Website **ISN'T** Company business!"

"Of course it is - it's **ABOUT** people in the company. And it's good for morale!"

"How?!"

"Because people get to vote for people they like. So people get the credit that they deserve. And people can update the website at any time, so good service is rewarded instantaneously! People get to feel good about themselves!"

"And how many positive comments have been posted so far?"

"I don't know," The PFY responds. "Obviously I can't read **EVERY** message posted as I've got a **JOB** to do, but I'd assume there'd be quite a few..."

"There are **NONE!**" The Boss snaps

"Well Obviously there would be **SOME** people who felt the need to..."

"**AND**" The Boss snarls "There's no SUBMIT button on the positive feedback page!"

"Did you scroll to the very bottom of the page, hidden behind the jpg picture of the world?"

"Uh... **YES!**"

"Really - must be an undocumented bug in the software, which I'll be sure to report back to the developers on their feedback form."

"If it has a SUBMIT button," I add.

"Anyway," The PFY continues. "The number of negative comments could be seen as a reflection of the negativity inherent in our company than the website itself. When more positive comments were logged, I'm sure it would be good for Morale!"

"Yeah, sure. However it doesn't matter, I want the site taken down!"

"Ok, we can do that - Now would **you** be telling the CEO or should we?"

"The CEO?"

"Yes, he's interested in the site, and quite likes it really. See >tap<, >tap< he's the one up the top of the rating. In fact, he's so pleased with the site and feedback that he asked that it not be anonymous. As a matter of fact, I'm rather surprised that **you** haven't placed any votes - positive or otherwise for him. Is there some problem there - a bit of animosity that would be reflected in the continuance of your empl..."

Breaking the land speed record for a standing start, The Boss rockets off to his office to press the "Suck up" jpg a couple of million times before the CEO starts compiling his New Year's Dishonours list.

A couple of hours, many many keyclicks, and a brownnosey phonecall later he's back, this time back with some helpful suggestions.

"I think you should tone down some of the automated procedures," he mumbles.

"Which ones?!" The PFY gasps, horrified.

"The one that locks people out of the building if they have a low popularity score for a start!" he suggests, obviously not happy at standing out in the rain after lunch till a courier came.

"It doesn't lock them out!" The PFY cries. "The chance of the door opening for them is directly proportional to their popularity percentage. Unless of course their popularity is zero.."

"And then?"

"It updates the HR Database (changing the Salary to Zero), cancels the person's swipe card and notifies security to put their personal effects in a cardboard box and drop them out a sixth floor window. So it's like real Survivor, with people actually being voted out!"

"It's great fun!" I concur, nodding happily. "The Company Caterer left just 10 minutes ago after a particularly nasty cauliflower cheese. It really is a fantastic use of technology."

"I think HR will have something to say about..."

"Spoke to them, passed on the CEO's thoughts on the topic and they agreed that perhaps it was a useful workplace incentive practice.

"The unions will never allow..."

"They got voted out yesterday after a video of them spending Union money at a strip show was anonymously posted to the site," The PFY adds innocently.

"I would have thought **YOU** would be a bit afraid of public opinion," The Boss snaps, not liking the way this is turning out.

"It's funny you should mention that, but would you believe it, when someone clicks on either of **OUR** names, the rating Down-Button disappears!" The PFY burbles.

"Must get around to reporting that," I murmur unconvincingly "The software's riddled with bugs - but then you must know that. **HEY**, isn't that your stuff passing by the Window?!"

>One hour later<</p>

"Well at least he put up a fight!" The PFY burbles happily. "It makes for lousy video streaming when they just give in. Who's next?"

"Well, bottom of the list - after that last anonymous video, the bloke with the nose picking habit who works in the mailroom."

"I hate him!" The PFY snips.

"We **all** do", I agree.

The Bastard Guide to Recycling

BOFH 2003 Episode 2

Published Sunday 16th February 2003 22:48 GMT

"Yes?" I ask in a surly manner, in response to a summons from the Head of IT.

"Couple of complaints about your not adhering to the new company recycling plan," he says disinterestedly, waving a couple of pieces of paper around in a woop-de-doo manner.

"Gosh really, should I try harder in future?"

"Yes, and I've been asked to **ENSURE** you're doing your bit," he says, pointing to an underlined paragraph at the bottom of one of the sheets.

"Absolutely devoted to it!" I respond, "In fact I'm so devoted, how about I recycle those bits of paper for you?"

"Excellent. That's my part done!" he replies

"RIGHT, THAT'S BLOODY IT!" someone behind me yells angrily. "You're not even taking this seriously!"

The head and I both turn in shock to find a greeny - disguised as a normal human being - behind us. In fact, he **might** even work on the Helldesk. Spies everywhere....

"Taking what seriously?"

"The company's recycling plan!"

"What recycling plan. I've not heard of any recycling plan?"

"There was a memo on it two weeks ago!"

"Oh I probably put it in the bin. Waste of paper - I read them online"

"You're supposed to put old paper in the paper recycling box!!"

"Those cardboard boxes with *Paper Recycling - Paper Only* on them?"

"Yes."

"Oops."

"What?!"

"Well I folded them all up and put them in a paper recycling box."

"Nggggg..."

"Then I chucked them in the bin."

"THE BIN?!"

"Yeah, the skip that we ordered last week to get rid of all those toner cartridges."

"YOU THREW OUT TONER CARTRIDGES!?"

"Yes?"

"THEY CAN BE RECYCLED!"

"They **ARE** recycled. They go to an artist in Leeds who uses them in his work."

"His work?"

"Yes, he works in Landfill."

"THAT'S NOT BLOODY ART!"

"I think he'd disagree with you. Anyway, it's truly amazing. He's got a technique he calls *Haphazard Arrangement of Still Life* - it's very arty. I can probably get you photographs if you want."

"Nggggg," he fizzes, then stalks off.

"He's gone to tell, you know," The Head mentions.

"Yes," I sigh.

...

Two days later it's big-greeny-meeting at IT time.

And Pandora's box creaks open...

"As you know," the Company's newly appointed Recycling Officer (i.e. mate of the CEO who needs a job) burbles. "There are significant advantages to recycling used products."

"What were they again?" The PFY asks.

"The Company pays less for its refuse removal, Cheaper prices when we buy recycled products, and more importantly we can **SELL** some of it. Not to mention the benefits to the environment."

"Sorry, we can **SELL** something?" The Head asks.

"Yes!" The Recycling Officer answers. "For instance, I read in a brochure I received this morning that there's a Cartridge Recycling Company in South London that offers as much as 5 pounds for an old toner cartridge suitable for recycling - depending on model, etc. And they sell reconditioned ones at very reasonable prices."

"Five quid each," the Head mumbles. "And how many have we thrown away over the past year?"

"In this building, probably two or three hundred," The PFY responds.

In a flash, the minds of around thirty people turn to where their future drinks money will be coming from.

"Why is it that the systems people do the toner cartridge replacements anyway?" one Helldesk person asks. "Surely it would be better with us, where we could deal with them as soon as a call is logged?"

"Sounds like a good idea to me," I agree, surprising a few people. (Let's face it - on the potatoes scale, it doesn't even rate as 'small')

"And paper, is that worth anything?" someone else asks - purely out of company interest of course.

"Only by the ton, and then when delivered to the point of recycling."

"And what's that worth?" the questioner continues, no doubt formulating a plan involving a vacant office, the company van, etc.

Sigh..

A week later I'm stopped at lunch by a beancounter with a worried attitude.

"Those bloody recycled toner cartridges don't seem to last very long!" he blurts "Though the helpdesk people are a lot better at replacing them than you were. Still, they don't seem to be the bargain we first thought."

"Don't tell me - we're going through a pantload of recycled paper too?"

"As it happens, yes. There must be some glitch in the system as almost every printer in the place is printing out the annual report. AND No-one's collecting them!!!"

..Back in Mission Control..

"I predict," I say to the PFY "that by the end of next week the Helldesk people will realise that a **NEW** toner cartridge looks much the same as an empty cartridge in need of recycling...."

"And that a ream of Xerox paper out of its wrapper looks much the same as a ream of used paper - when it's in the middle of a ton of paper in the back of a van, late at night?"

"Exactly."

"So what should be do - tell the Boss?"

"Actually I was thinking of: A. Taking on a new person at my Cartridge recycling centre - and maybe relocate it a little nearer to here than South London, B. Be more careful not to get caught about swapping half used toner cartridges for newly installed ones, and C. Get into the paper recycling business now that it's commercially viable."

"And where do I fit in?"

"Underneath a ton of Xerox paper if you don't keep your mouth shut?"

"Ah right."

It's only because I care about the environment you understand...

BOFH and the Pay Rise

BOFH 2003 Episode 3

Published Monday 9th June 2003 13:27 GMT

So I roll into work and almost run into Head of IT - who's eagerly loitering around the secretary's cubicle in much the same manner he probably loiters around Russell Square of an evening.

Seeing the data lamp on the secretary's printer flashing calmly, I feel obliged to slip into the support role.

"Waiting for a printout?" I ask.

"Yes, my Salary/Position Review results."

"Can't you just look at them on your screen?"

"I would, but the page was the size of a bloody postage stamp and I could barely make out paragraphs, let alone words."

An emergent page saves me having to explain what **ZOOM** means, using small English words, a measure of patience and a length of plastic hose...

"Woohooo!" The Head gasps, looking at the bottom line of his evaluation. "**A PAY RISE!!!!**"

"It's obviously a misprint," I say, looking over his shoulder at the bottom line figure.

"I don't think so!" he gloats happily.

"There's no way they'd pay you that much!"

"What?!" The Head snaps, catching a slight whiff of mutiny and preparing the gangplank. "Oh! Of course, he continues, changing tack in a smarmy manner. "You're not *Management*, so you'd be less, uh, **WELL** paid".

"I didn't realise that there was **THAT** much disparity!" I blurt unhappily. "I can't believe you get that much a day!"

"Uh, A week" he corrects.

"A week? Oh! Oh well, that's OK then - my mistake!" I blurt in a tone carefully crafted to raise nasty suspicions.

"What do you mean, 'OK'? Why? Are you implying that you earn more than me?"

"Uh, well, I'm not really sure of the exact figures. Didn't you sign my contract?"

"No, it rolled over from the previous Head of IT. So how much do you earn?"

"Uh, I don't know that I wish to discuss that with you," I respond, modulating my tones to imply he's being left out on some juicy gossip.

"I can find out anyway," he replies. "All I have to do is ring personnel!"

"Finance," I correct. "As I'm a direct contractor. In fact, as I'm contracted to the company and not to you directly, and whilst you pay for contractors from your budget you wouldn't be permitted to look at my personal charges..."

"**AH HAH!**" The Head cries, slapping his key into the secretaries' filing cabinet. "I may not be able to see your salary, but **I CAN** look up the contracting account and see the annual outgoings!!"

[A couple of minutes of ferreting in paper later...]

"**HERE!**" He cries, preparing for his I-earn-more-than-you-do gloat. "The contracting bill for last year! Let's see, you and your assistant charged us... uh... Oh, there doesn't seem to be an amount..."

"Yes there is," I point out helpfully. "in the bottom right hand corner."

"Really?" the Head mumbles deflatedly. "I thought that was a phone number."

"No, no" I say. "That figure would be inclusive of myself, my assistant and some one-off project consultancy contracts (Security, Standardised desktop, Wireless Survey, and LAN Topology reconfigure from memory) from independent specialised companies."

"I thought so," he smirks. "The majority of it goes to other companies."

"..owned by myself and my assistant," I add.

"But...You mean you charged the company that much over the past year?"

"Uh..." I murmur, pretending to count off numbers in my head. "Yes."

"But you earn far more than *I* do."

"Of course I do!" I cry.

"But without linked salaries, the organisational structure of responsibility falls to bits!" The Head snuffles.

"Well, it's not as though you do any real work, is it?"

"What?!" he snaps, getting into gangplank mode again.

"Well, I mean you '**MANAGE**' - whatever that means, but you don't go out there and get your hands dirty, do you? I mean when was the last time you went to a user's desktop and reinstalled their machine because their registry was full?"

"I..."

"And when was the last time you opened up a machine and reseated all the boards to eliminate a thermal expansion problem?"

"Well it's not rea..."

"And when was the last time a user came to your office to ask you for the best porn sites on the internet?"

"What?"

"Oh, Sorry, that was me. But ask yourself one question: Who's easier to replace, you or me?"

"You, obviously. There's stacks of Systems people out there, but Technical Managers with business acumen and project based accountability.."

"Yesss," I respond sarcastically. "There's only a couple of thousand graduates every year emptying themselves in **THAT** pool.."

"So you're saying that you get paid more than me because your job's more technical?"

"Oh yes. Never underestimate the bargaining power of someone who knows how to do as well as manage."

"Well in that case, what can I learn to increase my chances of earning more money?"

"Obviously not plain Systems Admin - you need a niche market. I mean I'm a Systems Admin with DBA, Networking and Audio/Video Conferencing, and The PFY is much the same, except he's got a slightly stronger profile in the hardware line, service always being an issue."

"So you think I should get into hardware?"

"You could do a lot worse. Do you know that some Engineer chargeout rates are as high as 500 quid an hour for specialised work like SAN installation?"

"Really?!? What's a SAN?"

"Storage Area Network. You've not heard of one?"

"No"

"But we bought one last year. You approved it!"

"Yes, yes, but I don't have time to read through everything I approve."

"It cost quarter of a million quid!"

"Yes, but I was very busy last year."

Sigh.

"Well anyway, we have a SAN installed - and it's extremely expensive to get work done on it."

"I suppose that's because it's so huge. It's huge isn't it - it must be if it cost quarter of a million pounds!"

"Yes" I respond, cracking slightly under the pressure. "Massive, It's as big as a room. In fact to all intents and purposes it **IS** a room."

"Is it in the Computer Suite then?"

"No, no, it was much too big for that, we had to put it with the rest of the storage."

"In the basement?!"

"Yes"

. . . three hours later . . .

"Have you seen the Big Boss?" The PFY asks, wandering around with an unsigned purchase order.

"He's in the basement servicing the SAN."

"The SAN?" The PFY asks curiously "In the.. **BASEMENT?!"**

"Well, when I say SAN, I mean Power Distribution Transformer, and when I say 'Servicing' I mean giving it an Oil change and removing all the '**DANGER, DO NOT REMOVE COVERS**' off to.... Oh look, the power's gone out."

. . .

It's just too easy sometimes...

The Bastard Interviewer from Hell

BOFH 2003 Episode 4

Published Monday 9th June 2003 13:23 GMT

There's nothing like a Job Interviewing for a little bit of time off work, and with our current lack of both Head of IT (serious burns after a nasty transformer explosion) and Boss (voted out of the building by a mass of public opinion expressed on an intranet website) the tide appears to be out in the catchment pool of potential interviewers.

Which is where The PFY and I come in...

"As you probably know," The HR Droid burbles to the 12 or so interviewer hopefuls collected in the IT meeting room, "we need to appoint a Selection Committee for the roles of Head of IT Department and Technical Manager, IT Department. For the senior role we expect to shortlist five candidates, whilst for middle management somewhere in the region of the candidates - which means that the interview process is likely to be a whole day for the Head of IT, and half a day for the Technical Manager. The second interview process is likely to only take an hour apiece for both roles. Anyone who would like to be on the Selection Panel would therefore have to be able to make themselves available for those interview times."

At this, a couple of selection team hopefuls get up and reluctantly drag themselves from the room.

"The committee is expected to be myself, two of you people, and the Chief Operating Officer. Are there any other questions before we move on?"

"Is lunch provided?" some furry toothed developer asks, taking a break from picking the egg stains out of his cardigan.

"Uh.. No"

Another couple of people depart...

"Can you be on the committee if you're an applicant?" a sad geek from the helpdesk (with delusions of grandeur) asks.

"Interviewers are expected to be impartial."

And then there were seven...

"In the event that the person chosen turns out to be deadwood, are there any repercussions on members of the committee?" I ask, knowingly.

"Repercussions?"

"You know, undocumented bulletproof-glasss-ceiling, legal action by the company for negligence in the course of the interviewing...."

"You mean would the Company hold you responsible? Of course not!"

Two more chairs are vacated by people who realise just how easily your office can be relocated to outside a toilet door or how quickly a redundancy clause can be invoked.

"No more questions. In that case I suppose we should just select from you five. What do you say, draw names out of a hat?"

"What about Rock, Paper Scissors?" The PFY suggests.

Ten minutes later..

"Funny." the HR Droid mumbles to The PFY and I as the sole survivors of the game. "We only had Paper, Rock and Scissors - Claw Hammer wasn't an option."

"Big Boy's games, Big Boy's rules," The PFY comments, putting the aforementioned item back in his backpack.

"Well, I suppose in the absence of objection I'll just get my assistant, Sharon, to go over what we're expecting from you in interview techniques. Sharon?"

"Hi," Sharon says, addressing The PFY and me. "What I'm basically going to cover is Interview Technique, what you should be looking for, questions you should be asking, the manner in which you ask them, and questions that are not acceptable in an interview situation."

I was worried about this - Talk about take all the fun out of interviewing....

"Not acceptable?"

"Yes, questions which might be used in a discriminatory evaluation - Race, Creed and of course, Sex.."

"Uh, not for me thanks!" The PFY slips in cheerfully.

"That is exactly what I'm talking about," she snaps.

"Yes, but I'm just not interested," The PFY responds, switching levity off with a >snap<</p>

"Look, I'm serious!"

"I'm sure you are, but I'm just not available - I'm already in a relationship!"

"Right! I'm sorry," Sharon chirps decisively, putting a line through The PFY's name on her interviewer sheet, "but I don't think that you're suitable material for an interviewee."

"I can't believe it!" The PFY cries "I'm being kicked off the interview panel because I won't sleep with her!"

"That's just shameful!" I concur, seeing the bandwagon and jumping on board to see where the ride takes us. "Isn't this against company policy - Harassment or something?!!"

"I THINK Sharon was trying to highlight questions that would be unsuitable for an interview and your partner grasped the wrong end of the stick" The HR Droid replies soothingly.

"GOOD GRIEF MAN, HE'S NOT MY PARTNER!" I gasp, overplaying the horror a little, "JUST BECAUSE HE WON'T SLEEP WITH HER DOESN'T MEAN HE'S GAY!? AND QUITE FRANKLY, *I* RESENT THE IMPLICATION!!!"

"No-one was implying anything by this!" The HR Droid babbles attempting to calm things down before they really get out of hand. "I meant partner at work."

"What, you're suggesting we're ambidextrous!" The PFY cries ."AC at home and DC at work!!!!"

"NO! No-one's suggesting anything of the sort! LOOK, what we mean is that there are certain phrases, topics and questions which aren't appropriate in the process of an interview, and they should be avoided."

"Oh!" The PFY gushes, "Now I understand! But which phrases precisely? The problem with the Internet is that it's a multicultural group with varying degrees of what's acceptable and not. Could you give me some, well, examples of what we shouldn't say, questions we shouldn't ask - words we shouldn't use."

....

Fish, Barrel, Loud Bangs...

....

"Well it's fairly damning evidence, I have to agree!" the Head of HR nods sadly as The PFY plays back the recording of selected parts of our conversation from his PDA. "And obviously, I'm pleased you brought it to me to deal with, and didn't complain at other levels. You realise, however, that this complaint will slow the interview process down significantly."

"We understand," I respond, "but we'd rather do this the proper way if possible..."

"Yes," The PFY concurs. "Everything above board and Politically Correct..."

The Bastard wants to know – How's your interviewing style?

BOFH 2003 Episode 5

Published Monday 31st March 2003 16:07 GMT

Due to an unfortunate spate of Onion Bhaji poisonings at the staff cafeteria, you have been called upon to act as a member of the interview panel to select some computing 'professionals' for work at a distal site. Your company needs your help, but first, we need to verify your suitability for a role of such importance. Please answer these questions honestly.

1. You need some time off from interviewing to check your email - how would you go about obtaining this time?

- a. Ask for a 10 minute recess
- b. Suggest the candidate ask some questions while you organise an annual report for them to look at
- c. Interrupt the interview for a 'comfort stop'
- d. Say "Man, I reckon that chick with the big tits is a shoe-in for this job!" - secure in the knowledge that you'll both get your email and never have to be on another interview committee, ever again..

2. You are expected to ask the prospective candidates a technical question to judge their ability. Your question is:

- a. Describe the main components of Active Directory
- b. Outline a basic implementation of a DNS system under Linux
- c. Describe a typical installation of Sendmail
- d. Outline why Bill Gates is a running dog lackey of the current American Capitalist Junta

3. The best way determine candidate's ability to handle extremes of pressure is:

- a. Rorschach inkblot test
- b. Generalised Aptitude Tests

c. Referees' reports

d. Repeatedly making demanding phone calls to them at their current workplace and waiting for gunshots...

4. You're expected to ask a 'stress' question. You choose:

a. "Can you give an example of a situation where you dealt with an unhappy customer?"

b. "Can you give an example of a situation of high stress and how you overcame it?"

c. "Describe your working style"

d. "Can you give an example of when a handgun is appropriate in a workplace?"

5. You have two candidates who are so alike it's difficult to choose between them. You:

a. Employ them both, knowing they will both do well in the company

b. Toss a coin

c. Organise a wrist wrestle - winner takes the job

d. Lock them in a darkened room with a half brick each. The one that makes it out gets the job.

6. A test of the applicant's ability to 'think outside the square' is called for. Your question is:

a. "Outline a method of integrating physical and online authentication"

b. "Describe an alternative to ASP applications that would still reduce the requirement for hands-on administration"

c. "In what non-temporary circumstances would the benefits of wireless networking outweigh those of wired - discounting cost?"

d. "Outline a situation where you might pay an interview panel a large amount of untraceable currency just to get the job"

7. When looking through a potential candidate's resume', which of the following ring warning bells:

- a. Their photograph
- b. (a), full size, as a coversheet
- c. "34th level mage, plus 10 for vanquishment, Dungeon Master" listed in hobbies
- d. Referees all have the same surname - as the applicant
- e. Their Typing Speed
- f. The document is more than 5 pages in length.

The words:

- g. "Certified OS2 Developer"
- h. "I have a home network of MicroVaxes"
- i. "MCSE"
- j. "I have 40 years experience in Computing"
- k. "I know C+++"
- l. All of the above.

8. The HR Droid asks the candidate if they have any questions they wish to ask. The question they could ask which would most endear them to you would be:

- a. Is there shift work involved?
- b. What's the salary of the position?
- c. Is there a Christmas Bonus?
- d. Did your mum buy that tie for you?

9. A good candidate can often be determined by their choice of dress. For a technical role, you would be expecting to see:

- a. Suit and Tie
- b. Smart Casual
- c. Hard wearing and Practical

d. Jeans, T-shirt and Penis tie

10. As each applicant leaves the interview room, you should compliment them on some part of their interview process. You would say:

- a. "Thanks, that was great"
- b. "Great, thanks very much, we'll be contacting you shortly"
- c. "I know I shouldn't say this, but you seem to be the ideal candidate"
- d. (c), and then "..but I know the chick with the big bazookies will get the job"

Bastard's got a Brand New Laptop

BOFH 2003 Episode 6

Published Wednesday 16th April 2003 14:50 GMT

"New Laptop?" The PFY asks looking up as he detects a stirring in the force.

"Yes, it's rather good isn't it?" I respond, pulling it out of its patent leather carry bag and flashing it at him.

"An ultra thin! How the hell did you talk The Boss into getting you one of those - AND the fancy carry bag?"

"Not just the machine and carry bag, but two spare batteries, an 802.11 card, USB camera and microphone, PLUS the thing's got a DVD writer!!!"

"But how did you get him to buy you one!?"

"As it happens, I didn't! He decided that this wasn't really what he wanted..."

"It's The Boss's machine?!"

"-Yes-...AND, as I was saying, that he preferred his old one..."

"His old one!" The PFY gasps sarcastically. "It was at LEAST a year old - surely any self-respecting manager couldn't show his face at a meeting with old-tech kit like that!!"

"Apparently so. He said he didn't think his position really warranted a new machine. In reality, however, I think it's just because he found the thing too heavy and ungainly to carry around"

"Too bloody heavy!!" the PFY snaps jealously. "It weighs about as much as a box of cereal and is so thin you could slip it into a bible without ruffling the pages!!"

"True, but he found it heavy. In fact, he confided to me that he'd left it at work a couple of nights but even found the bag a bit of a problem!"

"He even fou..." the PFY starts, suspiciously.

"YES," I interrupt. "Have a feel of it, it IS bloody heavy!"

The PFY is caught off guard by the weight and almost drops the thing on the floor.

"Careful!" I cry, grabbing it back. "Don't want to damage it!"

"Alright, I'll bite, what did you do?" he snaps, giving up.

"BLOODY INGENIOUS," I cry, gloating like a Third World dictator. "I got some self adhesive 1mm lead sheets and stuck them to the top and bottom of the laptop, then faked some manufacturer, FCC, etc labels, and slapped them on the lid!"

"Didn't he notice?"

"Well he DID wonder why it wouldn't fit into the docking bay..."

"What'd you tell him?"

"A design flaw which they'd fix later with a firmware revision..."

"?" The PFY wonders, wordlessly contemplating The Boss's stupidity. "What about the bag then?"

"Stuffed the lining with lead shot. Lucky he didn't try flying with it though - I'm sure that would've rung alarm bells with the current state of airline sec..."

>PING!<

"Isn't he required for a junket in the States??" The PFY snaps in a flash.

"No, that's just too mean!"

. . . Two weeks later . . .

"That really was too mean," The PFY reminisces, scanning the latest newspaper article on The Boss's state of detention. "You can go too far at times!"

"*I* can go too far! You're the one who put those envelopes of rice powder in his jacket pocket!"

"True, that was a little nasty," the PFY admits grudgingly. "But in my defence, I did at least think he'd make it out of the country and get a BIT of a holiday."

"Then perhaps you shouldn't have made that anonymous phone call quite so soon?"

"Yeah, well, there was blood in the water and we all smelt it - I just did something about it!"

"I think there's a subtle difference between 'doing something about it' and the feeding frenzy that you kicked off at Heathrow."

"OK, well maybe I shouldn't have said his laptop battery was crammed with C4."

"After rubbing his luggage with the insides of a firework for the benefit of the sniffer dogs I don't think it made a hell of a lot of difference..."

"Yeah well..."

"And as for slapping the tinfoil cutout of a gun into his in-flight reading..."

"Bad taste?"

"No, very old hat. A better plan would have been to have stuck some curly wires and an alarm clock into his carry-on."

"...Stuck to a couple of tubes of wine gums?"

"Oh no, that's not quite nasty enough. The THEORY is that they'd then have to LOOK for the rest of the suspected appliance..."

"Ah right, trousers, gloves, etc. Nasty. Perhaps next time..."

"Indeed."

Later that evening I'm at after-work-drinks with The PFY when I notice a surreptitious nod from him to a couple of suited gents drinking lemonade for the past hour. Quicker than you can say 'usurping bastard' I make some noises about needing to download some brownware, grab my bag and casually duck into the gents. I manage to get the clock and wire down the toilet before Special Branch kick the door in, but it's a close run thing.

The steps The PFY will go through just to get a new portable...

"Now what's our Iraqi exchange worker been telling you about me?" I ask.

Fair's fair.

BOFH, The Boss and Operational Euphemisms

BOFH 2003 Episode 7

Published Thursday 1st May 2003 16:15 GMT

ORDINARILY, I am not one to counsel The Boss in times of mental torment. To be honest, I see my role more as a **FACILITATOR** of torment, but this time I'm going have to break my informal rules and find out what's upsetting him. This could be an unwise choice, but sometimes a good turn needs to be done, and it's obvious to all that The Boss is so far down in the mouth he's liable to swallow a shoe.

If it gets any worse The PFY will have to call the Vet - for humane reasons.

Sigh.

"What seems to be the problem?" I ask, with a due sense of trepidation.

"It's the Management meeting tomorrow afternoon," he confides unhappily.

"Yes?"

"Well **MAINLY** the problem is that they're going to crucify me!" he snaps.

"Really? Why?"

"Were you not here the last week?"

"What do you mean exactly?"

"The helpdesk system - up and down like a whore's drawers!"

"Yes?"

"They'll go berserk. Not to mention the performance of the new Asset Tracking Database that we'd outsourced as a project to that overseas firm in Karachi."

"The one that takes longer to find a match than a blind pyromaniac? Well I ***DID*** warn you about trusting a database whose design phase was over in 15 minutes..."

"Yes yes, but that doesn't bloody help me now!"

"True. But is that all that you're worried about - nothing else?"

"That's enough, isn't it?"

"Potato, Po-tah-to" I respond.

"What?!"

"You see a helpdesk system that only successfully logged two calls in 5 days, I see a fantastic reduction in the number of weekly unresolved calls!"

"I hardly think..."

"You see a database search engine that's so slow it needs a mobility scooter, I see a search engine which has completely eliminated false match reporting!"

"What, you want me to lie to them?"

"Lie to them? Good grief man, if 21st century world history has taught you anything, it must have taught you that 'What you don't know..."

"...can't hurt you', yes."

"Did you know that The PFY had removed the support bracket from your table last week?"

"No?"

"So that disproves that theory. What I was **GOING** to say was that *'What you don't know is an ideal marketing opportunity'.*"

"What **ARE** you talking about?"

"OK, you know last month when the Helpdesk coordinator told you that there'd been a huge reduction in reported sick leave in the previous four weeks?"

"Yes?"

"Yes, that was a euphemism for they'd stopped reporting it - but not taking it. Combine that with his next statements: 'dramatic reduction in helpdesk calls' and 'no service complaints logged' and you get?"

"There was no-one there most of the time?"

"Exactly."

"So what you're saying is that instead of reporting the truth..."

"**INSTEAD** of reporting the **INCIDENTAL** information, you should instead report the hidden benefits which may have otherwise have escaped observation, yes."

"So instead of saying that you and your assistant are homicidal megalomaniacs, I should say that you're..."

"Dedicated, Team-Playing professionals who will go the extra mile to get a job done properly, yes."

"And that Windows consultant I appointed last week to tighten up the company's IIS Server security..."

"Is a waste of good office space, yes."

"A waste- Where's the good side in that?"

"That *was* the good side."

"Oh. So my P.A., who can't type so good, or use an online calendar would be a People Person, putting people first?"

"Or, more geekily, a customer-focused professional, always willing to try the hands-on approach. Least that's what they say down at the pub."

"What?!"

"Nothing, just going that extra mile, like we always do.."

"Ah. OK. Well, I think I've got the hang of this now!" he burbles. "I think I'll just pop back to my office and browse some porn for the rest of the day!"

"Or, to put it another way..?"

"Uh... Keep myself abreast of the new and startling developments in the Web community to ensure my full exposure to the potential of the medium?"

"Couldn't have said it better myself."

"Yes I know, your assistant put it down for a 14 hour activity in last week's timesheets."

"He's a dedicated man," I admit.

The Boss toddles off happily, giving me time to set up some extended web-cache logging of his machine, which will 'accidentally' get emailed to the Head of IT at the end of the day..

"What are you up to?" The PFY asks, peering over my shoulder at the screen.

"Oh, just ensuring our exposure to a broad spectrum of Management resource with a wide variety of computing experience."

"Getting another Boss fired, right. Why?"

"He'd pretty much reached the pinnacle of his career."

"Oh, You told him about Operational Euphemisms then?"

"Exactly."

"It's a dirty business, this computing game"

"Indeed."

The Bastard goes 24/7

BOFH 2003 Episode 8

Published Tuesday 20th May 2003 12:52 GMT

Sigh.

I don't know what it is about 24x7 Operations, but the thought of it seems to make most IT Managers weak at the knees - and The Boss is no exception. I'm sure in his mind he sees a clean, shiny computer room with suited professionals striding purposefully betwixt machines, engrossed in their continuous 24x7 work - all accomplished with the professional care and attention you expect from a full time operation.

Tapes whirring, lights blinking, just like in the movies...

In **REAL** life however, the situation is generally:

- one of the three night shift staff sleeps under the boardroom desk
- another racks up humungous long distance phone calls in between porn marathons
- the remaining person (if they turn up) doing the crossword between half-hourly trips to the tape library media bay

But of course, telling The Boss this is about as useful as explaining the beauty of Open Source to a Windows geek. His 'Field of Dreams' view of 24x7 makes him think the company's backlog of work will suddenly flood into the place of an evening and his plan end up becoming the efficient cost-saving exercise of the century.

As opposed the the money soak that everyone else knows it will be...

So, at a departmental meeting...

"...and what I'm after is a rough idea of the setup costs involved in running the place round-the-clock" The Boss rambles, addressing The PFY, me and the Helldesk people.

"You're going to need a lot of Helpdesk cover!" a phone geek in a headset burbles "...to handle all the calls."

"What calls?" The PFY asks in an annoyed manner "Don't your calls taper off exponentially after 4:30pm?"

"People will work late if they know there's support!" the helldesk geek Kevin Costners.

"People wouldn't work late if there was sex involved!" The PFY counters, annoyed.

"I **THINK** you'll find that people would enjoy flexible working hours," The Boss responds.

"If by flexible you mean coming in at 2pm, saying you started at 7am, and leaving at 3pm, then yes, I think you're right."

"Or..." The PFY adds, "If you mean going out on a bender, missing the last tube home, realising that you could clock in at 2am and be able to go home at 10am when you wake up under your desk..."

"It would be more structured than that!" The Boss explains. "People would be rostered on..."

"Ah - so you'd need to organise your bender in advance," The PFY replies sagely. "Tricky..."

"So what I'm after," The Boss continues, ignoring him, "is an estimation of what we'd need to put in place to allow us to supply 24x7 service."

"Well let's see - there'll be more staff for a start - at least two more Operator/Admins, shift allowances, an account with a restaurant..."

"What?!"

"For meals - the company cafeteria won't be open, and most contracts specifically include provision for meals for shift workers."

"We would provide meal preparation facilities for out-of-hours use!"

"**QUALITY** meals, of a standard available at the cafeteria during normal working hours - so as not to unfairly disadvantage shift-work staff?"

"What are you suggesting?"

"Nothing ambitious, a chef's oven, a vertical griller, industrial fridge, fresh food and vegetables, a selection of meats and cheeses, breads and dips. Some wine perhaps?"

"I'll go as far as pizza!" The Boss replies, closing the topic.

... Three weeks later ...

"What the bloody hell is that?" The Boss gasps, as a large crate is slowly wheeled in the direction of Mission Control.

"The Pizza oven you okayed."

"I never okayed a pizza oven!"

"Sure you did" The PFY responds, scrabbling around the desk to find a piece of paper. "Look!"

"I didn't sign that!"

"Yes you did, see!"

"I most certai...That was for a pizza! 14.95!"

"A pizza oven, £14950.00, yes."

"That's preposterous! You changed the order!"

"I never!" The PFY cries, offended

"You bloody did!" The Boss blurts, realising what a purchase like this could potentially do to what remains of his reputation.

"We can't send it back - it came from Italy!"

"You **ORDERED A BLOODY ITALIAN PIZZA OVEN!**" The Boss blurts, in danger of bursting a major artery.

"**YOU** did, yes."

"Get rid of the bloody thing before someone sees it!"

"Where? The guys in the store won't have room for it, and the Importer probably won't take it back."

"I don't know, just get rid of it and don't ever mention it again - Surely one of you could use it?" he asks sneakily.

"Nah, not really," The PFY says disinterestedly, in less time than it would take The Boss to say "Excuse me officer but I believe that one of my employees has been involved in some theft-as-a-servant".

"Well can't we pay a restocking fee to the Importer and vanish the thing from the purchasing records.... somehow?"

"You mean you'd like us to modify the purchasing database to substitute "Pizza" for "Pizza Oven", modify the purchase price, ship this back to the importer, pay the restocking fee without causing another transaction to be logged into purchasing system, and generally not mention a word of this ever again?"

"Yes"

"200 quid"

"Why, that's... that's bloody"

"..Far too small a price to sell out our professional dignity, yes, you're right! Make it an even 500."

"FI.." The Boss bubbles, passing out.

"It's funny isn't it," The PFY mumbles through his Pizza. "Some people would see an empty packing crate on the street and think 'rubbish', while you immediately think 'opportunity'."

"Yes, I'm a glass-half-full sort of person," I admit. "Now what else has The Boss signed up for recently?"

"Ahhhhh.... Night Shift Workstation, 800 quid."

"Night Shift Watchman, 8000 quid?"

"Nah, What would we do with one of those?"

"True - Swiss Night Glow Watches - for accurate time keeping?"

"I like the way your thinking!!!!..."

BOFH and the Interruptible Power System

BOFH 2003 Episode 9

Published Tuesday 20th May 2003 12:56 GMT

"This is eerie," The PFY whispers, as we gaze around the darkened and newly silent computer room with a flashlight. "Isn't there emergency lighting?"

"Apparently not," I respond. "Which is an excellent design feature for a room with no windows in the centre of a building."

"So where's the UPS bypass switch?" He asks, directing the spotlight around the room to the power distribution board.

"Not sure, but I'm guessing that they would put it somewhere next to the UPS. First though, we need to follow computer room physical security procedure."

"What, check all the doors are secure, that circuit breakers won't trip from start current when we power the system on, and that we can get adequate lighting for service people?" he asks, greenly.

"No, I mean, lift a couple of floor tiles, tie some cat-5 cable at ankle height between racks, unscrew the Halon Hold-off knobs, remove the doorknobs from the inside of the computer room doors and hide the oxygen masks."

"You've thought about this before, haven't you?" The PFY asks, tying cable furiously while I lift several tiles in the computer room in a random manner.

"Oh yes. This is one of those moments in your career that you dream of. But quick, we need to put up those 'Work Underway, Multiple Hazard Area' signs!"

"But why, no-one can see them?!" he asks - complying anyway and popping a few of the little yellow sandwich board about the place.

"Because there's work underway with floor tiles removed and cable everywhere! There could be a **nasty** accident if someone were to foolishly take advantage of the power outage to have a quick peek inside the computer room while the swipe card system was out of commission to see what the place looked like..."

"But the swipe card system's got its own battery backup, hasn't it?"

"Yes, A small nicad battery which has probably been charging continuously for about five years and has the life expectancy of... um..."

"Someone who'd sneak inside a darkened computer room for a quick peek while swipe card system was out of commission?"

"Exactly! Sshh, here comes someone!"

We wait quietly while the door opens and one of the Helldesk people has a peek around to see if the coast is clear before blundering into the computer room.

>CRASH!<</p>

"Deary me!" The PFY mumbles very quietly over some faint groans. "Someone has fallen down a hole in the raised floor, and, by the sound of it, done themselves a bit of an injury!"

"I would go and offer assistance," I say magnanimously. "But as we all know, it is dangerous to enter a multiple hazard area in the dark, so I think it's best to stay put. Always put safety f... Ooh, here comes another one!!!"

A faintly lit face, which can only be that of The Boss, pushes up against the doorglass. Moments later the door opens and he enters.

"Who's that?" he asks in response to the groans.

A bit of muffled conversation follows with The Boss deciding to render assistance.

...

>Trip!< >CRASH!<</p>

The PFY muffles a snort whilst shaking his head.

"Like moths to a lamp!" I mumble to The PFY as another face appears in the window - A beancounter.

"Are Beancounters worth more points?" The PFY asks.

"Mmmm" I mumble.

More conversation follows the door opening, with the Beancounter being sneaky, and hugging the walls instead of crossing the floor...

>Trip< >CRASH!<</p>

"Tripwire?" The PFY asks.

"No, that sounded like one of those multiple hazard signs," I whisper. "Hang on, can't keep a good man down!!!"

>Clamber< >Twang< >CRASH<</p>

"Or maybe you can. Now THAT was a Cat-5 tripwire!" I add.

"HELLO!" I cry, deciding to let people know I'm here.

"Who's that?" The Boss gasps. "I think I've broken my ankle!"

"So have I!" The Helldesk geek whimpers.

"It's us - we were in here when the power went off!" The PFY blurts.

"Well givvus a bloody hand will you?" the Helldesk geek snaps.

"I would, but we've been doing work in here and there's cables all over the place and floor tiles up, and no emergency lighting. It's a hazard area. Didn't you see the signs?"

"IN THE BLOODY DARK?!" the Beancounter gasps testily.

"True. Tell you what though, there's a couple of flashlights in the control room. We'll pop out the back way, grab them and come back and give you a hand!"

"Well hurry up then!"

The PFY and I make a show of feeling our way around in the dark to the back of the Computer Room and slip out that way.

...

"It says here that in the future you'll be able to put terabytes of information in your cellphone!" The PFY says, pointing to an article in a magazine with his coffee cup.

"Mmmm. Did you see that article on the next page though, that says that there's a secure version of Windows out?"

We finish chuckling, and make our way back to the computer room, flashlights in hand...

One UPS-Bypass >click< later the computer room is up and running and the victims are taken.

"This isn't the way I'd have had it happen though.." I sigh unhappily.

"A touch of remorse?" The PFY asks.

"Nah, I was just hoping one of them would've had a cigarette lighter we could have blamed a halon release on..."

"Can't have everything."

"True."

BOFH cops a virus

BOFH 2003 Episode 10

Published Tuesday 3rd June 2003 15:08 GMT

Ah mornings!

There's nothing like a leisurely cup of coffee, feet up on the table, enjoying the morning news. Well - reading people's email - but same difference.

"Brown in accounts is sniffing around the new mail room girl again," The PFY comments.

"Yes, I saw that yesterday - the odd 'what you doing?' message during the day. Where's he at now?"

"Nonchalantly suggesting that he and a 'few work mates' are meeting up for a 'quick drink' and maybe she'd like to come along 'for a laugh'?"

"Don't tell me, a pub miles from work - and he's not sent any other email out to his 'mates'?"

"Precisely!"

"I thought he was chatting up Jenny in Payroll?"

"Yes, he's doing that too."

"Oooh, wouldn't it be a bloody tragedy..."

"...If >clickety< their mail got mixed up due to some horrible MTA error and they found >clickety< out about each other? Oh look at that!"

"The course of true love is never smooth" I sigh. "What about The Boss, what's he up to and when's he back?"

>clickety<</p>

"Back today, was at a >click< SAN presentation in Kent. Oh, you're not going to believe this!"

"What?" I ask, not wanting to miss out on the morning funny.

"He booked travel insurance."

"To KENT? He may as well book travel insurance on the Tube!"

"No, it would probably cost more for the tube - more risk,.."

"True. What was he insured for?"

"Uhhhhmmm - mainly medical?"

"Medical? He's got company health insurance, hasn't he?"

"Hypochondriac Alert?"

"Must be - We'll have to find that out when he gets in. It's essential for worker-boss bonding to keep up to date with people! But first some calls!!" I cry, phoning the company doctor...

"Hello?"

"Yes," I burble in a worried manner. "I'm a **BIT** concerned about The Boss. He's been a bit... uh... stressed... lately, and, well, irrational. I think He might have that cleanness thing like what Howard Hughes had?"

"It's not very likely. People with germ phobia shun the contact of others. He'd be unlikely to turn up to work if that were the case."

"It's just..."

"OK, OK, I might stop by to see, but no promises."

...Later that morning when the boss trundles in...

"...and I bought this CD in for you people to look at. It's an actual model of a working SAN, which you can run up on your desktop."

"Oh, I'd like a look at that!" The PFY gasps joyfully, "I've been wanting to get a lo.. lo.. loo.. AAAAAACCCCHHHHHHHHEEEWW!"

What The PFY's sneezes lack in authenticity, they more than make up for in spray, and I make a mental note to hose my desk down before I use it again...

"Sorry about that," The PFY blurts "Touch of the Flu. Must have picked it up when I took the new girl in the mailroom to see the Chinese Ballet Company."

"You went to the Chinese Ballet?" the Boss whimpers, edging back slightly.

"Yeah, she loves the stuff, and a mate of a mate knew the stagehands, so we got in free and got to meet all the players!"

"I don't remember any Chinese Ballet being on?" the Boss says. Obviously a closet culture vulture.

"Well you wouldn't - they only played for a couple of days then the whole thing was cancelled and they shifted off back home to Beijing like a flash!"

"What did your friend say?"

"Dunno, haven't been able to get hold of him. The phone rings and rings, but no answer - which is strange because he normally puts the answerphone on when he's out."

I personally think The PFY's laying it on so thick he may as well be driving a manure spreader, but The Boss is lapping it up.

"Really?" he muffles, through the hanky that's suddenly over his face. "Sorry, runny nose."

"Yes, that's how this started!" The PFY adds, looking around for a tissue.

"SARS," The Boss mouths silently,

"Sorry?" I respond, while The PFY has the decency to make a real show of not turning back around.

"**SARS VIRUS!**" he again mouths.

"**VIRUS?!**" I ask out loud, to which The Boss nods so furiously it's a wonder he doesn't get concussion.

"**WELL**, I'll run the CD through the scanner then - just to be on the safe side."

The Boss's head movements change axis from a nod to a shake, whilst simultaneously nodding at The PFY.

"Oh, you want **HIM** to do it?" I ask, turning and tossing the CD to The PFY "Boss wants you to run this thro.."

>SLAM!</p>

"That's funny," The PFY comments. "I didn't hear a sonic boom, but I'm sure I should of."

"Should **HAVE**. And no - it must be the low wind resistance of polyester that saved us."

"So should I take the CD back."

"Not just yet, have to make a call or two!"

...

"..and bring the tranquiliser gun"

Ah mornings!

BOFH and the Bad Junket

BOFH 2003 Episode 11

Published Tuesday 2nd September 2003 14:54 GMT

So The PFY is back from a short junket he went on to learn about some technology or the other that no-one's heard of, no-one cares about, and no-one can afford to use.

"How'd that Microsoft thing go?" I ask, as he enters the office with a full contingent of bloodshot eyes.

"Microsoft? No, I was at that thing of 21st century connectivity!"

"Really?"

"Yeah. There were people there from all over the place."

"Oh, and what did you bring back from it?"

"A hell of a hangover, about a million pens, a digital watch built into a chunk of steel, a desktop organiser, uuuuhm, a patch cable that winds back into it's holder, some golf balls, a business card hold, a CD holders, a couple of..."

"OK, Bruce Forsyth, I think I got the picture - you brought back nothing."

"What do you mean, I just told you what I brought back."

"That's just fluff. You have to bring back something of worth to the company. Something that will make The Boss think it was a good thing to send you there - so that he sends you there again next year!"

"Oh. Well he can have some of my pens I suppose."

"PENS WON'T CUT IT! He needs something that he can in turn pass up to his bosses to justify the outrageous training budget!"

"Uh?"

"Look, you go on a course, you get heaps of useful information, bring it back, The Boss shows this to the Head of IT, he shows it to the board as a future direction for IT and the company, the board is happy and happiness trickles down the chain onto you. If you fail to bring The Boss something back to flash about the place, something will be trickling onto you, but it won't be accolades. **SO**, did you bring back any Informational CD Roms?"

"No."

"Course Program and Associated material?"

"Dumped it in the bin on the first day."

"Cheap, poorly labelled, Course Carrier Bag, with Proceedings CD in the small zip up compartment?"

"Binned it!"

"Brochures from Vendors?"

"Nope. Didn't have room with all the Pens I got."

"Ok, so it looks to me like that's the last junket you'll be going on. Unless..."

"Unless?"

"How's your patter on Technology of the Future."

"What?"

"Do you think you could give a 15 minute, extremely dull - and I mean **MINDNUMBINGLY DULL** here, not just tedious or meandering. I'm meaning a talk so Dull you'd think Richard Stallman had taken over your body. For free beer."

"Nah, I don't think I could."

"What about a 5 minute dull speech, full of acronyms, devoid of intelligible content?"

"Uhhhm."

"1 minute, Dummy Mode on?"

"Uhhh"

"30 Seconds - backed up with glossy brochures?"

"Could you write it for me?"

"Of course. So you talk to The Boss, he doesn't understand a word of it, let alone have the ability to repeat it, but he needs his kudos, so he'll get you to spout off to the Head of IT, who will glaze over quicker than a donut in a freezer - He'll make you say it to the board, they'll think that whatever the hell you're saying sounds fantastic, and so much better than the 'invest cautiously in emerging technology' that the opposition board are saying, and we'll all be happy."

"You think it will work?"

"Bloody **BOUND** to!"

One speech later...

"That was... very enlightening," The Boss burbles, coming out of his coma. "You know, I think we should talk to The Head about this. I'll cover the main points, and you just fill in the blanks."

Another speech later...

"Yes..." The Head of IT says, sneakily closing Solitaire on his PDA. "Very interesting. I was just saying to the board last week that we should be investing more in that, um, wassisname technology to replace our redundant thingies. I know, why don't you tell them what you just told me - I'm sure they'd appreciate it straight from the horses mouth, so to speak"

Another speech later...

....

"..." a Board Member breathes, looking around expectantly for someone else to say something.

"Yes" The Chairman says. "Couldn't agree more, fascinating. **AND I SUPPOSE**, the **REASON** you told us all this is because you'll be wanting a larger technical and training budget next year?"

*****BONUS*****

"Well obviously there are costs involved in an undertaking of this nature," The Head says, tapping a wodge of brochures the PFY and I recently pulled out of the middle of some geek mags.

"And redundant fibre-optic coupling of multiple VLANs over an mixed-mode data infrastructure doesn't come cheap."

"Well I guess I don't need to be told twice the cost of keeping up with the industry," The Chairman sighs benevolently. "So I suppose you should put the proposal, and maybe this little talk as an intro, into next year's business plan."

"Ah, one question?" a Board Member asks.

"Yes?" The PFY replies.

"What did all that **MEAN**?"

"You mean you didn't understand it?" I butt in, sympathetically "But I got my assistant to word it so simply."

"Well what does, er, SAN mean?"

"Storage Area Network."

"And what does that have to do with Wireless Access Points?"

"They're all technology that we're looking at implementing."

"But they don't have anything to do with each other do they?"

"Nothing - except they're both about the future of computing at the company? Honestly! Now, who'd like some free pens?"

Master Plan: Nothing kills a dissenting voice quicker than a stampede for freebies...

The Bastard School of Argument

BOFH 2003 Episode 12

Published Wednesday 2nd July 2003 22:38 GMT

It's not a good day for The Boss - for two reasons.

First, there's no work on and I'm bored - and we know who makes work for Idle Hands. (Apart from Software Assurance). *Second* because there's no work on and The PFY is also bored.

"I think I'm going on an Operations Mission."

"Really," I ask,. "What?"

"Thought I might break into The Boss's office, go through his stuff, grab anything interesting. Then leave a mop or something laying around so he blames the cleaners."

"OK - Pick me up some of those biscuits in the third drawer down on the right will you?"

"Sure. Run interference for me?"

"You betcha!" I blurt, pondering the right way to drag the Boss into a pointless argument with no possibility of resolution...**BINGO!**

15 minutes later....

"YOU'RE BLOODY PIRATING SOFTWARE!" The Boss cries unhappily as my DVD writer spins up.

"No I'm not, I'm making a backup copy of our software for safekeeping!" I respond. "All perfectly legit, as noted in the copyright notice that comes with the media."

"A backup copy? But you said you're taking it home!" he continues.

"Yes."

"But it's **COMPANY** software!"

"Indeed it is. And what better place to store a backup copy of the software than a secure place offsite?"

"I... uh... **BUT WE'VE GOT AN OFFSITE MEDIA STORAGE FACILITY!!!**" he gasps, unearthing a lie in the making.

"Which costs 10 quid per unit per year. *This* costs nothing!"

"It's not secure!"

"Yes it is!"

"You got broken into last year!"

"True, but it **WAS** just The PFY."

"Your assistant stole your TV, DVD collection, and Home Theatre System?!"

"Yes."

"And you weren't angry with him?"

"I didn't say that. Anyway, I got most of the stuff back. **AND**, he'd only done it for a bet in the first place."

"**A BET!**" M The Boss gasps.

"Yeah. He thought 'I bet I can get away with this'."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Indeed it was. What he should have thought was 'I bet my supervisor noticed the wax on his doorkey from my hasty impression and has some nasty plan in mind'. That would have been better."

"You let him steal your stuff!?"

"Only until the insurance money came through, obviously. Then, as I said, I got most of it back."

"**INSURANCE FRAUD!?**" he gasps once more, a vein on his forehead throbbing dangerously purple.

"No, I simply recovered my stolen items."

"Instead of returning them to the Insurance Company who'd paid out for them?"

"Paid out, less depreciation, excess, a random number for actualised market value, etc. Anyway what would they do with the kit?"

"?... People like you push my Insurance Premiums up!" he snaps unkindly, seeing an empty saddle on a high horse.

"No, Insurance companies do," I explain slowly. "Anyway, back to the original topic - your groundless fears that I'm pirating software..."

"Well, you are!"

"No, I would be pirating it if I took it with the intention to sell it or use it for a purpose other than for which it was licensed."

"..othe.. ..whi.. That's just a technicality!"

"Of course it is, but I've noted that technicalities are important if in defending one's actions. Like using the words 'Child Model Website' instead of 'Paedophilia Startpoint'. Or 'Unlawful Combatants' instead of 'Prisoner of War'."

"What **ARE** you talking about?!"

"Well, you say I'm pirating software, I say my *intention* is to take a backup copy."

"And?"

"As long as I stick to my story, my intentions are surely presumed to be innocent! As am I."

"I think you'll find that it's *not* the case. The software is licensed to the Company for *Company* use."

"Yes, but I'm not intending to *use* it, I'm just safeguarding the Company in the event of a disaster."

"A disaster?"

"Yes, like fire. Or theft. Where we lose irreplaceable media."

"So you're going to copy **ALL** our software?!"

"Of course not, just the stuff that would be difficult or expensive to replace in the event of a loss."

"Stuff Like what?"

"OS2."

"Is that expensive?"

"Some would say priceless. I know I'd find it difficult to put an exact figure on it's worth to an organisation like ours."

"And you really think it's worth protecting?"

"Oh yes! With its rarity, it's bound to be a target for opportunity thieves."

"Opportunity thieves?"

"Yeah, you know, people in a workplace who are normally reliable, but can't resist the temptation of stealing something if they see it unattended."

"Surely not here?" he gasps.

"You would be surprised. One time one of your predecessors had the entire contents of his drawers stolen."

"Really?"

"Yes, and the next day they came back and took his desk."

"Did they find out who did it?"

"Nope, the stuff just disappeared into thin air. Not a scrap of evidence!" I pinnochio.

I notice the form of The PFY wandering past the doorway to Mission Control with so much contraband that he's had to steal the Boss's wheelie chair to carry it all.

"Well I suppose if we *are* at risk..."

"Nah, you're right, we probably don't need to take copies," I respond, ending as The PFY wheels the chair into the back door of the computer room.

"But what about opportunity theft?"

"I've just been thinking - perhaps I'll just chuck the media in the bin - that way people won't see it and won't be tempted!"

"Right! Excellent. But what about...."

BUGGER! Hoist by my own petard, there's only one thing to do until The Boss's logic runs out. I signal The PFY to get me some more biscuits.

Nice biscuits too. Got chocolate in them.

BOFH and The Engineer

BOFH 2003 Episode 13

Published Saturday 12th July 2003 22:27 GMT

Picture if you will a computer room, late at night..

Late, late at night...

Almost morning, in fact....

All lights - bar several system status indication lamps - are off.....

Suddenly a lamp, previously glowing Blue, changes (hereafter) to Orange.....

Seconds later an SNMP trap, delivered by the system concerned is received by the Services Monitoring Facility server.....

Seconds after that, a dial tone, followed by a series of DTMF tones is heard echoing through the machine room. And again.....

Approximately one minute later, in the bedroom of a geekily furnished studio flat in South London, a pager beeps shrilly

A figure partially emerges from the Fleur-de-Lis bedspread to focus on the pager in question.....

THE WELL-OILED MACHINE OF TRIPLE-TIME, AFTER-HOURS CALLOUT IS IN MOTION!!!!

...

"But I didn't get paged!" The PFY cries in response to The Boss's annoyed questioning as I roll in at 9 the same morning. "Mind you, that could have been because I dropped the pager on the way home and it broke!"

The PFY holds up a pager that, whilst bearing the hallmarks of being repeatedly struck by the heel of a shoe, must have been damaged in the manner he said...

"I did mention the need of some form of backup to the pager in case of situations like this - or pager unreliability due to congested telco networks," I ad lib.

"I'm not buying a bloody satellite phone for you to run up astronomical bills on!" The Boss snaps, cutting my plan off at the pass. "Anyway, this isn't getting the Finance Server up!"

"The Finance Server **IS** up!" I say, looking on the Services Monitor. "It's just dropped a power supply"

"Then how come *I* got messaged?" he snaps, flashing us a look at the message on his phone.

"You said you must be notified of any major problems - and you know how I don't like to ask questions."

"That's not major!" he snaps.

"It is if it happens twice!" I reason.

"Look, I only want to be notified when the machine goes down!"

"OK, that's easily sorted out," I respond helpfully.

"And get that power supply fixed!" He snaps.

"Running all the way to the phone!" The PFY blurts, poking in the Hardware Support number.

Three hours later

"I thought I told you I only want to be paged when the server goes down!" the Boss seethes, crashing into Mission Control.

"Yes?"

"Well?"

"Oh! The server's gone down, see?" I say, pointing at a red icon on the services display.

"You're joking!" The Boss blurts. "But it's got redundant power supplies!"

"Indeed it has, but they don't work when one's dead and the other is outside the machine..."

"I thought the machines could work without interruption?"

"They can, but unfortunately our engineer can't. The PFY asked him if he wanted a coffee, which must have confused '**LEFT**' and '**RIGHT**' in his brain. So he pulled the wrong supply out. I was going to check before he did it - but as you know, I don't like to ask questions..."

"**RIGHT!**" The Boss shouts as he storms off to his office.

Ten minutes later The Boss informs us that the engineer concerned is on his way back to the office and the senior engineer has been dispatched to us.

...

"..a real bastard," I say to The PFY, finishing my description of the engineer in question. "The sort of person who gives helpful tips to your boss like how the dangling cables you have are a workplace hazard and how he couldn't help noticing that you're using root for day-to-day work - and how insecure that is.."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. An out and out brownnoser. A cleft presser of the First Order. **AND** he notes all his tips and observations on his report and files it with his office. **THEN**, next time something happens, they dig through it for a reason to void the maintenance agreement."

"Really?"

"Oh yes. He's the guy they send to punish people. **AND**, he makes a point of coming in and advising you through what he's doing, every step of the way."

"Arse Covering?" the PFY asks.

"Partly, but mainly to punish you for not issuing him a permanent swipe card to access the room night and day. So he wanders in and out of the machine room to make you keep getting up to let him in."

Our conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the man himself, complete with titanium toolkit.

"So where is it?" he asks.

"In the machine room," I respond.

"OK, can you give me a card to get in and out?"

And so it begins...

Ten minutes later...

"Just about to install the new power supply," he says, once the computer room door has latched shut.

"Good."

"And could someone let me into the machine room, as I don't have a c.."

"Sure," The PFY says cheerfully

Ten minutes later...

"New power supply installed, I'm just going to box up the old one >click< and fill in my form."

"Uh-huh".

"Oh, could you let me back into the..."

"Sure," The PFY seethes.

...

Looking back, I think it was probably the trip back to collect his toolkit that broke The PFY. The repeated trips in and out to let us know he was about to power the system on, check the hot plugability was working, then confirming it was all working, boxing up the old power supply, borrowing a pen to label the old power supply 'faulty', packing up to go, etc, must have slowly eroded his patience.

The phonecall from the Maintenance Company asking if we'd seen their engineer was the first thing I knew about it.

Then there was The PFY's new titanium tool kit.

I don't like to ask questions...

BOFH and The Conference

BOFH 2003 Episode 14

Published Monday 27th October 2003 12:51 GMT

So The PFY and I have been shafted by The Boss who's signed us up to a one-day "conference" in the city which is so airy-fairy it should really just be called a trade show.

Ordinarily, as a computing professional, you'd expect to disagree with people on matters of technology on occasion. For instance, someone might have the position that Word was the best editor of all time, whilst others might rightly suppose that emacs is. Similarly, someone may suggest that Microsoft has a suite of tools and settings designed to ensure application and desktop security, whilst others might rightly say that's a load of crap.

HOWEVER, when faced with the 'expert' opinion that a vendor's machine runs faster or is more robust because the monitor is silver or that the box has a number of flashing LEDs to indicate activity, you find yourself reaching for the 18-inch hammer-of-truth to perform some impromptu vendor reprogramming.

What also irks me are vendor's 'technical' people (whose qualifications would be almost sufficient get them an extra role in a remake of "Deliverance") who are at the conference to give you the 'expert opinion straight from the horse's mouth'. True, there's a part of the horse's anatomy involved, but it's not the mouth...

So I roll up to the conference bright, early and annoyed and am immediately cornered by a meet-and-greet person who tells me she "wants to make me feel right at home here".

"Excellent Nancy, that's great. So where do I find the hot curry, case of lager, a sofa and TV set?"

Nancy chuckles lightly, looking for an exit, but is sadly caught in my tractor beam as unfortunately I must have "accidentally" locked the entrance door behind me to give me a large amount of time alone with the vendors and their freebies before the great unwashed arrive and get all the good stuff. The PFY, meantime, is standing outside in a suit, complete with fake nametag, redirecting people to the rear of the building, for "safety reasons".

"So what do you do... uh... Simon?" Nancy asks, making polite conversation while vainly waiting for a new conference attendee arrives to allow her to step away politely.

"Well I'd have to admit to being a Systems Administrator," I respond.

"Really? Just like Roger over there?" she responds, pointing at a sad vendor droid - made even **MORE** sad by the fact that he's scrawled MCSE under his name badge just so people know **EXACTLY** who they're messing with...

"nnnnYes indeed. Roger and I are alike in the same way that a town reservoir could be likened to a toilet cistern," I respond, unable to suppress a hint of snobbish elitism.

"Oh, I see - You mean there's a difference of scale involved?"

"Well yes, but also that Roger's job involves taking shit from people".

"Excuse me?!?"

"Sorry, I can't believe I said that! Please forgive me! What I **MEANT** to say was that Roger was full of crap!"

"But Roger's company is a Platinum Sponsor of this show!" Nancy cries loudly, in case her loyalty is in question.

"That would be the company that's marketing an anti-spam product based around Bayesian filtering - only they call it a 'patented statistical classification process', after porting some freely available source to .NET and whacking a 500 quid price tag on it."

"I... uh..."

"But wait, there's more! You can, for a small fee, upgrade the aforementioned pirated software to one which also sends you email to tell you that it's rejected a message!"

"But wouldn't that..."

"Defeat the purpose of the application? Why yes it would. And, talking to Roger there's another bloke whose company sells 100 Base T Network cards for PCs which **ALSO** have a wireless adaptor onboard - so that your machine can remain connected even if your network goes down!"

"Does that happen a lot?"

"Funny you should ask - No. And if it **DOES** go down it's generally because a core network device has failed - which the access point is connected to - so you have no connectivity anyway."

"Well, I'm sure there are a lot of other worthwhile products here today."

"Including the company of that bloke at the reception desk over there which has released a bug-fixed version of their software which actually **WORKS** now. Only they put the words 'New Generation' on it so they can charge their customers extra for the version upgrade."

"So if this whole show is a waste of time, why are you here?"

"Why indeed. Because my Boss enrolled me without asking, and not to attend would be a waste of good quiddage, but more importantly, for the drinks and freebies."

"You're attending to get drunk and get free merchandise?"

"You betcha!"

"Isn't that just a **LITTLE** shallow?" Nancy asks sarcastically.

"**SOME** people might say so."

"And **YOU** would say?"

"Gimme some Pens! And one of those cool rulers with the calculator in it. And the stress ball. And the elastic modem patch cable. And some of those...."

. . .

Suffice to say the show didn't pan out as well as expected. That said, the original objective - having The Boss removed from the Company's Conference mailing list - did eventuate, so the whole thing wasn't a complete write-off.

I never did get that curry, though.

BOFH and The Boss's Porn

BOFH 2003 Episode 15

Published Monday 27th October 2003 12:50 GMT

So I'm wandering past The Boss's office one day, when I notice that tell-tale puzzled-yet-vaguely-interested-but-revolved expression on his face which that can only mean one thing.

Hard Core Porn.

Improvising, I grab a sheet of paper from his PA's desk and barge in.

"If I could just get your signature on this or... oooerrr, what **IS** that," I ask, tailing off to tones of disgust.

"I... I was trying to find out something on Waterskiing."

"And you just happened to click on the first watersports category you found?"

"I..."

"And then clicked on the 'Sure, I'm an adult with a disgusting obsession, let me in'?"

"No, I..."

"Then browsed your way into image number.... 9 of a.. 17 part series."

"I..."

"Don't worry - you're secret's safe with me - I've signed a confidentiality clause with the company which means that I can't tell **ANYONE** about **ANYTHING** I've seen at the company."

"Yes, but..."

"No matter **HOW** depraved."

"I..."

"Or liable to get someone fired. In fact, I wonder if the clause covers people who're breaking company Internet usage policy? I guess it doesn't, when you come to think of it, because..."

"I got here by accident," The Boss whimpers. "I never realised that people could do..."

"Of course you didn't - and I advise you to stick to that defence. It's certainly better than the 'I was just intrigued and wondered what drew people to it' or 'My browser just went berserk and started popping through the pages' which we hear so often. No, I'm sure that would be an acceptable reason for your behaviour!"

"I BLOODY GOT HERE LOOKING FOR WATERSKIING INFORMATION!" The Boss snaps, going on the offensive in an attempt to turn the inquisition tables on me. "The wife and I are going to beach resort for a couple of weeks and I thought I'd pick up a couple of pointers so as not to look like a complete duffer!"

"You and your wife, really? Does **SHE** know about your... uh? tendencies?"

"Oh you can't tell her!" he crumbles. "It was a bloody accident, I searched for waterskiing and things and refined my search to watersports in general, then chose this site because it said it was 100 percent relevant."

"Relevant to **YOU**, yes."

"What?!"

"Well those search engines remember what you've searched for and browsed to in the past. So when it says relevant, it means to **YOUR INTERESTS**, not to the **TOPIC** you were searching for."

"So what I've looked for from this machine?"

"Yes."

"But this is a new machine - the Helpdesk came and installed it yesterday! So it must have been them who were doing the bad things"

"I don't think the Helpdesk have been 'Browsing the Pink' so to speak, as they work in an open plan office where people could have seen what they were doing at any time - unlike yourself."

"They must have - it's a brand new machine."

"So you got rid of your old machine?"

"Yes, it was very noisy apparently."

"It's quite a good idea to roll over your machine every few months or so - to cover your tracks. You've gone up a notch in my estimation."

"I didn't want a new machine! They said that I was due for replacement, transferred all my files, and gave me this! I was happy the way things were!"

"Of course you were. Like I said, Mum's the word. Now, was that all the porn you were looking at, or was there more? I'm only asking because I assume that you'd want it erased from the cache logs so as not to appear in some disciplinary action taken when the logs are reviewed."

"You review the cache logs."

"Of course. We *say* it's to improve hit efficiency, but really it's just to refer items to the HR group. See, we're not permitted to **LOOK** for **indiscretions**, but if we encounter them *in the course of our day-to-day operations*...."

"Look, I've told you, it was just this one image, by accident."

"So you wouldn't mind clicking on the BACK button."

"I..."

"Here, I'll do it for you. >click< Oh, 8/17 >click< 7/17... "

"OK, OK, so I looked at it, but it was all so.. well.., weird"

"Uh huh, >click< 6/17 >click< 5/17, my goodness, what *is* that?!?"

"I don't know, that's obviously a leg, but I can't work out...."

Our conversation is interrupted by the arrival of the Boss's PA with a magazine in her hand.

"Just wanted to get your signature on this.. ohmigoodness, what *is* that?!!!!"

"It's OK, he was explaining how he'd accidentally browsed there," I respond, nipping the horror in the bud.

Or not.

"Two guys, browsing some disgusting porn together.." she comments sourly.

"I.. I was trying to find out something on Waterskiing"

"And you went straight to.... er.. Watersports?"

"Uh."

"And then clicked on 'Let me in'?"

"No, I.."

"Then browsed your way into image number...5 of a... 17 part series."

So of course we're screwed...

802.11bofh

BOFH 2003 Episode 16

Published Monday 11th August 2003 08:34 GMT

It's a dull week at Mission Control with no one adding a lot of value to the place, so the PFY and I give ourselves a quick challenge of writing the ultimate application for the new 802.11b cards that we've picked up for our personnel disorganizers.

A few furry toothed days of programming later, the PFY and I meet to show off our respective efforts.

"Check this out!" the PFY chirps happily, handing his PDA over.

"Well, at least you're trying I suppose," I admit grudgingly.

"Trying?!?"

"Yeah, well, with the self-paging thing. But if you want to make an urgent departure from a meeting really believable you need something like the EEP I wrote for my PDA"

"EEP?"

"Emergency Exit Procedure. It's hooked into the Excuse Calendar and generates a message which is SMS'd to your mobile in less time that it takes to compromise IIS, and, should anyone ask questions, is vague enough to be believable as a real fault"

"Hmmm.... It does look interesting," the PFY admits.

"But not," I interrupt, "as good as the ECF program."

"ECF?"

"Emergency Calendar Filler. You know, like when you're somewhere near the Boss and he has a brainwave about how he could send you to some technical event in godforsaken backwater full of retards like Virginia or somewhere, and you just **know** that if you say you have something on he's **bound** to check your calendar before you can get back to the office and take it offline..."

"Yes."

"Well, with ECF, all that's taken care of. You say, 'Hang on while I check my calendar,' fire up ECF, select the length of unavailability you want (in months), then click on the maximum allowable free time (in hours), and the ECF will fill your calendar with copies of past appointments, random specialist appointments, religious observations, etc. that you couldn't **possibly** attend the event he has in mind."

"You know that actually sounds like a bloody useful tool - but what about if you reversed it to make yourself more avai--"

"You mean my ECD program - Emergency Calendar Deleter," I interrupt. "Select a date window click the GO button and your Calendar will have less content than a software support agreement."

"You haven't really done that."

"Sure. And from the drop down menu at the top you can also choose who's calendar you want to empty. Which reminds me, the Boss has booked you into that Health and Safety refresher course next week."

"Ah, I don't think so, I've booked holidays next week!"

"Not any more you haven't!"

"BASTARD!"

"In person, WAP'ed up and making your life a misery!"

"OK, so those things are good, but what about my locator?"

"Locator?"

"Yes, it's software that tracks the Boss by his PDA. As his PDA moves about the place the software tracks his network card's progression through the building."

"A little inaccurate, don't you think? Those 802.11 cards work through walls and floors?"

"Not so bad in this building, but in any case, I also flipped the on-board Bluetooth on his PDA and installed a sprinkling of Bluetooth cards in strategic places round the building which make the location a lot more granular."

"Sneaky. But how did you get access to put the Bluetooth cards in?"

"Told them I was giving them more RAM. Worked like a charm."

"Smooth. So where's the Boss now?"

"Survey says... out of the building."

"Really. And he hasn't switched his PDA off or forgotten to take it with him."

"No, I've told him we'll keep him on the cutting edge of PDA releases..."

"So he can show off his new kit to all his toy-loving mates."

"Exactly, and to ensure he keeps it with him I told him it makes the ultimate secure repository for private, personal stuff that he doesn't want people accessing because no one can steal his stuff if he keeps his PDA with him."

"Sounds like you've thought of everything," I admit with a touch of newfound respect. "What was the private, personal stuff then?"

"Oh, a bit of cheap smut, a spreadsheet of his DVD collection, some email drafts to women, etc. - nothing interesting."

"I have to admit it does sound like a good tool..."

"But...?"

"But, when compared to my last program, which I call Pandora, it still pales."

"Pandora?"

"Oh, yes!"

"What does it do?"

"Here," I show him proudly. "To the casual observer, a remote control application for infrared devices. In actuality a remote control for a large part of the building."

"Really?"

"Indeed. Here we have the touch screen controls for Fire Alarm Test, Halon Discharge, Security Alarm Test - both with and without building lockout, and/or individual door lockout, Lift Priority Recall and Remote Control, Escalator Emergency Start/Stop, Building Environment Control and master Building Lighting remote!"

"No Building Power On/Off."

"No, it's a chunky manual breaker in the basement, damn it all!"

"That's fantastic, but what's the big button down the bottom?"

"My favourite, orders a large Pizza with all the toppings to whatever room in the building you're in, supplying the credit card number of the person whose desk is nearest to the current location."

"Bloody Fantastic!"

"You like"

"I certainly do!" the PFY gasps.

"Excellent, because I pressed that button 14 times from your chair about ten minutes ago"

"BASTARD!!!!!"

BOFH and the Boss' PA

BOFH 2003 Episode 17

Published Wednesday 20th August 2003 08:39 GMT

A wise man once wrote: "All power corrupts, absolute power should be left in the hands of professionals."

I was that soldier.

So the Boss' PA has become a liability - more so than the boss himself, which in itself is quite a feat. Since 'catching' the Boss and I (allegedly) browsing some disgusting porn together she's embarked on a voyage of blackmail and extortion which deserves a special mention in the annals of history...

Not only has she secured the Boss' office, forcing him to work out in her cubicle (the Boss telling everyone that it was **his** idea, to allow him to bond with his workers) but she's also getting me (well, the PFY, as part of an extortion contra deal whereby I pass on some guilty secrets of the PFY that he believes no one knows) to run errands for her. Like penning the performance appraisal she'll be getting the Boss to sign off on at the end of her three-month trial period... Not to mention some despicably menial tasks designed to slowly but surely wipe away remaining vestiges of your self-respect.

Well, the PFY's self-respect.

You have to admire the professionalism of that. Some people would just make their point and be done with it, but she wants to snuff the smoking wick of our dignity.

Well, the PFY's dignity.

"You know what she wants me to do now?" he snaps, holding up a large carry bag.

"What?"

"Clean her shoes!"

"So take them down to the shoe shine man at Vi--"

"No, she wants **me** to shine them. She says she'll know if I get someone else to do it."

"And you told her to get stuffed?"

"I... Well, I s'pose I could shine them this once..."

"If you give in to a blackmailer, you'll always be giving in!" I caution.

The PFY wanders off dejectedly without further comment, which is always bad sign. He might be beginning to crack...

Something has to be done. The PFY is (mostly) a human being, and I can't just stand by and let his dignity be drained out of him like this.

Though I do wish I had a digital camera...

Some sort of peace offering is in order. I catch the Boss' PA outside his (her) office and hand over the brown envelope I'd prepared earlier.

"I take it this is some sort of trap where I open this and someone leaps out and catches me with company secrets?" she asks derisively, shoving the envelope straight into the shredder.

"Uhhhh, no, that was the 200 quid you told me to steal out of the Boss' petty cash. Which you just shoved into the shredder."

"Ah well, get us another lot then will you?" she asks, nonchalantly.

"Ooooooooooh, cruel and ruthless!" the PFY says, wandering up. "I like that in a major home appliance!"

No matter what some authors say, silence is not deafening - it's just silence. I swear the entire office is so quiet I can hear a laser printer in the next building jamming...

"You can't trick me into hurting you on camera," she informs the PFY, nodding at his buttonhole.

The PFY again wanders off dejectedly, and there's only one thing for it - a head to head.

"Can I have a quiet word in your... office?"

"Sure," she responds.

[SLAM!]

"I think we both know this can't go on," I start. "It's no good for the workplace to have people demoralised and stressed like this."

"Why not? You do it!"

"Yes, but I do it in a structured way."

"What's structured about trapping someone in a lift and sending them up and down between floors until they're sick - like you did three weeks ago?"

"I waited until after they'd had a biriyani for lunch! An amateur would have done it before the meal!"

"And when you extort money out of someone after a chance encounter in a lift with a co-worker in a moment of weakness at the Friday night social drinks **in their first week**?" she gabbles.

"Beg pardon?"

"Don't play the innocent with me - I know it was you!"

"Pretend for a moment it wasn't - what are you talking about again?"

"This!" she snaps, handing over a black and white frame from the CCTV lift.

"It's you and... GEORGE FROM STORES!"

"Yes, well, I'd been drinking..."

"DRINKING WHAT, PAINT THINNER? HE'S 48 AND LIVES WITH HIS MUM!"

"Like I said, I..."

"HE DRIVES A 1978 LADA!"

"It was a moment of weakness!"

"A MOMENT OF WEAKNESS? A moment of weakness is when you flip a pack of condoms into a teenager's shopping basket at the supermarket!"

"I..."

"A moment of weakness is when you divert someone's attention and throw ground habanero into their soup!"

"So it wasn't you then?"

"Nah, I'd have printed T-shirts by now. Still, punishing the Boss for all this is a little harsh."

"He did call me 'Love' at my interview..."

"Justifiable homicide. But seriously, you have a mean streak in you. Want to do dinner?"

"I... I... Well, OK."

"But can I ask you one favour?"

"What?"

"Can you get the PFY to do my shoes beforehand? With dubbin, because the leather is getting a little shabby."

What the hell, he was doing it anyway!

A Bastard of a late night call-out

BOFH 2003 Episode 18

Published Thursday 28th August 2003 09:58 GMT

I hate phone calls at the best of times, but phone calls at home - especially during the hours of darkness - do not find me at my personal best.

"But it **has** to be going again as soon as possible!" the user dribbles into the receiver as I fumble with my bedside clock to get the time.

"It's 3am in the bloody morning!" I snap, not at all happy.

"Yes, but this is really urgent!"

"It's a bloody **TEST** Electronic Document Management System - it's not urgent!"

"Yes, but it's got my data in it and I need it urgently for some reports that are due tomorrow!"

"You put **production** data into a **test** server?" I ask.

"Yes, why?"

"A server which we told you - REPEATEDLY - that we might shutdown at any time - without notice?"

"Yes, but I needed..."

"A server which we only have a EDMS demo licence for, which probably expires in 90 days?"

"Yes, but I had to store my data centrally to share with other users!"

"You're sharing your data with other users - on a **test** system?"

"Uhhh... Yes..."

"Who might also be storing data..."

"But it's got a **massive** disk - doing nothing!"

"Nothing at all, true. Not even being backed up, in fact."

"You're joking!"

"IT'S A BLOODY TEST SERVER! Anyway, if I was joking I would tell you about the user who locked his keys in his car and spent half an hour with a coathanger trying to get his family out!"

"Wa!?"

"Nothing. Anyway, I'm not coming in, none of the test machines are under maintenance, so you'd have to pay call-out fees, parts, etc - **if** I can find an approved service agent at this time of night!"

"I don't care, I need it done!"

"Have you **any** idea of how much it'll cost?" I say, asking the obligatory questions.

"How much?"

"Ok, I'm guessing 120 to 180 quid an hour **MINIMUM** with a minimum three hour call out, travel, **THEN**, if they know what they're doing and can even **FIND** the problem you'll probably need parts so you'll have to call out their stores person at the same rate and expenses, so you're looking at over a grand, **PLUS** the cost of the part, which is bound to be more expensive than some cheapo parts company which we could get it from tomorrow morning..."

"I don't care, this has to be done, the report's needed for the big arbitration case tomorrow!"

"The one where we're trying to prove that we didn't steal another company's intellectual property?"

"Yes!"

"But we did, didn't we?"

"No!"

"Sure we did! I downloaded a stack of stuff from their website when it was compromised and slapped it onto our R&D site."

"No, it was developed in-house..."

"Inside of a week? Yes, I can see that happening in the real world..."

"What are you suggesting?"

"That someone on staff took credit for a stack of work they didn't do by changing the company and designer name, tweaking some specs and printing it on shiny paper."

"I didn't hear you say that!"

"Should I speak louder?"

"No! Just get someone to come in and fix this server!"

"Now?"

"Yes."

"And not mention that we stole another company's intellectual property?"

"!!!"

"I'll need an order number to quote to the agency, plus an internal order for my call-out and travel!"

"They'll be in your email when you get to the office!"

"OK, it's as good as sorted!"

... Bright and early that morning ...

"TWO GRAND FOR A BLOODY HARD DRIVE!" he screams.

"I told you they were expensive!"

"A HUNDRED QUID TRAVEL EXPENSES!"

"Yes, apparently he got lost on the way here."

"THEN HE CHARGED ME AGAIN AT 150!"

"Yes, travel to their store to get the hard drive - then he got lost coming back..."

"I'm not bloody paying!"

"Well he's still here - you could tell him - but then I think he'd probably take the hard drive back."

"Well just tell him we'll pay."

"I would, but he won't power the server on until he's got a cheque..."

"..it's OK, we'll canc-"

"Made out to cash."

"DAMN!"

... One company cheque imprint later ...

"Right, well get him to power the server on will you - and hurry!"

"Sure, and I just need you to sign off on my expenses too while you're at it."

"Oh, OK, just this form is i... A HUNDRED QUID ON TRAVEL EXPENSES?"

"Yeah, the streets are bloody confusing at night - not to mention I normally ride the tube to wo-"

"MEAL?"

"Yes, standard stuff if you work outside the normal working hours. Took me ages to find a place that was open too - hence the second travel expense claim."

"I'm not paying!"

"Well you could, but then I'd have to go directly home as my contract states I only need to put in an eight-hour day - ie. four hours at double time."

"Well I think **I** can manage to ask the technician to power the machine on..."

"OK, go ahead."

"What - **YOU'RE** THE BLOODY TECHNICIAN!?"

"Yes, as I'd said, we needed an approved service agent - and I was the only person I approve of. Still, as luck would have it I was up at that time of the night!"

"THIS IS BLOODY BLACKMAIL!"

"Not exactly. But you wanting me to switch the machine on as an approved technician is."

"Why?"

"Because you'd have to pay a call-out fee - unless you wait a couple of hours till I start work. Three hour minimum..."

SORTED!

Resumé writing – BOFH style

BOFH 2003 Episode 19

Published Thursday 4th September 2003 08:39 GMT

"Uh, hello..." one of the helldesk wannabes burbles as he advances cautiously into Mission Control.

"Mmmm," the PFY answers calmly.

"I was just wondering if you guys could give me some pointers for my CV."

"?"

"Oh, right! I'm applying for a technical role and just wanted some tips on how to put my resumé together to give me a better chance at getting the job!"

"I see," I respond, leaping into the conversation once I sense blood in the water... "Well, lets see... How to make your CV the one they look at..."

"Well, there's the obvious things..." the PFY chips in.

"Yes?" the wannabe asks eagerly.

"Well a lot of CVs suffer from being far too short. What can you learn about someone in two or three pages? I mean there's barely enough room to list all your primary school grades, let alone the rest of your qualifications?"

"Primary school grades? Really?"

"Oh yes, I don't know how many times I've seen them left out of a CV. You see you can tell a lot about a person's character by how well they did in primary school, which subjects and what scores. I mean people cram their CV with tertiary qualifications when every real employer **knows** those scores are only there to get a job.

"I prefer that the person leaves out any history of tertiary education," the PFY adds.

"Really, because this book I have about writing the best resumé says that--"

"That would be a book written by a person NOT in a technical role? Written to make money out of people **wanting** technical roles?"

"I..."

"As opposed to a couple of people who've employed countless people **in** technical roles?"

"Yes, I suppose you're right."

"So anyway, another obvious thing is you want your CV to stand out from the others."

"Yes!"

"So print it on pink paper."

"PINK?"

"Yes - it won't get lost and it will stand out from the others."

"But isn't pink a little... well... effeminate?"

"NOT if you mention 'Shagging a different bird every night' in your Hobbies and Interests," I counter.

"Shagging a different bird every night?"

"Yes, you're right, KNOBBING a different bird every night."

"Really? Isn't that a bit non-PC?"

"Yep, but you're after a technical role now, which is predominantly male dominated, so you want to appear to be one of the lads."

"Oh, I see. What else?"

"Well you'd better put down drinking as a hobby too."

"Right, anything else?"

"Well," the PFY says, "one thing I do like to see on a CV is a photo - and not one of those tiny passport jobbies, I mean a real photo, full page. There was one on a CV recently which was absolutely inspired."

"Really?"

"Yeah, the guy was a long distance runner and so he had a full page photo of him in running gear crossing the finish line in a race. You play sport?"

"No."

"Good answer - you're after a technical role after all. Which reminds me, put down 'watching TV' as a hobby too - employers like to know that they'll find their employees at home if they have to be called out after hours.

"Got any hobbies?"

"No... I used to play D&D when I was a kid..."

"Bloody fantastic. Put it in as a hobby, and have a photo of you in D&D gear as the cover page. A wizard or something."

"Really? I thought just a normal photo of me in a suit..."

"Which they'll see you in at interview time. You're trying to establish a character that people will remember - right?"

"Right!"

"How far did you get with D&D?"

"I was a 17th level Mage with a +10 Wand of Lightning!" he blurts, unable to suppress the pride.

"Right - list that in your achievements. Oh, and put a 'Bronze lifesaving award' in too."

"Won't they check?"

"How? Anyway, if it ever came down to it, a bronze lifesaving award only means you're skilled enough to rescue someone from a handbasin, so it won't matter."

"But what if they find out?"

"No one **ever** checks qualifications! So while you're at it slap in some fake certifications - like MCSE, MCSA, CCNA, etc - no one really knows what they mean. If you're asked at the interview just say you didn't bring the certificates because they're framed."

"Uh-huh."

"Oh, and best to keep it informal too. So in the covering letter, don't be using things like 'Dear Sir' and 'Yours Sincerely'."

"No?"

"No! Use things like 'H3y Dud3z!!!!' and 'LaT3R l33tR!'"

"Oh. OK."

"Well, I think that should think cover it."

"You missed out criminal record," the PFY adds.

"Oh, right. Put in something like 'breaking and entering' or 'theft as a servant' a couple of years back."

"WHY?!?!" the wannabe gasps.

"Look," the PFY says quietly, glancing around in case we're being listened to. "Occasionally, technical roles call for a little bit of the old thud and blunder - say you need to check out a user's

workstation off the record - or maybe they'll want you to wander over to competitors site and uplift some information - at night. They want someone who isn't a career criminal, but who does know how to handle the black-ops, so to speak."

"Riiiiight," he burbles, seeing himself as the James Bond of the technical world. "Thanks, I'll get right onto it!"

... Three days later

"Morning," the Boss burbles, trundling into the office with benevolence on full beam. "I've just managed to fill that technical role in R&D, and I believe you two were instrumental in helping him with that fantastic CV of his..."

Sigh.

I think I'd like to be killed now please...

BOFH beats the Boss

BOFH 2003 Episode 20

Published Thursday 11th September 2003 08:12 GMT

So the Boss has finally tipped a little too much of the overproofed rum on his cereal in the morning and has become a liability.

Well, when I say "become a liability", I ACTUALLY mean "become MORE of a liability".

Well, when I say "MORE of a liability", I ACTUALLY mean "a complete nightmare".

Well, when I say "complete nightmare" I mean: nightmare as in turning up to work brushed cotton pyjamas with a gaping fly, having to give a televised lecture to all the eligible women in the world and having the pants fall down. And then having a test about a subject you haven't studied for. In a tunnel that just keeps getting smaller and smaller.

In other words, a liability.

The crunch came when he committed to buying all the scheduled desktop replacements at a local retailer advertising package deals because that way everyone got a scanner, inkjet printer and modem in the bundle, which was a bargain. If that wasn't bad enough, he decided to give them a choice of desktop or tower models. And, as every administrator with even the SLIGHTEST clue knows, the LAST thing you give your users is a choice.

And the calls haven't stopped since. And not just from the people wanting to know the virtues of horizontal over vertical - a PFY strongpoint apparently - but also from those whose desktop wasn't scheduled for replacement but has suddenly got a pen up the power supply.

The coincidence intrigues me, and after a bit of legwork the common denominator is revealed: young, cute, female. I lock the PFY in the lift for two hours with the Pan Pipe music turned up to 10 so he can contemplate his sins.

So the Boss has to go. Only it's getting tricky now because the Head of IT is a bit twitchy about all the Health and Safety fines we've racked up in the past. It seems that being an IT manager has a job danger index approaching that of an Elite republican guard.

...

"Long Term Secondment?" the PFY asks, as I unveil my plan.

"Yep. You give someone enough info that they sneakily create themselves a cushy job in another group, then drop the role like second period maths once you've appointed someone to replace them. It's a great idea which someone posted to one of the Bastard blogs! Wish I'd thought of it myself!"

"So, maybe we could put them in Shipping?" he offers.

"Nah, they've only got two people - it apparently needs to be in a reasonably large department that's not actually growing, but might possibly want to add people to bolster the impression of dynamism."

"THE BEANCOUNTERS!"

"Yes!" I concur, joyfully. "Now all we've got to do is think up some reason why he'd want them and they'd want him."

"He'd make the company more money?"

"Nah, no one cares about that. The best motivators are personal prestige or the chance to shaft someone whose guts they really hate."

"Like us, you mean?"

"Yes. Good point. But what role?"

"What about IT Asset Management! They're always asking us to track down 'lost' inventory."

"Yes, and they'd been keen to sniff out something dodgy!"

"But would the Boss go for it?"

"With a PA running his life and using his office by extortion?"

"Ah..."

...

Two days later the fix is in. After a ten-minute Google frenzy I find a couple of articles to support the need for an IT Asset Manager, fake up an 'IT-Auditweek' newsletter with the links concerned and implying that organisations that didn't have an IT Manager in the Auditing role were probably losing millions of quid every year to e-shrinkage, and then anonymously e-mail it to some senior beancounters.

The Boss fell over himself to get the role, saving me having to lie that the company auditors were a little concerned with the expenses his PA had been claiming for him. Quicker than you can say Technical Manager in charge of Asset Management and Tracking, the Boss was one!

For about a day - until the PFY helpfully noted that the same functionality was built into our current helpdesk software. But you know what they say, one door closes and another one slams shut and has planks nailed over it...

"Lucky I didn't move out of my office," the Boss chuckles nervously, wandering up to his door.

"**Your** office?" his PA asks, looking up from his desk.

"Well, TECHNICALLY my office."

"No, technically it's my office," she responds, pointing at the new nameplate. "I noticed the transfer and applied for the role, what with my intimate knowledge of the area."

Oh, she's good!

"But I'm back!"

"No, I believe you're redundant," she responds, waving a recently delivered sheet of paper around.

"But that's constructive dismissal!"

"It's only constructive if we create the position - but you thought this role up and proposed it, didn't you?"

...

And about now I'm getting that nasty deep down feeling that I've been played.

"But I am looking for an assistant..."

Oh, she's really good.

Women like that, you can't help imagining what they'd look like administering a Linux farm.

OK, so I need to get out more...

BOFH and the Auditor

BOFH 2003 Episode 21

Published Thursday 18th September 2003 01:20 GMT

Don't you just always get them, people who're sure that the only reason you were put on the planet was to make their life a living Hell.

I mean obviously, if you'd annoyed me there might be a bit of friendly unholy retribution, but it's not like I go out **looking** to be annoyed.

As opposed to THIS person.

"Yes, well, as I said in my email, I need to get Domain Administrator access to manage the machines of my team," the user burbles.

"Yes, and if you read my reply, I said that I wasn't going to give it to you."

"I don't think you understand the importance of this project to the company and how it..."

>natter natter natter< "

I mentally switch off until I realise that the drone has ended.

"Hello?" the user asks.

"Hello?" I echo.

"You're still there?"

"I'm still where?"

"There. You're still on the line?"

"Sorry, I can't make out what you're saying."

"Can you hear me now?"

"Can I what?"

"Hear me."

"Not for me thanks, I'm trying to cut down."

"Look, there must be something wrong with the line, I'll call back!"

... Ten seconds later ...

"Can you hear me now?" he asks.

"Can I hear you now?"

"Yes."

"No. Why don't you try calling back on the other line?"

"OK, what's the number?"

I give him the mailroom number and ring off. And roger me senseless with a roll of thinwire if he's not banging on the door outside Mission Control five minutes later!

"It's about domain admin privilege!" he continues.

"Sorry?"

"Domain Administrator privileges to administer my machines!"

"Sorry, there must be a crossed line, I can't hear what you're saying!"

"Oh," he sneers sarcastically, penny dropping, "is that your way of saying I can't have Domain Admin privileges?"

"Oh no. My way of saying you can't have Domain Admin privileges is to say 'You can't have Domain Admin privileges' - you know, like I did in your email!"

"Oh be serious!"

"Serious is my m--"

"Middle name. Yes, I can guess..."

"What? What sort of mother would give their kid a middle name like that? No, I'm afraid mine's far more commonplace."

"Oh, yes, and what's that?"

"User hater."

"That's not commonplace."

"It is around here," I counter.

"What's going on here?" the Boss - well, the Boss's PA, if you want to get technical, see last week's [episode](#) - asks, smelling trouble and trying to head it off at the pass as a way of proving he should have his job back.

"Oh, just another person who wants Domain Admin privilege."

"But we don't give that out do we?"

"You might not ordinarily, but this is a particularly important project and my failure to implement it will not go down at all well in the boardroom," the user responds.

"Oh!" the Boss backtracks, damn him and his rubber spine! "What project is that then?"

"My group and I are on the verge of cracking expenses fraud in the company!"

"Expenses fraud!" I echo, pressing the button for the PFY's BATPAGER. "How interesting. You should have said!"

"Yes! Over the past five weeks we've been creating a huuuuge spreadsheet of all the expenses claims over the past few years from the paper copies and we're **just about** ready to run a comprehensive analysis of them looking for cases which meet certain criteria, with each member of the team concentrating on a particular area - meals, travel, equipment, petty cash, etc."

"Sounds fascinating! What criteria are you looking for exactly?"

"Oh, all sorts! Double dipping from separate expenses, duplicate claims from members of staff, staff who've authorised their own expenses, large one-off payments to companies which no longer exist, false claims for extended work hours and overtime that doesn't match building access logs - you name it, we're looking for it!"

"It certainly sounds like you've got every known dodge," I admit, with complete and depressing honesty. "So how much do you expect to save the company?"

"Save? Who knows - actually the focus is more on preventing future claims and bringing perpetrators to court!"

"And a good thing too!" I agree sagely. "Anyway, speaking of expenses claims and the like," I add, scribbling on a purchase order furiously and handing it over to the Boss, "could you autograph that for me?"

"A long-handled spade and three bags of quicklime," the auditor burbles "What on earth is that for?"

"It's technical," the PFY responds, bowling up and catching the end of the conversation. "Part of our back-up plan!"

"Well it's just the sort of odd order that would normally be ringing alarm bells in my head!" the auditor chuckles.

"As it should," I respond, again all too honestly "Anyway, about this Domain Admin privilege, why don't we line you up with that right now and you can get to work. Tell me, how are you going to use it - just to set my mind at rest from a security perspective?"

"Well, I have this utility I've used before which uses something called SMS to distribute things between machines, so I thought I'd copy the database from my machine to my team's and they can get cracking."

"After you take a back-up copy of your data," I suggest.

"Yes, yes, I'll do that the **moment** I get back! I have put a copy in the department file share, but you can't be too careful, can you?"

"No indeed!" >clickety tap tap< "Well, that's your Domain account created, AdminAudit, up and running when you get back to your office!"

"Excellent! Thanks!" he burbles, striding off with the Boss in tow (in case there's a chance of reflected glory) to make company history.

"And" >clickety< "that's your datafile deleted from the server and" >clickety< "the server and its indexes deleted from the back-up system" >clickety, tap, tap, clickety< "as well as" >click, tap, tap, click< "all non-OS files on your desktop machine - and" >clickety, click, click, click< "your team's desktop machines - (in case you're a lying bastard)" >clickety< "deleted, **and**, just to be sure " >clickety, drag, click, click, tap< "a run a quick disk zeroer over the lot of them."

"Well," the PFY sighs appreciatively, "it's good to see a true professional at work."

"Professional? Yes, I suppose I am, and it's time like these that... WAIT, do you smell that?"

"What?!"

"Fire, Accounts Payable archives - five minutes from now!"

"Meet you at the pub in ten?" the PFY asks.

"You're on. And don't forget an expenses form - Meal and overtime!"

"Gotcha!"

The BOFH mobile comms quiz

BOFH 2003 Episode 22

Published Thursday 25th September 2003 08:35 GMT

It's mobile, it's comms, it's great - you know it, your geeky users want it. But then people are rarely happy. They want 802.11b and they want it yesterday, and you're the one who's supposed to have installed it. Yesterday. However, as a seasoned computing veteran, before you put your budget where someone's mouth has been, just ask yourself these questions:

1. Mobile comms in your workplace currently consists of:

- a. Full 802.11b coverage
- b. Partial 802.11b coverage
- c. Unadvertised 802.11b coverage in your region the IT Dept
- d. Anywhere the roll of thinwire cable can get to!

2. You would install 802.11 in your workplace except that:

- a. You're unsure of the security implications
- b. The building would have too many dead spots
- c. The budget would be difficult to justify
- d. Half the staff would come to work with tinfoil wrapped round their heads

3. Wireless would get most use in meeting rooms to:

- a. Allow people to take online notes of meeting progress
- b. Allow people to read their email during slow periods
- c. Allow people to send sneaky messages to each other
- d. Keep people 'abreast' of the porn revolution

4. In your opinion your users would judge the throughput of the wireless network in:

- a. Bytes per second
- b. Kilobytes per second
- c. Megabytes per second
- d. Smutty movie frames per second

5. Using your knowledge of the people concerned, the mobile devices commonly used by your technical staff would most likely be:

- a. PDA
- b. Laptop
- c. Webcam
- d. Shoecam

6. An anonymous survey to determine the most-requested places to put 802.11b coverage would find most demand for:

- a. Cafeteria
- b. Designated smoking areas
- c. Reception
- d. The gents' toilets

7. After a lengthy campaign advertising coverage areas, a user complains about a massive dead spot. You know that when you get to their room you're going to find:

- a. Their PCMCIA card has popped out
- b. Their PCMCIA aerial has broken off
- c. They don't have, nor have they ever had, a PCMCIA card
- d. Their desktop machine on a trolley in the corridor

8. The security of your 802.11b solution is ensured by:

- a. WEP
- b. Access restricted to named hardware addresses
- c. VPN connectivity
- d. Burying the bodies of the people who try to get around with it

9. An annoying user repeatedly comes to complain about the poor bandwidth in his area. You:

- a. Add another access point in an effort to double the bandwidth
- b. Move the access point closer to his area
- c. Do a site survey
- d. Do a site survey. Then install a large ungainly microwave dish precariously above his workstation. Set to DEFROST...

10. The best way to encourage uptake in 802.11b at your workplace would be posters:

- a. Noting 802.11b on site
- b. Advising of troubleshooting techniques
- c. Advertising best coverage areas
- d. Advertising 'Kournokova nude - only on wireless!'

Scoring

Mostly a: A technical response for a technical workplace. In fantasyland.

Mostly b: You mean well, and give your users a lot of credit.

Mostly c: A practical response from someone who's seen the highs and lows of the user community.

Mostly d: The healthy cynicism we expect from a true professional.

BOFH makes a hardware call

BOFH 2003 Episode 23

Published Thursday 9th October 2003 16:12 GMT

So I'm making a hardware call about a dud disk which can only mean one thing: I'm going to be annoyed.

I start up a game of Age of Empires in the assurance that I will have taken over the world with my water powered nuclear generators by the time they answer the phone.

And I'm not far wrong.

After negotiating my way through an IVR phone system that was built by the same guy who invented recursion, I'm slapped in a **PRIORITY** queue, which will mean that I'll get to talk to someone about the time I urgently need to go to the toilet.

I pull the PFY's briefcase a little closer, planning for future needs.

The repeated assurances of how important both I and my call are to the hardware manufacturer do nothing to improve my mood as I listen to my number in the queue slowly decrement. I'm reminded all too often that if I'd bought the vendors triple-platinum-bum-cover-special maintenance contract, I could **now** be talking to a service representative instead of waiting in a phone queue with all the other plebs who bought the gold edition 24 x 7 x 2 hour response, foolishly thinking that that was had something to do with maintenance coverage. And surprise of surprises, for the price of a testicle transplant I can upgrade my ex-top-of-the-line maintenance for the current top-of-the-line maintenance and be assured that I will have priority treatment from now on. Until they release the quadruple platinum cover, of course.

OK, so I'm annoyed.

Several million rings later.

"Hello, how can I help you?"

"I'd like to log a hardware fault please." I say testily.

"Ok, I'll just transfer you."

"WAIT!" I cry, before he can do any more.

"Yes?"

"If you're going to transfer me now, why didn't I get transferred when I pressed 7 on the IVR system to select 'make a hardware call'?"

"Oh, that's a customer assurance thing."

"As in 'assure yourself that the customer didn't hang up about two hours ago, sick of waiting'?"

"I... uh... I'll put you through."

I wait impatiently while the phone rings. Mid-ring I'm informed that the call may be monitored for training purposes (ie. when the company wants to teach a skilled hardware engineer how to appear retarded).

"Hi, hardware service, you're speaking with Terry. How may I help?"

"Hardware Call," I snap.

"Righto. Do you have a maintenance contract with us?"

"Yes!"

"What was the maintenance contract number?"

"No idea."

"Well, without a maintenance number this would be a chargeable call. Are you sure you don't have a maintenance contract number?"

"No. I do have a customer number, which our contract was indexed by when I last called you. I also have the main switchboard number, which our contract was indexed by a few calls before that. I can even give you the serial number of the machine concerned, which worked about a year ago, which was in turn the index method of choice after you changed from caller name. Which was the index method you used after changing from maintenance contract number about three years ago."

"Uh. Well you see it's got this box that we have to type your maintenance number into, before we can press search."

"Terry is it?"

"Yes."

"How long have you been working there, Terry?"

"Uh... three months..."

"And what did you do before that, Terry?"

"I was at college."

"Of course you were. Now, Terry, where do you see yourself in, say ten years' time?"

"I... Well, I suppose as a chief hardware support specialist."

"I think you need to aim higher. With your qualifications, and at your company, you probably have all they need already. Were your parents married?"

"Yes."

"Ah well, that's running against you from the start - glass ceiling material. But anyway, so you have a vision of yourself in an on-site technical role sometime in the future?"

"Oh yes!"

"OK. Do us a little favour. Our customer number is 8732281. Click on the Query Open Calls button and enter that number, and then press search."

"Ah... >clickety< >click< OK, three calls outstanding in the past four years."

"Right. Now look at the last entry in those call logs."

"Um >click< Engineer dispatched to site... >clickety< Engineer dispatched to site... >clickety< >click< They all say 'Engineer dispatched to site'."

"Right. And do you know what happened to those engineers?"

"No?"

"No. No one does. No one ever will. One day, Terry, when you're a hardware support engineer, you might get sent to this site. And *if you mess me around with maintenance contract numbers, pressing search, or chargeable calls*, your call will be the fourth on that list..."

"You don't know who I am."

>clickety<</p>

"Au contraire >clickey< Terry Carter, 22, partially completed Bachelor of Science at the University of L..."

"How did you..."

"It's all there in your Company's poorly protected staff newsletter. And look, there's even a photo of you. Why, I could recognise you in the street - and with the quality of the photo, probably even late at night in a darkened alley..."

"I think I'll just get my supervi..."

"DON'T PALM ME OFF TO YOUR SUPERVISOR!"

"I... Uh..."

"Now listen very carefully, and I'll tell you exactly what to do..."

. . .

Three hours later, and strangely within the maintenance support time, the faulty disk is replaced and the engineer departs at speed.

Sometimes you just have to reach out and touch someone.

Health, Safety and... BOFH

BOFH 2003 Episode 24

Published Thursday 16th October 2003 12:50 GMT

"It nearly crushed her!" the H&S feeb blubbers, in an attempt to justify yet another new brainwave.

"And you think that we'll avoid workplace tragedy by 'Securely, at a minimum of three points, bolt monitors to immovable desktop surfaces'?" the PFY asks.

"Yes!"

"What about laptops? Do we need to bolt them too?"

"Obviously laptops don't need bolting down," he responds, "they're not as likely to fall. AND not a piece of equipment that would hurt you if it fell on you."

"So what about LCD monitors?" I ask. "They could fall, but they wouldn't do you much damage if they fell on you - not even the really big ones."

"Well, I suppose would could examine things like this on a case-by-case basis because some pe--"

"And speaker systems?" I interrupt "What about those ginormous sub-woofers you see up in your department?"

"I think you mean subwoofers," the H&S guy points out.

"No, no, sub-woofers - the people that own those big speakers. Some of those speakers are huge! Are you going to make the sub-woofers bolt them down?"

"LOOK, I'M ONLY DOING MY JOB!" he snaps suddenly, obviously feeling underappreciated.

"And what a fine job it is!" I add, cheerfully. "And we'll happily bolt our monitors down at three places. What's next on your list?"

"I'm to check all your fire extinguishers are approved for use on electrical fires."

"Be my guest!" I cry, gesturing about the room expansively - loving, as I do, red tape in all it's manifestations.

He wanders off extinguisher spotting until he comes across the unit near the door.

"This one's not an approved type! It's water! You could get a severe shock from this if you used it on an electrical fire!"

"Ah well that IS the visitor's extinguisher," the PFY notes, nonchalantly.

"VISITOR'S extinguisher?"

"Yes, for visitors. Which we don't have. But, because of the square footage of the control room, you guys made us have one extinguisher for each person in the Control room, plus a spare."

"My records say that it should be a CO2 unit!"

"Well it was, but it was needed in the Computer room, so we had a bit of a shuffle."

"You had a water type extinguisher in the Computer Room!?!?!"

"No, that came from the cafeteria."

"How did the cafeteria one get to be here?"

"OK..." the PFY sighs, taking a deep breath for the story. "We needed a FLAT-bottomed extinguisher in the Computer Room to keep the door open when we're transferring tapes from the tape safe room to the tape jukebox in the Computer Room. The Computer Room extinguisher had a ROUND bottom, which wouldn't stand up by itself. When we tried to swap them we found the Computer Room one was too tall to fit on this wall hook, which is rather low. So we swapped it with the one in the cafeteria which was shorter."

"B-b-but this is the wrong extinguisher for this area - and the one in the cafeteria was supposed to have been a... >scrabble< dry powder one - for oil fires - not the water one you took, and what the HELL are you doing holding a fire-rated door open with an extinguisher? Don't you realise the risks?!?!?"

"What risks?"

"A fire could spread from your tape safe room through the open fire door to the Computer Room!"

"That's ridiculous!" I cry, re-entering the conversation. "A fire's FAR more likely to start in the Computer Room - especially with those flagons of isopropyl alcohol on top of warm equipment."

"You're supposed to keep flammibles in the dangerous items cupboard!"

"We swapped that with the bloke from stores who was told HE had to keep HIS stocks of isopropyl alcohol in a dangerous items cupboard."

"You SWAPPED it? What for?"

"His bottles of isopropyl alcohol, I seem to recall," the PFY responds.

"This is all going in my report you know!" he threatens.

"You should do what you think is best," I say to placate him.

"I will. Now I want to look in this Computer Room."

"Oh."

"What?"

"Well, I'd **like** to let you in, but if you remember back to last time H&S had a slow day - probably all of six weeks ago - you told us that the Computer Room was a dangerous place and we shouldn't permit visitors."

"Which you said you don't have."

"No - yet we do have a visitor's extinguisher. Ironical, isn't it?"

"Well I still want to look in the Computer Room!"

"No can do!"

"Why not?"

"You haven't been on the Computer Room safety briefing you people insisted that visitors must attend prior to entering the Computer Room."

"How about I do that now?" he responds sarcastically.

"Are you sure? It's quite involved..."

"Positive!" he snaps triumphantly.

. . . Ten minutes later . . .

"THAT'S RIGHT!" I shout through the Computer Room door and over the halon discharge alarm "KEEP LOW WHEN YOU CRAWL TO THE DOOR, THAT WAY THE HALON WILL HAVE LESS EFFECT!"

"Will it?" the PFY asks, peering into the Computer Room.

"No idea, but we'll find out when he gets over here and I tell him he dropped his swipe card in the middle of the room."

"So that's the safety briefing is it?" the PFY asks. "Lock them in the Computer Room and test the Halon?"

"It depends. I've 'prepared' lessons on 'Navigating the Computer Room in the Dark' - which we've always enjoyed in the past - 'The dangers of racks without earthquake restraints', 'Why you should check how secure the grating floor is before stepping into a comms riser' and, if he's still moving, 'Why we always treat wires as live'."

"Ooooh, can I teach that one?" the PFY gasps.

"Of course you can," I say magnaniously.

After all, Health and Safety is **everyone's** responsibility.

Megalomania™ – the board game for BOFHs

BOFH 2003 Episode 25

Published Sunday 26th October 2003 08:25 GMT

It's a very VERY quiet day so I finally talk the PFY into continuing our board game while the game's fresh.

>rattle< >tap< >tap< >tap< >tap< >flick<</p>

"Invoicing 'error' in your favour, collect 1000 quid."

>rattle< >tap< >tap<</p>

"BUGGER!" I snap.

"Ooooh, go to the Tape Safe!"

"I've got a Get-out-of-tape-safe key," I respond, throwing it down on the board as the Boss wanders in.

...

"Just wondered if you'd got around to looking at my PC... I-Is that a game?!" the Boss asks, slightly put out.

"It's not just a game," I respond "It's *Megalomania*™, the Bastard Operator training tool."

"It's a game!" he blurts happily. "I love board games... HEY! It's exactly like our building!" he gasps, looking at the multilevel playing board.

"Of course it is. Each game is as true to life as possible. Look, see, there's even a stain on your office floor from when the PFY electrocuted you that time."

"Can I play?" the Boss asks.

"It'll cost you 20 quid," the PFY replies.

"What for?"

"Training fees. Stamp Duty. Arbor tax."

"OK, so what's the object of the game?" the Boss asks, handing over the cash.

"To take over or compromise all the offices in the building."

"And how do you do that?"

"To take over an office, you have to land on it and pay the occupant to leave the room. You then install a fibre feed, media converter, a patch-by-exception frame, etc. When the room is full you have a datacentre."

"Why?"

"When someone lands in your datacentre they pay service fees. The more services, the higher the fees."

"Why go into the offices instead of staying in the corridors?"

"Because the cleaning robot comes through at the end of each round and pushes you forward into the nearest office."

"Ah, I see. And what does 'compromised' mean?"

"It means you've installed a hybrid PC in the room with the ability to snoop network traffic, act as an anonymous Internet proxy, record voice and images. It's done outside this room, but you'll not get to that level in this session."

"This session? How long does the game take to play?"

"Well, we've been playing this baby for about six months. Oh, and lastly, compromised offices have a little black computer piece in them."

"OK, so where do I start?"

"Ground floor, at personnel. Forward-invoice the company and collect 1000 quid."

>rattle<</p>

"Five!"

>tap< >tap< >tap< >tap< >tap<</p>

"Mail room. Can I buy it?"

"Compromised. Pay the bastard fund five quid!"

"Anyone break a 1000?" the Boss chuckles.

"No, real money," the PFY replies, pointing at a large envelope overstuffed with fivers. "That's why you avoid compromised offices."

"Where's this money going?" the Boss asks, extracting five quid from his wallet as painfully as a molar. "And how much is in there?"

"The winner gets the remainder at the end of the game, but you get ten per cent of the fund for compromising an office," the PFY responds "and there's about... oh... 735 quid in there so far."

"SEVEN HUNDRED AND THIRTY-FIVE QUID!?! " the Boss gasps, greedily.

"Yes," the PFY responds .

>rattle< >tap< >tap<</p>

"Fourth floor reception. I'll pay them out. What's it worth?"

I look up the card for the office concerned. "Four women, all lunchtime drinkers, so it'll cost you 25 quid in drinks, times four to get them legless at lunchtime: 100 quid!"

"Cheap at half the price. Now, I'd like to buy a fibre feed, media converter, patch-by-exception frame, switch and a server rack."

"100 quid, 20 quid, 200 quid, 100 quid and 600 quid."

"SIX HUNDRED QUID FOR A BLOODY SERVER RACK!" the PFY snaps "It was 300 last time!"

"Yes, but you're on the fourth floor now and Fat Barry doesn't like carrying them up the stairs - since you compromised the service lift."

"Oh yeah. OK, so that's 820 quid?"

"1020 quid, yes."

>rattle< >tap< >tap< >tap<</p>

"Oh bugger..."

"What?" the Boss asks.

"He's stopped in the corridor, right next to my datacentre!" the PFY laughs triumphantly. "See, all the fruit, plus dual server racks, blade servers, cellular service and WAP capability. Which, when the cleaning bot comes through, NOW, runs to a tidy... 2030 quid - but I'll call it two grand!"

I hand over the Megalocash™, and pass the dice to the Boss.

>rattle< >tap< >tap< >tap<</p>

"GO TO THE TAPE SAFE!"

"Oh, and how long do I stay there?"

"Until the air runs out."

"Then what happens?"

"You pay another 20 quid and start again."

"What!?" the Boss cries unhappily, then finally extracts the required funds.

>rattle< >tap< >tap< >tap< >tap< >tap< >tap<</p>

"Consultancy Card!" the Boss blurts.

>flick<</p>

"HAH! Inform your Boss that the Telco only licenses phones for use on ground floor, and upper floors are extra. Pocket 1500 quid 'license fees'."

"Well done!" the PFY and I comment, as I hand over the Megalocash™.

"Didn't **we** pay for some floor licensing for phones a couple of weeks back?" the Boss asks suspiciously.

"Yes. Like I said, it's as close as possible to real life."

"Oh... right..." he adds, confused.

>rattle< >tap< >tap< >tap<</p>

"Opportunity Theft Card," the PFY says "Disable the Boss' switch port and steal half his memory when he brings it in for repair."

"YOU TOLD ME IT WAS A HARDWARE PROBLEM!" the Boss shouts angrily.

"Well, you've got to take the game seriously," I counter.

"Oh this is ridiculous!" the Boss snaps angrily. "I'm not playing this. And I want my bloody network connection turned back on again. Where's my machine?"

"On my desk." I respond. "When should install it for you?"

"And lose half my memory - I don't bloody think so!"

...

"What a poor loser!" the PFY comments later as he put's the Boss' playing piece back in his office.

"As opposed to my good self," I reply. "A cheerful winner, taking... uh... 74 quid from the Bastard Fund."

"Why?"

I left my fingers do the talking as I place a black computer alongside the Boss' playing piece.

"BASTARD! You were playing outside the game!"

"Just seizing the moment," I respond.

>rattle< >tap< >tap< >tap<</p>

"Ooooh, Gratuitous Violence card! One sore loser coming up!"

>BZZZZZERT!<<P>

BOFH and the government contract

BOFH 2003 Episode 26

Published Friday 7th November 2003 16:24 GMT

"I still don't see why this should affect myself and the PFY," I blurt as the boss hands over a lengthy questionnaire.

"I've told you already, it's something to do with a contract that we're signing - some defence department thing."

"A defence department thing?" the PFY burbles cheerily. "Does that mean that we'll get a security clearance? Like James Bond?"

Sigh.

"Oh, there's **some** form of vetting involved for anyone who could have access to the data that the company is working on, but we're not sure what it is yet - it's one of those need to know things," the Boss advises, feigning superior knowledge.

"Right," I respond. "And this new contract, it'll mean a stack more work? For the company I mean?"

"Oh yes, masses. You might even have to take another person on, there'll be so much to do. Apparently. Anyway, meantime, you're to fill out these questionnaires, and participate in some simple vetting procedure things that they want to run. Should be over in no time..."

...

The next day, I secretly observe the PFY's interview from a quiet office on the third floor...

"And what does this picture remind you of?" the analyst asks, scratching out some cursory notes about the time, the PFY's demeanor etc. on her pad

"A symmetrical ink blot card, as designed by Rorschach?"

"Yes, but what does that Ink Blot LOOK like?"

"Some spilt paint?"

"Ok, but if it were, say, something else, what would it be?"

"Oh! I get you. Well I SUPPOSE I could be... er..."

"Yes?"

"Spilt tomato sauce?"

"**NO!** Sorry, I didn't mean to shout. I mean if it were an object in the real world, what object would you think it would look like, and how?"

"You mean like a dishwasher?"

"Yes!"

"Well, it looks a LITTLE bit like an old Pertec reel tape drive, on its side..."

"Yes, and why do you think it be on its side?"

"You mean you want me to guess?"

"Yes, how did the tape drive come to be on it's side?"

"Someone might have slipped on the spilt paint I guess..."

"FORGET THE BLOODY PAINT!" she snaps testily. "Is there a reason, do you think, that the tape is on its side?"

"Maybe it's out in the storeroom?"

>scratch< >scratch< "Right, I see. Okay, what about this card?"

"Uuuhm - not paint or sauce, right?"

"No."

"The cooling fan of a VAX 11/780 with the grill removed."

"And what's a VAX 11/780?"

"A computer, an old computer."

>scratch< >scratch< "OK, and this?"

"Ah, that looks a lot like the cable loom in our UPS."

"And the UPS is another computer, yes?"

"No, a power supply. **For** computers,"

>scratch< >scratch< "And what about this one?"

"A pile of thin-wire Ethernet cards."

"Cards?"

"Yes, out of a computer..."

. . . *Ten minutes later* . . .

"So how did I do?"

"Well your life appears to be dominated by the technology you work with."

"**MY LIFE?!?**" the PFY cries. "**YOU'RE THE ONE WITH ALL THE GEEKY PICTURES!!!**"

"So it seems," she sighs sadly "OK, now I'd like to play a simple word association 'game'."

"Oh, where I say the first word the comes into my head?" the PFY asks.

"Yes! Ready? Love."

"Is that the word, 'love'?"

"Yes!"

"Oh right, only I thought you might have meant it as a term of endearment."

"What?"

"You know, like 'Get us a prawn Malibari will you, Love'?"

"No, it was part of the game."

"Oh. Right. What was the word again?"

"Love."

"Right. Uhm, lager."

"Ok, faster responses if you could - time is a factor. Work."

"Lager."

"Family."

"Lager."

"Joy."

"Lager."

"Security."

"Ooh... lager."

"**HOW CAN YOU GET LAGER FROM SECURITY?!?**" she cries, cracking slightly.

"Oh, one of the security guys is a beer drinking machinegun!"

"I see. OK, so you get lager from the words 'love', 'work', 'family', 'joy' and 'security'?"

"Yep!"

"And you see technical components in ink blot tests?"

"In the geeky cards that **you** chose, yes. I don't think I'm the one with the problem there..."

"And you believe that you could be trusted with our nation's secrets?"

"Sure!"

. . . Half an hour later . . .

"And what does this picture remind you of?" the analyst asks me.

"A symmetrical ink blot card, as designed by Rorschach?"

"What ELSE does it LOOK like?" she seethes.

"Oh well, sp--"

"**DON'T** say spilt paint, sauce, curry or any crap like that!" she snaps.

"I was just going to say **spent** casings out of a Heckler und Koch P7M8 9mm Pistol. End on, of course."

>scratch< >scratchey< >scratch< >scratch< >scratch< >scratchey< >scratch<</p>

>scratch< >scratch<</p>

"Really? And how did they come to be here?"

"What, you want **me** to guess? No idea, you'd have to ask my assistant, he's the gun freak!"

"I see. What about this card?" >flick<</p>

"Ah right, these are definitely the shell casings of a HK Mark 23 Pistol. End on. .45 calibre."

>scratch< >scratchey< >scratch< >scratch< >scratch< >scratchey< >scratch<</p>

>scratch< >scratch< >scratchey< >scratch< >scratch<</p>

>scratch<</p>

"And your assistant would know how they came to be here?"

"Probably. Although sometimes he forgets when he's stressed. You know he once took **my** Mark 23 home, thinking that it was his!"

"And you're not a gun freak?"

"Oh no. I'm a *collector*. Huge difference."

"The difference being?"

"I've got more guns."

...

"Caring."

"Lager."

"Childbirth."

"Lager."

"Redundancy."

"Lager."

"How the hell can you get bloody lager from all those questions?"

"Well, anyone who gives a crap's going to buy you a lager on a Friday, you always have a lunchtime shout when someone has a kid, and you go to the pub with people who've been made redundant."

"Spend a bit of time at the pub do you?" she asks.

"No more than anyone else at the company."

"What, say four to five hours a week?"

"Oh yes. But sometimes we drink after work too, so it'd be hard to get an exact figure..."

...

Two days later we find out the deal's off. Not only has our security rating been dropped lower than IIS, but we've also been made ineligible to bid for any contracts where safety is of importance, which just leaves us with road, rail and government building contracts.

She's a hard world at times. Still, at least someone on the fourth floor's having a baby or getting fired or something, so it's not all bad...

BOFH on the pull

BOFH 2003 Episode 27

Published Friday 7th November 2003 11:28 GMT

So the PFY's been showing off to a couple of the more attractive young ladies in the new employees induction course, and I have to admit that he's doing well. So well in fact that I have a twinge of remorse about locking his swipe card out of the cafeteria when everyone was watching. But the twinge passed quickly, which is the main thing.

Still, in my defence, he did make some rather nasty comments about me when he thought I was out of earshot, which thanks to the wonders of electronic age, is very few places in the building. Even less when you're carrying around a PDA which is transmitting your every word over the wonders of 802.11b

Not that I mind the PFY using me as a foil to enhance his social life - I mean, in his position I'd do the same. In fact...

"Afternoon, ladies," I say nonchalantly as I wander over to the new-employee group. "Mind if I join you?"

I take their noncommittal response as a non-negative and sit myself down, ensuring that the PFY can see me from his vantage point outside the door.

It's only a matter of time before someone gets up and lets him in, so I make the most of it by waving to him cheerfully.

"The old 'Locked out of the cafeteria' joke," I burble. "A classic!"

The assembled womanage turn and smile at him, which only adds to his annoyance. There goes that twinge again.

And gone.

"So, I hope my assistant has been taking care of you, showing you how we take care of your needs."

"Yes, he has," one of them responds. "He showed us how all your cabling worked, and the wirey stuff, and showed us around the computer room with all the machines in it."

"He showed you round the computer room?" I confirm cheerfully, firing up the PDA, opening the PFY's calendar and scheduling a beating.

"Yes, it's very noisy. And then we did the computer guessing game."

"The guessing game?"

"Where you have to click on things to win prizes."

"Oh THAT game," I respond, smelling rodent. "And what did we all win?"

"Well the guys down the end of the table won a box of photocopy paper each..."

"Really?"

"Yes, and those two there won a box of pens, but us three won the big prize!"

"Free drinks at the Social Club on Friday night?" I ask, knowing the PFY only too well.

"Oh, is that what the Mystery Dinner is?" she asks, slightly disappointed.

"Oh, the MYSTERY DINNER! That IS the big prize. What we normally do-- well, is it OK if I spoil the mystery?"

"Sure!" another replies.

"OK, well, what normally happens is some of the IT people take the winners out to pre-dinner drinks at a cocktail bar, then pop off to dinner at the Dorchester or the Ritz."

"Really?!" one gasps. "The Dorchester! With Nicholas Parsons?"

"Unlikely," I respond. "Anyway, we generally leave once you've finished the day's induction. Does that fit in with everyone's plans?"

A short discussion and a few phone calls later, it's a done deal. I notice the PFY has disappeared which means he's going to be reprogramming the door access system - probably with an axe, now that I've changed the access passwords - so I'd better work fast.

"So what's this afternoon's induction tour?"

"Ummmm, just a tour of the building and then there's a company introduction video."

"So nothing important then?"

"I guess not..."

"Tell you what - why don't we do the tour of the building now then just pop off for some drinks and nibbles around afternoon tea time?"

...

One hour, and multiple detours to avoid the PFY (with PDA tracking) later...

...

"...and finally, this is the mail room, through which all the inwards and outwards correspondence passes. You'll note that all items are both x-rayed and exposed to a demagnetising field for security purposes, so you need to inform anyone sending you magnetic or x-ray sensitive material to mark the package accordingly, so that it isn't put through the system. OK, so who fancies a quick tour of the pub across the road?"

...

Two hours later...

...

"Anyone for another?" I ask, grabbing the glasses and turning toward the bar.

"We really should get back for the video..." one of the three slurs. "And isn't your assistant supposed to be here?"

"Yes, my assistant will be joining us as soon as he's... secured the services," I lie. "And UNFORTUNATELY, someone accidentally put the induction video into the mail room's demagnetiser - so that will probably be delayed somewhat."

"Did you do that on purpose?" one of them asks coyly.

"I... Drinks anyone?"

While they're making their mind up about which brand of bubbly to test drive next, I excuse myself for a gentleman's rest stop. While I'm at it, I devote a bit of time to thinking about where we should relocate to next, in case the PFY works out that he can narrow down my location by seeing which Wireless Access Point has my PDA connected t-- >BBZZZZZERT!<</p>

...

"So have we made up our minds?" I hear the PFY ask, from the comfortable position he left me in, laying in the urinal. "Tell you what, why don't we grab a cab to the cocktail place?"

"Aren't you going to wait for Simon?" the coy one asks, bless her.

"Ah well, unfortunately he's been called back to the office to... secure the services," he replies.

"Weren't YOU doing that?"

"Yes, but it's a big job and he needs to do some technical stuff - like sweeping," the PFY replies as they exit.

Well this isn't a happy ending...

Yes, it's the BOFH quiz!

BOFH 2003 Episode 28

Published Thursday 13th November 2003 11:53 GMT

The Bastard wants to know: do you know your Computing Personalities?

The following set of questions is aimed at determining whether you're up to the task of recognising a professional in their line of work. Select the correct **response** from the 'technical professional' to each initial statement in the following. Best of luck!

Spot the Slave Trader

You: "I need an experienced Linux Engineer with exposure to RedHat and Slackware"

- A. "Pardon?"
- B. "I'm sorry, we don't have those skills"
- C. "We don't have that, but we do have a relationship with another agency who may be able to fill the position"
- D. "We have someone who shows potential"
- E. "We have someone who used Word with a typing speed of three words per minute"

Spot the Salesman on a commission

"Could we have a low spec. machine, say a PIII 1.2 gig, with 128 Meg?"

- A. "Sure"
- B. "I'd have to look, but I think so"
- C. "Sorry, we only have 1.5s and P4s. Want to see those?"
- D. "Yes, but everyone wants them at the moment so they'd be about the same price as a P4 1.2"
- E. "Sure, I can get you a P4 3G with Speakers, DVD ROM 1 Gig Memory 180 gig hard drive, 21in LCD flat screen monitor, inkjet printer and ADSL modem"

Spot the 'Technical' Manager

"We have a problem with our core router, looks like the content management firmware is dropping packets because of some poor criteria settings"

- A. "Dropping... ..Packets?"
- B. "Problem? With the Router?"
- C. "What Criteria are we talking about? Can we remove content management until it's sorted?"
- D. "I'm sorry, I have no idea what you're talking about."
- E. >Dribble<</p>

The IT 'Consultant'

"So we just need a plan to rationalise our cabling infrastructure..."

- A. "OK, sure, I just need to get an overview of what you currently have"
- B. "Cabling - have you considered wireless?"
- C. "Sorry, I work in Active Device networking, but could put you onto someone who knows"
- D. "Could be a big job, but I'm up to it!"
- E. "Yes, I'd think you would. By the looks of it you've got a complete balls up. We'll probably need to start from the ground up. Luckily I have some contacts in the business who can tell you how to do it right this time. It won't come cheap and I can't give you a timeframe, expected cost or project plan. But I'm onto it!"

The Beancounter

"...Which means that to ensure sitewide authentication we need to slap a radius server in somewhere - shouldn't be more than a couple of grand, maybe five if we add a redundant power supply into the box along with a mirrored disk for higher availability"

- A. "OK, I suppose if you think it's necessary"
- B. "Five grand does seem a little pricey - are you sure it's worth it?"
- C. "I think we can do without the redundancy - go for the two grand box!"
- D. "Can't we run it on some other server? Doesn't 2000 do it?"

E. "I have a machine on my desk which needs to be replaced because it catches fire every now and then. Just put it in a room near a sprinkler above it..."

After-Sales Support

"So we're pretty disappointed with the service we've been receiving on the kit we bought earlier in the year"

A. "Really. How about I come and meet you, take down the details and see what we can sort out?"

B. "What problems precisely? If you give me the jobs numbers I'll follow them up!"

C. "Really? Those servers were state-of-the-art for uptime specs. Of course, that's nothing compared to our new product which has been voted top of the range of highly available..."

D. "That's terrible. Perhaps it's time to replace them. We have some very good servers that have been voted top of the range..."

E. "WHY DWELL ON THE PAST? Let's face it - if you had our new servers you wouldn't even remember the poor maintenance you've had. Tell you what, I'll knock the shipping fee off the first order for you as a sign of good faith."

The Bastard

"...And I really do need you to recover the files I was working on five weeks ago but accidentally forgot to back up"

A. "I'm sure we'll be able to get something back"

B. "I'll have a look at the backup indexes and see"

C. "Our policy is only to keep data for 28 days, so it looks like you may be out of luck. Have you got any deleted file recovery tools?"

D. >Clickety< "Nope, nothing there"

E. "There's a one-time recovery charge of 50 quid per recovery. OK?" >Ching Ching< [3 seconds later] "Nope, nothing"

The Bastard

"...And then I turned my laptop on but the screen was black"

- A. "It may just be dark initially while it's booting. Wait a couple of minutes and see"
- B. "Maybe you've got your screen brightness and contrast wound down?"
- C. "Is the battery OK?"
- D. "It's rooted."
- E. "It's rooted" and "Drop it off here so we can steal the parts out of it... er... I mean run diagnostics"

The Head of IT

"We just installed the file-share machine and it all appears to be running very well"

- A. "Excellent!"
- B. "Ah yes, the file-share. I believe that that was a project that was most often requested of us"
- C. "What's a file-share machine - something like FTP is it?"
- D. "Yes, I used to use files when I started computing. You used them to keep the pins on card collater sharp..."
- E. >droool<</p>

The Engineer

"...And then the hard drive gave a whine and stopped"

- A. "So, let's just take a look at that motherboard then"
- B. "A fan problem, you say"
- C. "Sorry, I didn't bring any replacement keyboards with me"
- D. "I think you should leave the diagnosis to an expert"
- E. All of the above

Scoring

Mostly A: Perhaps you should work in the field of computing a while

Mostly B: Perhaps you should work in the field of **computing** for a while

Mostly C: Perhaps you should work in a field for a while

Mostly D: OK, so you've seen some of the shame

Mostly E: You've been there, done that, got the T-shirt and wear the scars. You know what to expect from a 'professional'. You're bitter too. Very, very bitter...

BOFH, the Boss and printing p0rn

BOFH 2003 Episode 29

Published Wednesday 26th November 2003 12:13 GMT

It's a sad day for computing when your own boss doesn't even trust you to get equipment delivered, preferring instead to receipt it and lock it away in safe storage in the basement himself. This lack of trust is enough to upset a technical professional with impeccable standards.

"You know what I like?" the Boss chirps, watching the company banner whirl around on his screensaver as I enter his room.

"Hermaphrodite Nuns in Leather Saddlery?" I ask.

"What?! No!"

"Oh, you're past that now - good. Always best to make a clean break from that sort of thing - you never know where it might lead."

"I'm not sure I understand what you're implying!"

"Yes, mental faculties are generally the first - and worst - affected. One minute you're sure you know who you are and what's what, and the next minute you're logging into a chatroom as Rita, a lesbian truck driver from Hull."

"I think it highly unlikely that I would eve--"

"Know her do you?"

"Just what **are** you implying?"

"Implying? Why nothing! No, I don't imply anything. I let the keystroke logger do all that. I simply present the facts as I obtain them - with punctuation of course."

"What are you going on about?"

"Nothing, just testing."

"Testing what?"

"Oh, someone's been printing some smut to our printers then forgetting to collect it. We don't currently log it so we had to think of where it might have come from."

"AND YOU THOUGHT OF ME?!"

"Your name did come up. We saw the whole Rita, truckdriver thing and noticed a couple of similarities."

"What **similarities**?"

"Well, you both have a driving licence."

"So does half the building!"

"Yes, but half the building doesn't work in this office."

"So you're saying it came from this office?"

"No, but **you** work in this office."

"Yes?"

"And you don't find that a bit of a coincidence?"

"**It's my bloody office!**"

"Yes. Well. I can see you're getting upset, so maybe we should talk about this again later? Perhaps you want to arrange for personal support or legal representation?"

"What for? I haven't bloody done anything!"

"Yes, right, mum's the word then!" I say tapping the side of my nose knowingly.

The PFY is, meantime, in the next room on the other end of a long piece of thick wire which is inching out of the vent system over to the Boss' keys.

"So this **isn't** your printout then?" I ask loudly covering the noise of the keys' ascent while I mis-hand him a page so that it falls on the floor.

"Th-that's disgusting!" the Boss chokes, sitting up as the PFY's hand pops out of the vent and quietly grabs the keyring.

"It's not yours then?"

"Of course not!"

"Fair enough, well I s'pose I'd better continue looking for the culprit," I say, grabbing the printout and exiting.

. . .

"How long?" the PFY asks, scanning the Boss' keys nervously.

"Well, if you're lucky it'll be an hour, but he had onion bhajis for lunch so there's a good chance he's going to want to use the porcelain ashtray sometime soon."

"Almost there," he blurts. "Right! Where's the Magstripe duplicator?"

"Running on my box!" I snap, looking for signs of movement, so to speak, from the Boss' office.

...

One READ and two VERIFY swipes later we have all the info we need for a duplicate card issue...

"OK, I've got the Magstripe info. How do we get his PIN number?"

"Isn't it written on his card?" I ask, guessing at the high standards of security the Boss would aspire to.

"Oh yes..."

We slip back to the Boss's office to return the keys only to find him deep in conversation with a particularly annoying helldesk geek about the virtues of patching your system regularly to protect you from virus infection. I have to say that I'm all for users patching their machines, I'm just not happy with the guy spending half his life wandering around the office talking to people and doing bugger all else. That's a TECHNICAL role!

"Bloody hell, is that Linus Torvalds?!" I cry, pointing out the Boss' window.

"Who?" the Boss and helldesk geek ask.

It's my fault, of course, for assuming too much and aiming too high.

"No it's not, it's the bird with the huge hands from the bikini commercial," the PFY adds, going for the save.

"Where?" the pair ask, scrambling for the window while the PFY slips the keys down on the desk next to the Boss' wallet...

Which I yank the cash out of and slip into the Helldesk geek's jacket pocket.

You see a chance, you take it!

"So ANYWAY," I continue, ad libbing. "About that Internet porn thing - I think you might want to revise your story somewhat - now that we have credit card information. I take it your card number is uh... 4372 8015 73--"

"It's not mine!" the boss interrupts. Look, I'll show you, I've got my card right... uh... Where's my bloody wallet gone?"

...

Ten minutes, and one call to security later we have a helldesk vacancy, and I also have the Boss' real credit card number for him to make a lot of suspicious Internet transactions with...

Which only leaves the kit to misappropriate...

Nah, I'll leave that for later.

I can do with the overtime...

BOFH's Xmas Xperience

BOFH 2003 Episode 30

Published Tuesday 9th December 2003 13:16 GMT

Ahhh, Christmas! The music, the people, the presents and the office party. Goodwill to all men and Christmas bonuses to the plebs.

Fantastic!

"There are, ah... no Christmas bonuses this year," the boss mumbles quickly, hoping to launch into the next agenda item before any of the assembled staff start crying.

"What?" a helldesk geek whimpers unhappily. "But I was going to use the money to pay for my trip up north!"

Some mumblings from the back of the room indicate that the geek wasn't alone in planning his holiday around his bonus cheque...

Damn shame. As a contractor and not entitled to bonuses since the change of policy a while back, I have to admit to not sharing the grief. Still, you have to feel sorry for them in a semi-paternal way.

I realise no good will come of it when I get a couple of visitors with a proposition...

...

"What the hell's going on with our HR Server?!?!" the Boss blurts, crashing through the door to Mission Control at Warp Factor 3.5.

"What do you mean?" the PFY asks, innocently.

"The bloody pay system, it's **taking** money out of people's accounts!" he gasps.

"But it's not payday!"

"No, but they're paying the bonuses today, only they're paying them in negative amounts!"

"I thought there wasn't any Christmas bonuses?" I ask.

"Well not for general staff, but for managers and board members who've made savings over the past year..."

"Ah, the old screw-the-workers trick!" I interject.

"Not at all! There was simply insufficient money to reward all workers, so the board decided to allocate the money evenly and fairly among themselves and the managers who'd achieved the savings over the past year."

"They awarded themselves a negative bonus? Well, I have to admit it's probably more fair than they ever imagined, but why talk to us - why not talk to the salaries people?"

"They've tried reversing it, but the program won't let them change an annual bonus after it's been paid!"

"Yes, well, I can understand why it won't let them do it, but why are you talking to us?"

"We've got to reverse it! Now! People's bloody mortgages are at risk!"

"Sorry, there's no way I'm doing that - it's embezzlement!"

"It's OK, I'll take responsibility - but it has to be done!"

"I'll need that in writing!"

"Give me a piece of paper!" >scratch< "AUTHORITY TO" >scratchey scratch< "Reverse transactions and amounts as" >scratchy< "of now. THERE!"

I grab the hunk of paper and wander over to my desk.

"It'll take, oh, about an hour for me to find all the bonus people, do the reversals and get it updated to the bank. And I'll need someone from Salaries to OK it with the bank..."

"I'll get them to do it immediately!"

. . . ONE HOUR LATER . . .

"WHAT THE BLOODY HELL HAVE YOU DONE!?" the Boss screams, ricocheting off the door to Mission Control as he bursts into the room "You've just bloody taken the money out again!" he sobs.

"Yes - that's what you said."

"WHAT?!?"

"You said reverse the transactions and the amounts. So if we reverse the transaction we'd be taking a negative amount out of their account, and if we reverse the amount, it would then be a positive amount, so we took a positive amount out of their accounts. Like you said. See, it's on this piece of paper that you sign..."

>Grasp!<</p>

"What" >chew< >chew< "piece of paper?" >chew< the Boss asks, swallowing the evidence.

"Oh, actually my mistake, that was my lunch expense claim that I'd left on my desk to dry out after I dropped it in the urinal..."

>GAG!<</p>

"HERE's the bit of pape..."

>Grasp!<</p>

>chew< "I didn't ">chew< "sign anything."

"Actually, that's not it either, it was a white piece of paper wasn't it?"

The boss starts stuffing paper down his gob like an industrial shredder, which **isn't** the way you want your superiors to see you when they're coming to find out where all their money's disappeared to...

"You've got to hide me!" he gasps, ducking under the desk. "They'll bloody murder me if they seem me!"

"Why? Surely you're just as affected as they are?"

"Yes, but the bonus changes were my idea..."

"Ah, I can see how that would make you a wanted man. Tell you what, hide under the PFY's desk for now."

>Crash!<</p>

"Where is he?" the Head of IT snaps, not at all in a good mood.

"Who?"

"Your bloody boss!" one of the other managers snarls.

"No idea. Last I heard he was doing some bonus stuff."

"Find him!"

"Well I'd like to, but I'm still looking into this bonus thing. It seems that the money's just... disappeared. No wait! It looks like the first lot's been transferred, in much smaller amounts, into the non-management people's accounts!"

"And the second lot?"

"Gone!" the PFY responds faking horror whilst simultaneously clicking through first class air travel prices.

"Reverse it!"

"Yeah, I COULD, but I don't think you want to do that - we've already reversed it once, and that didn't work out too well. You MIGHT end up losing another bonus from your account..."

. . . The next day, down at the local . . .

"mmmmmmffffffffgguggle," the PFY says, which isn't surprising, considering he's been drinking free pints (courtesy of bonus-enriched staff) for the past three hours.

"ggggggg," I respond, sliding off the table and onto the floor.

Ahhhh, Christmas...

The BOFH-father: Part One

BOFH 2003 Episode 31

Published Monday 15th December 2003 10:18 GMT

. . . Late one evening, in a darkened corner of Mission Control . . .

"...and so we agreed that for justice, we'd have to talk to the Operators," a helldesk geek gushes to me.

"Why did you go to the Head of IT? Why didn't you talk to me first?" I whisper, sitting back in my padded leather wheely chair.

"What do you want? Just tell us - anything, but do what we ask, please!" the geek burbles.

"What would you have me do?"

The helldesk geek looks around, spots the PFY, decides that this is best kept between us and whispers his group's request.

Sigh...

"That, I cannot do."

"We'll do anything you ask!" he blurts.

"We've worked in the same place many years, but this is the first time you've ever asked me for help. I can't remember the last time you invited me to your table at the pub for a cold lager. But let's be frank here, you never wanted my friendship, and you're afraid to be in my debt."

"We... didn't want to get into trouble."

"I understand. You thought this was a great job. You did nothing, knew nothing, got paid well, and paid your union fees. You didn't need a friend like me... But now you come to me and say, 'Simon, give me justice.' But you don't ask with respect, you don't offer friendship, you don't even call me 'Sir'. Instead you came to Mission Control on the day I'm falsifying my overtime and ask me to accidentally push someone down a comms riser..."

"We're asking you for justice!"

"That isn't justice - you'll still have a desktop machine!"

"It'll be a thin client! We won't even be able to play music!"

"We'll pay!" he adds, after a conspiratorial pause.

"Why do you treat me so disrespectfully? If you came to me in friendship, your department head and the desktop efficiency consultant would be suffering this very afternoon - at the latest. And if by chance an IT 'professional' like yourself lost their desktop machine, then **they** would in turn have problems with their desktop machines, and they'd think twice about trying to downgrade you."

. . .

"Be my friend... uh... er... Sir."

Sigh...

"Good. Some day, and that day may never come - but it probably will - I will call upon you to do a service for me. But until that day, accept this justice as a token of our friendship."

. . . The next day . . .

"Has anyone seen that consultant bloke?" the Head of IT asks.

"The bloke you got in to tell you that thin clients were a good idea, even though the rest of the department, including the Head of IT, thinks they're crap?"

"Uh, yes."

"No, why?"

"I was supposed to have a meeting with him half an hour ago. We rang his office, but they say he's been on site since this morning. We found his briefcase at reception and the only thing inside it was some rolled up newspaper with a piece of battered fish in it."

"It's an operational message," the PFY murmurs. "It means he sleeps at the chippy."

"You mean he's... dead?" the Boss gasps, knowing that consultants - particularly ones employed by management to back up their ludicrous schemes - are generally an endangered species.

"No, it means he's gone to the chippy. We had beers over lunch and sent him for food."

"You took him out for drinks?"

"Oh yes. Keep your friends close, but independent consultants closer."

"Well where is he now?"

"No idea. Maybe he's revising his recommendations to suggest that we don't use thin clients as they're a bad long-term investment?"

"He's changed his mind? He said it was a good idea! I'VE JUST ORDERED 200 UNITS! Why the hell did he change his mind?!"

"We made him an offer he couldn't refuse."

"You threatened him?!"

"No, no. I found a dealer who could undercut the thin client price. Dirt cheap."

"Well he can't change his mind now - it's too late!"

"Oh, so he gave you a copy of his report?"

"Verbally, yes."

"Ah, not written. So to the casual upper management observer it might look like you'd committed to a purchase which would fly in the face of the recommendations of an independent consultant?"

"I... ah..."

"And as you're the person who recommended this hardware in the first place, it might look like there was some oversight in the purchase procedure. You've no prior relationship with the vendor in question?"

"Of course not!"

"Never received any gifts?"

"No!"

"Nothing at all?"

"Well, maybe a pen or two, a couple of outings on the company boat."

"Ooooooh... Conflict of Interest!" the PFY cries.

"I hardly think a bloody pen and some fishing trips would be a conflict of interest!"

"Oh, so you declared it to the Head of IT at the time?"

"No, but..."

"Ooooooh... **Undisclosed** conflict of interest!" the PFY chirps.

"It's **only** a bloody PEN and a couple of social events!"

"I'm sure it will come as a great consolation to the company that you sold them out for such a small amount..."

"I..." the Boss burbles, before rushing out to cover his tracks and try and cancel an order.

>slam<</p>

"So ends Operation Fredo?" the PFY asks.

"Uuuuuhhhmmmmm... One last fishing trip I should think..."

BOFH and the Boss' space problems

BOFH 2003 Episode 32

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Some days just nothing goes according to plan...

The Boss is on the prowl for office space, and as usual we're being targetted simply because we have the appearance of consuming a reasonable amount of space.

"It's not like you USE the tape safes," the Boss blurts, on the defensive. "The tapes are just sitting in piles in the computer room floor."

"Those tapes currently required by the tape library, yes," I respond, "but the OTHER tapes, the long-term archives, the non-current series, are all in the tape safes."

"So what's all this stuff?" he cries, pointing at row upon row of tapes sitting on shelves in the tape room.

"Scratch tapes, see!" >BZZZZERT!< The PFY responds, erasing the first volume of last night's financials back-up.

"We keep the scratch tapes on this shelf because it's easier to get to when we need some for a project," I explain carefully.

"So how do they get in the tape safe then?"

"We put them in when we take them out of the tape library," the PFY lies. "And when we put some tapes in, we take oldest series of tapes currently in the safe out, to be used in the tape series which are written after the current series is written."

The Boss' vacant expression bears witness to his lack of understanding of the complexities of multiple tape series.

"We keep some tapes in the safe and some out of the safe," I explain, kindly. "Otherwise we'd need a couple more safes."

"Well can't we move them in here and free up the tape safe room?"

"Well firstly, they'd take up half the room, secondly the floor needs to be reinforced as there are four tape safes and they weigh - with tapes - approximately three-quarters of a ton each, and lastly, they take up so much room we'd have to get them moved to allow large equipment like the PABX to be delivered into the computer suite. Oh, and they're too big to get out of the doorway."

"Well how the hell did they get in here then?"

"They were built into the room once the floor had been reinforced, apparently."

"We could widen the doorways to get them out. AND we could put them in the basement - which wouldn't need reinforcing, has HEAPS of spare room, and would free up a room!" he gasps.

"I don't think that's such a good idea - there's no access except via this room, and that would mean a secur--"

"Nonsense! We could whack a door through the other side - or just rebuild this doorway after the tape safes are gone. It's perfectly secure! And with the tape safes gone we could relocate the whole helpdesk there."

!!!

"Ah I REALLY don't thi--"

"No, my mind's made up! We'll use that room. I take it you can organise someone to move the tape safes to the basement?"

Nggggggragh!

Now I'm no elitist - well, actually I am, but that's beside the point - but I do NOT want to spend my life being bothered by the helldesk with every one of their inane enquiries every minute of the day. There is no way it can be allowed to happen.

...

I get into the office after lunch and find out that there's no stopping the Boss. A large gaping hole greets us from where the tape safe room door used to be, courtesy of one of the building cowboys the company use for minor alterations.

I know it's them by the jagged approximation of a rectangle which has been circular sawed into the wall - halfway through the light switch on the other side of the wall. Professional!

Scant minutes later, a wadge of fatblokes from the safe moving company arrive, and begin hoisting the safe onto their heavy duty creeper...

...which, once they get into Mission Control, puts it's castor wheels through the floorboards.

"Not to worry!" one of the fatblokes chirps. "We'll put steel plates under it till we get it to the frieght elevator."

Desperate times, desperate measures. I give the PFY some instructions, then leave to supervise the tape safe's installation - knowing only too well that it'll end up with its door facing the wall.

"Bloody heavy, this," one of the fatblokes says, making polite conversation while waiting for the freight lift. "What's in it, plumbing supplies?"

"No idea."

"What do you mean?"

"Well when I got here I found that there keys for all the tape safes but that one, so we've never used it. The only reason we've kept it is because it's too bloody difficult to move."

"So it's you're lucky day then?" he burbles.

"About to be, yes!"

>ding<</p>

I give the fatblokes a hand pushing as the doors open, and even - out of the goodness of my heart - grab one to help him keep his balance as the safe topples down the lift shaft

>CRASH<</p>

"BUGGER ME!" the fatbloke shouts. "Where's the bloody lift?"

"Ah, here it comes now" I mention, pulling him back from the open doorway as the empty lift sails past. "Mind your head! Yes, the freight elevator's a bit of a death trap, so it's probably lucky that we weren't in it."

I hear a much smaller >CRASH< from below as the remote controlled lift fails to get to B2, due to the newly installed shaft obstruction. The PFY, bless him, isn't one to be put off and continues to attempt with repeated crashes echoing up the shaft while I put up the hazard tape like a good safety conscious employee.

A much nearer crash occur minutes later as the Boss rolls in looking rather red.

"SKIP THE BLOODY EXCUSES!" he blurts. "I KNOW IT WAS YOU WHO SABOTAGED THE LIFT, AND I'M GETTING THE LIFT COMPANY IN TO PROVE IT! AND IF YOU THINK THAT THIS WILL DO ANYTHING BUT DELAY THE HELPDESK MOVE, YOU'VE GOT ANOTHER TH-- WAOOOOH!" >CRASH!< >BZZZZZERT<</p>

"BUGGER ME!" the head fatbloke says as the boss trips on one of the holes in the floor and falls into the gutted lightswitch. "This place is a bloody deathtrap!"

"It is if it's managed properly, yes, but that was a complete accident," I'm forced to admit. "Beautifully executed though. Any of you blokes know mouth-to-mouth."

"I do!" one of the more generous fatblokes says.

"Can you give it a crack once I pop the breaker?" I ask prying open the distribution board.

"Sure."

Some days everything just goes like clockwork.

BOFH 2003 – 2004 (From TechWorld)

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The Bastard's Guide to Storage

12 May 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

In my younger years I experimented with storage. I'm not proud of it, it was probably a phase I was going through, and I'm over it now.

That said, there are some lessons to be learnt.

For instance, when buying storage, the normal managerial approach is to find a salesperson, open their wallet and in a loud voice cry, "Here, help yourself!". A far more technical approach is to actually find out what you're buying, and what it's worth. No, really. As a quick guide to what's out there, I bashed up the following between lunch and lunch part two...

INTERNAL STORAGE

Drives

Interface

If you're looking at storage, you're going to have to plug it in to use it. (Don't let the salesman lie to you.) Your standard PC motherboard has at least two IDE channels in it, each capable of handling two drives. Some of the fancier motherboards also have a couple of IDE RAID channels, giving you a possible total of 8 drives in a machine - if you have no CD, a stack of room, a case the size of a small filing cabinet and an industrial cooling system that'll make your office a bit like a poor man's sauna. Oh, and you'll probably need earmuffs.

In real life, however, your interface choices are:

- ATA, ATA/100, Ultra ATA - The mini cooper of Interfaces. It gets you there.
- Serial ATA - The "new" standard - smaller adaptor, faster speeds. Like the new mini, it's a lot flashier and has lots more going for it. And the windows don't rattle
- SCSI 1,2,3, ultra, etc - The standard traditional server range of disk. More

expensive than ATA, but *generally* performs better. The disk equivalent of the Toyota series of vehicles, ranging from the clapped out stuff you don't want

your friends seeing, to the sleek and modern...

- SSA - Similar to Serial ATA in some ways - particularly cabling. Dissimilar in price (ohmigoodness yes) and not as much market penetration. (oooh err)

>p>

•Fibre- The data is there before you send it. The vehicle equivalent would be a small turbocharged dream ride. The pricetag, however, is a large turbocharged nightmare.

Spindle speed is important. If it's for you, it needs to be a 15,000 RPM Ultra SCSI 3 drive; if it's for your boss a 5400 RPM IDE drive is fine. And if it's for the beancounter down the hallway who times your coffee and lunch breaks, it's time to find and resurrect an old 3600 RPM Seagate MFM like the trusty 20 Meg ST225...

Other Considerations

SIZE DOESN'T MATTER?

Of course it matters, but no-one wants to be the one to say it - not in real life, and not in computing. At this point in time several manufacturers have 250 gig IDE drives on the market, which, if you were fully using two of your IDE channels, would give you a terabyte of storage. Which is a hell of a lot of porn and pirated movies. Not that you look at either of course, but it pays to know how some unscrupulous users waste resources

Cache

Disk Cache can affect your machine's performance in dataflow as drastically as thinking about Thora Hird can affect your performance in the bedroom. So think carefully about it. (The performance, not Thora). As with any cache, there's a law of diminishing returns, but if it's under 2 meg, it's beancounter country.

Noise

Noise is a factor that many people don't think about. You don't want to slap a drive in your machine only to find yourself surrounded by suits looking for a "double decaf nana latte" every time it spins up.

Heat

Some drives run hot. Particularly the 15,000 RPM ones when they're stacked in close together. You'll remember that when you drop one on your foot on the way to the first aid kit. You might also want to remember it when you slap 4 of them into a server with a dodgy CPU fan and blocked ventilation holes. Before the long weekend. With that big box of paper and tape cleaner fluid on top of it...

Power Consumption

These days, drives are pretty much reasonable in terms of power consumption, and the days of the lights dimming when you turn the disk cabinet on are long gone. Unless of course you've got a kamakuza power supply with a wattage rating less than a public toilet light bulb in the red light district. It pays to check the power consumption tho - particularly if you're putting a stack of drives into a machine (or they're in there with a tape drive - some of which are real pigs where power comes into it).

EXTERNAL STORAGE

Boxes

Say you're looking at external storage. Boxes count. You need to spend a little time thinking about the box you're going to use, and what options it comes with..

Interface

As with drives, your interface counts. For instance, one prominent manufacturer (no names) releases a fibre attached disk enclosure with all the speed of fibre to your disks - Until it gets to the disk enclosure that is, at which time it has all the speed of SCSI, as it's ACTUALLY a fibre attached SCSI box. So you have all the extra expense of switching to and from fibre to get to the disk that you could have hooked a SCSI cable to. Nice way of selling fibre switches, that...

Also bear in mind that if you're got 4 SCSI disks running flat out delivering cinema-quality pirated video to your 29" wall-mounted flat screen monitor, there's probably not going to be all that much bandwidth left on the bus for that silly database application that Public Relations complains runs like a pig on sticks - that you made them buy a whole new server for. So maybe you get a box with a split bus, or maybe just get two boxes. Say it's for redundancy

There's also the skid-lid-el-cheapo SCSI attached IDE RAID arrays. As a general rule, I like these. Cheap, reasonably reliable, and gobs of space. True, their performance is worse than Lou Diamond Phillips in a made-for-TV-movie, but they're good at a pinch. Did I mention they were cheap?

The SAN

As soon as a vendor starts talking about TCO (Total Cost of Ownership) you know to prepare yourself for some cheap drinks and a shafting you won't forget in a hurry.

When selling SAN Solutions to people the UTCOPS (Use of TCO Per Sentence) increases exponentially as your attention appears to wander.

The basic idea is that a SAN is cheaper to administer because you have all your disk in one place, so: (a) It's not sitting unused in little bits on people's desktop machines all over the place so you're getting full value out of it, and (b) Your administrators don't have to look after dozens of disk boxes, just one.

The actual idea is that people like to have little bits of unused disk space on their desktop machines, to hide all that pirated software, which no-one in the world owns. Because no-one EVER plays a pirated shoot-em-up game at work on a high speed LAN... And what real admin wants to use a clinical management app to configure gobs of space that then makes it really hard to hide that terabyte of space you've allocated to yourself.

"All the fruit" With a SAN, you have the option for all sorts of interesting things - RAID obviously, but also things like the ability to split a RAID-1 set so as to backup one copy while the other one is being written (performance increase), rejoining the mirror at a later time. But

wait, there's more - Snapshotting of volumes, active standby drives, etc, etc, et cetera. Can you afford not to have one? Sorry, I meant, can you afford to have one? Of course you can't. Which leads me to:

How much would you expect to pay? The same as a similarly priced RAID box? An overhead for the built in intelligence, fibre attach, etc? No, the real answer is A PANTLOAD. And a pantload more in licensing (depending on vendor) when you want to use any of those great features you've heard so much about. Did the salesperson not tell you that?

So it'll cost a lot of money then? Did I mention fibre switches, locating machines within easy fibre run, etc? Do what I do, buy the cheap IDE RAID, and blame any problems on Intermodulation Distortion, which affects fibreoptic devices made in the other hemisphere.

The NAS

Non-technical people call it filesharing, but don't let that stop you spending a huge wadge of cash on a NAS farm. Yes indeedy, that's a posh name for something which is pretty standard. Sure, it's purpose built, but so was the Trabant...

Traps for young players

- Buying a fully fault tolerant disk subsystem, only to find that redundant power supplies are optional extras. So is hot swap ability.
- Thinking that clearing up a disk access bottleneck will remove all bottlenecks in your systems
- Thinking that adding more disk than your users could ever *possibly* use will actually *be* more disk than your users could ever possibly use.
- Thinking that your redundant "everything" disk box doesn't need to be backed up because it's so fault tolerant. The day before a couple of scousers nick it because they think it's a 200 watt stereo...

Tape

As any operator with years of experience under their belt will tell you tape is fantastic stuff, right up until it fails, and then everything's gone.

As far as tape drives are concerned, you need to think

- Standards - Is this a tape format that no-one's ever heard of, that no third party is ever going to produce a less expensive version of, and that will never be supported by any software ever?
- Reliability - Forget what they say about Mean Time Between Failures - they made that up by adding three zeros to their phone number. Tape Units fail, as do robots

- Capacity - As an ex-operator who resented being woken up in the middle of a work day to change tapes, THINK BIG! Get the biggest tape units you can buy, get a robot with a stack of slots, and have it recognise that there's a cleaning cartridge in one of the slots as well.
- Transfer rate. There's nothing worse than a tape unit which couldn't keep up with a pensioner in a zimmer frame. Check the tape unit's rated speed - and don't be fooled when the manufacturer claims that the LIBRARY can handle huge data rates - it's not the library that's writing the media.

Hierachical storage

I don't care if I haven't touched the fortran source to dungeon in 10 years, I MIGHT want to touch it some time soon. And WHEN I DO, I WANT IT READY AND WAITING, and don't want to have to wait for it to come down from tape stashed away in offsite storage. Yes, yes, virtual disk SOUNDS like a good idea, but it's only a loud BZERRRRRT away from being non-existent disk when you annoy the operator.

Tape

it's good, but it's not disk.

CD-R/RW and DVDs

Excellent for Music and Movies - but of course you would only use it to backup your work files - and nothing with dubious copyright. All great stuff, although beware the long wait while a DVD worth of data is written, always wondering when that buffer underrun will occur... Excellent way to move the burden of backup back onto the user, and even better for those 'take home' projects like sensitive company data which you have a copy of "For Safekeeping".

The Bastard asks: what do you know about storage?

13 May 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

1. In the 1970s a gigabyte of memory was measured:

- a. As a global organisation's net storage consumption
- b. Only in science fiction novels
- c. In disk towers
- d. In acreage

2. Solid State Disk is:

- a. Something you used to put on a 3-in-one stereo on 33&1/3 speed in the 70s
- b. Memory made to appear as disk
- c. Bloody expensive
- d. A good place to stash the porn archive...

3. In the geek version of "The Godfather", when Luca Brassi slept with the fishes, what heavy items would have been in the sack with his body?

- a. A large number of bricks
- b. Several large lengths of assorted chain
- c. 100 Seagate ST225 hard disk drives.
- d. None, they would "baptise" him inside a Vax 11/780 cabinet.

4. You're called to a user's machine because they need more space. You notice that 14 gig of their 20 gig disk is pirated copies of recent movies. You:

- a. Clean up their temp and log files and the profiles directory
- b. Delete the movies

- c. a, then copy the movies
- d. Copy the movies, and report them to the authorities

5. A user has split their hard drive into 4 partitions to use as "backup copies" in case of a disk failure. You:

- a. Explain, slowly, in simple language, what a partition is.
- b. Explain the options of RAID, and how that might be used
- c. Congratulate them on their forward thinking
- d. c, then, late at night when no-one's around, strike their disk repeatedly with a rubber mallet

6. The correct method for installing a new 200 gigabyte hard drive for the beancounter who's pestered you night and day since the moment he ordered it (two weeks ago) is to:

- a. Install it in accordance with the vendor instructions, complete with static strap, correct mounting screws, complete format and sector verification
- b. Backup his files onto a portable drive, slap the drive in, unwind the backup onto it.
- c. Just slap it in and see what happens (Plug and Pray). Act surprised when he asks about his data.
- d. Kick it over to his office, low level format the old drive (for "Security reasons"), tape the new one in with duct tape, leave him to it.

7 You're asked to estimate the amount of data your company will have in five years time. Your figure is found by:

- a. Predicting that the company will be in receivership by then
- b. Multiplying the current amount by five
- c. Multiplying the current amount by 10 and adding a couple of terabytes for good measure.
- d. Decoding the hex value of the serial number of the newest peripheral on your machine. In megabytes.

8. A colleague with a digital camera which uses the same storage cards as your personal disorganiser asks you for advice on which card to buy. You would direct them to buy:

- a. The largest possible card, as capacity is always useful
- b. The least expensive card, as prices are always coming down
- c. The newest compatible card, as transfer speed is critical
- d. a, and because you can steal his, swap the stickers, and say his camera isn't compatible...

9. You've been asked for a tape drive recommendation by security to backup the digitised video recordings of the site security cameras. You:

- a. Recommend LTO2 for its large capacity and excellent throughput
- b. Recommend DLT for its proven track record
- c. Recommend AIT because it's small and conserves tape safe space
- d. Recommend 4mm because you're thinking about a life of crime.

10. Your boss asks you to take a look at his disk drive because the last time it stopped it had something called "stiction" You tell him that:

- a. A stictioned drive can generally be spun up by a gentle but firm tap on the side with an open hand
- b. A stictioned drive can generally be spun up with a large thump on the side with a rubber mallet
- c. A stictioned drive should be replaced as the problem will only become worse
- d. You have to turn your machine on at the wall before the drive will spin up.

Scoring

If you don't know how to score by now, you should get out more. Lager helps.

The Bastard's Guide to Security

Keeping the users under control

06 June 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Many is the time that people have come up to me and ask about best practice for Computer Security.

Actually, that's a complete lie, many is the time that people have come up to me to complain about the difference between what they think is best practice for computer security and what I think is the best practice for computer security. Typically, the conversation goes something like this:

Them: My password has expired.

Me: Yes, it has a finite lifetime

Them: Why?

Me: Because someone may know it, so this forces you to change it

Them: No, I keep my password safe.

Me: A post-it note underneath your keyboard isn't safe.

Them: But I WANT TO KEEP MY PASSWORD!

Me: And I want to be Claudia Schiffer's love puppet, but I've come to terms with disappointment.

And one of the things you'll have to come to terms with as an administrator, is being the bad guy, because security, like Backups, is a no-win situation. People like the IDEA of security, but they don't generally like the application of security.

Here's the matrix (and we're not talking Keanu in a dirty-old-man jacket here):

Admin Security Implementation Matrix

Something happens

Nothing happens

You don't do it properly

Everyone hates you

No-one knows

You do it properly

No-one knows

Everyone hates you

As you can see, there is no positive spin to this. Sure, people will thank you for making the system secure - right up until it inconveniences them in some manner. I.e.

>ring ring<

Me: Hello?

Them: I can't seem to work from my home machine any more!!

Me: Ah, you'd be the person dialling up to a desktop machine on our network via the ancient remote control software, accessible 24 hours via a DDI line?

Them: Yes? But it does require a password!

Me: Or not, if you use the freely available buffer overflow attack software. Yes, we disconnected the phone line.

Them: Can you reconnect it?

Me: Sadly no. We lost the terminating tool so we had to improvise. With an Axe. And we may have tapped your machine by accident too.

Them: Was there any damage?

Me: A little. Only to the screen, CPU, harddrive, keyboard and mouse. And your chair and the picture of your Doberman.

Them: I don't have a picture of a Doberman?!

Me: Ah! My mistake. I did wonder about the engagement ring...

>clatter, click<

OK, all illusions of you being hailed as a hero dispelled, lets get down to the real crux of security.

Analysis of risk

Before you go implementing security that the Airline industry would gag for, figure out who's likely to attack you, why, and what they stand to gain.

I.e. If you're Bob No one, you collect MPEGs of Morris dancing championships on your 486 with a 2400 modem and Windows 3.11, you're PROBABLY not high up there on the targets list - except with the fashion police.

If, however, you're John RichPerson, of Rich Person Ltd, with 1 million credit card numbers in your Database, privileged access to banking systems, broadband connections to everywhere, and recently quoted as saying "I laugh at geeks because my system is so secure", expect a little more attention. In fact, expect a lot of attention.

Lockdown

The basic rule of thumb should be: "If you don't need access, you don't get access". This goes for physical and logical security. Be ruthless. Blame the newfangled operating system which 'just seems to have done this by itself'. Apply the same rules for the Server and Comms Room access. Then watch your popularity plummet faster than if you'd taken a dump in the department water cooler. As I mentioned above, everyone loves security unless it affects them.

Firewalls

Great things. Content-based (or stateful) Firewalls are even better. But if your firewall permits all traffic to and from port 80, and your Web server permits directory traversal, writing of files to disk, and has default protections set on system executables, (i.e. unpatched IIS Servers) the firewall will generally watch happily while your system is compromised in the most disgusting manner.

A stateless firewall works in the same manner as locking all but a few of your doors and windows, then putting a bouncer in front of the open ones. With the IIS bouncer being a weedy guy with coke bottle glasses and narcolepsy.

A stateful firewall is a far more intelligent bouncer with some signs of Alzheimer's. Maybe it'll protect you, maybe it won't.

Proactive Scans

Tools like Nessus allow you to whiz through your address space and see what ports, services and potential vulnerabilities there are at your site. Great tool, though with a propensity for false positives on occasion. Still far and away better than nothing, and good for lie detection:

Me: So, we've noticed a problem with your webserver

Them: What webserver, I don't have a web server

Me: This >clickety< web server. With a vulnerability which allows anyone to do >clickety< this to it...

Them: Oh, that web server. Can it be secured?

Me: Yes indeedy, that's what I just did!

Them: So that command, DEL/Q/S/F *.* secured my machine?

Me: Oh yes.

Security Policy

Policy Documents are generally as interesting as watching mud pies set, and about as appetising to make as they are to eat. Hint: Plagiarise someone else's and customise it for your site. Then charge your company 1000 quid for it.

Physical Security

Lock the doors, limit access. Allow no tourists - i.e. those people who want access to the computer room because:

- They're important
- They 'administer' an application on a machine in there
- They need it for Health and Safety Reasons

The fewer people who have access, the fewer accidents that occur. Accidents that lead to fewer people having access...

Think like the enemy:

- When faced with a 300 quid lock on a 200 quid door in a 10 quid per panel wall, what would you hit with a sledgehammer?
- If you wait long enough, the tower of old cardboard boxes in the corner of the computer room will eventually obscure the PIR of the alarm system.
- Magnetic door locks which open automatically in response to a fire alarms are about as useful as greaseproof toilet paper.
- Identifying the door lock system's power circuit and flipping the breaker before a bank holiday weekend usually sorts out access problems by Monday morning.

Cryptography

When given the option of listening to a cryptographer describe the intimate details of his or her keying and encoding algorithms OR wiping your backside for the rest of your life with 100 grit sandpaper, choose the sandpaper every time. Every time. And don't even hesitate over the decision, in case the cryptographer in takes the pause as being a positive sign. Why? Because cryptography is about numbers. Numbers, probabilities, primes - all that crap that they told you at school that you'd use some day, but which is only ever used by about 0.5% of the world's population. 0.000005% if you take out Maths teachers.

Cryptography is good, and generally it works - if it's been developed by a propellerhead locked in a dorm room for three years with his propellerhead buddies - none of whom have washed. That's where real security comes from. It does not come from the Government, and it does not come from global monopolies with impressive login windows. You don't need to know how it works, nor do you want to. Also bear in mind that with enough time and patience, any cryptography can be broken, and that Moore's law means that what is super-secure today, becomes not so secure in 5 years. Encrypt data if you must, but it's no substitute for not protecting your data in the first place.

Sad But True

- The best time for implementing security is immediately after a successful attack. The worse the attack, the more strict your security measures will be.
- Very few people consider their password insecure. It could be 10 years old and written on a bit of paper under their keyboard, but it's still secure because it's still a secret.
- People will trust the output of a Nessus scan more if it cost 2000 quid and came from an external agency rather than if you did it for free, in the course of your duties. Now's the time to be setting up that Security Consultancy.

Top Ten User Lies

- "No, my caps-lock key is not down"
- "I don't write my password down"
- "I never reuse my password"
- "I make sure to change my password every 3 months"
- "I abide by the password policy guidelines"
- "I have never told anyone my password"
- "I have never attempted to access a dodgy internet site"
- "I make sure to keep my antivirus definitions up to date"
- "I do not download games to my machine"
- "I virus scan every floppy and CD I put into my machine, particularly the ones I got sent from Malaysia"

Some would say I've got it all wrong while others would say I'm bitter and twisted. Maybe they're both right. Or maybe I'm trolling through your webserver right now, changing the first names of all your board members to genitalia...

Take the BOFH security test

What sort of safety-conscious bastard are you?

13 June 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

1. In your estimation IIS has all the security of:

- a. Any of a number of similar web servers
- b. Any of a number of Microsoft Applications
- c. Slightly less than SQL server
- d. One of those aluminium luggage locks that come free with the bag when you buy it - and all have the same key.

2. A Redmond man wants to know what it would take for you to be happy with their O.S security in your company. You would answer:

- a. Free availability of source code
- b. a, and peer review prior to release
- c. A fast-tracked service pack patch process
- d. A ten (derro)-pack of Tennents Super lager, a carton of fags and a fist full of fifties...

3. An example of a conflict of interests which might adversely affect your company's security might be:

- a. A sub contractor having access to confidential files on upcoming contracts which they are tendering for.
- b. Financial information on a public server which may lead to advantageous insider trading.
- c. A contractor performing an audit of the services provided to your company by themselves.
- d. None of the above, if you're the person in question, because you have ethics.

e. (bonus answer) d, and: The boss is asking you to ensure the boardroom door automatically locks because they've just had a load of booze and cigars delivered and Security has just gone on strike.

4. In a physical access situation, the person with the greatest access is generally:

- a. The CEO
- b. Security
- c. IT Management
- d. The cleaning staff.

5. In a physical access situation, the person who presents the greatest *threat* to security by entering a room is generally:

- a. The CEO
- b. Security
- c. IT Management, who "just want to have a look to make sure all the servers are running in tip-top condition, and what's this button here that says UPS-Shutdown do?"
- d. The cleaning staff.

6. In implementing a password lifetime policy, the balance between security needs and user convenience generally means that a staff member is happy to change their password:

- a. Monthly
- b. Bimonthly
- c. Quarterly
- d. Yearly, so long as they can still use their old password...

7. A good tip for Engineering staff who are choosing a new password for the first time is:

- a. "Use something you'll remember"

- b. "Don't write it down"
- c. "A name is not good"
- d. "Don't dribble on the keyboard".

8. In social engineering, the most you can expect to get out of a P.A is:

- a. Their boss's wife's name
- b. a and their date of birth
- c. a, b, and their dog's name
- d. a, b, c, and their boss's car, favourite colour, password, and home address - if you keep the Gin and Tonics coming.

9. A user wishes to know how to encrypt files on their desktop for safety. You would recommend:

- a. A highly secure third party utility
- b. Windows built in file security
- c. Winzip
- d. Their name to your assistant as a potential MP3/Porn repository...

10. You need to gain access to the computer room at a rival company for some free sharing of ideas, in the middle of the night. You would gain access via:

- a. The £200 High-Security door
- b. The £150 High-Security door lock
- c. The £100 High Security Hinges
- d. The £10 wall panel beside a,b and c above.

Scoring

There is no scoring in this questionnaire - there never is.

In fact, it's like one of those personality profile tests that the company has you do every couple of years or so that has no bearing on your role, won't be kept, and is for your information only...

Except that two days after you fill it in you find your office has moved to the basement, your pay has dropped dramatically (for "exchange rate reasons") and they won't let you use metal cutlery at the cafeteria any more...

The Bastard wants to know - how's your junket detection system working?

Making the most of industry events

19 June 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

We all like junkets, it just goes unsaid. I mean let's face it, it's a perk of the job. The chance to get offsite for up to a week on a 'conference', 'course' or 'two-day technical briefing' should be mandatory in a role where you're expected to deal with people whose intelligence can be measured on a micrometer. But how do you choose a junket with the correct balance of freebies to technical content? Worse still, how do you get out of a conference which is so dull the papers read like a Microsoft Licence Agreement (but are still only half as confusing)? Here's a quick test to challenge your junket-picking skills.

1. A conference's value is directly proportional to:

- a. The number of internationally renowned keynote speakers
- b. The representation of industry at the event
- c. The breadth of content and material
- d. The scale of the drinks evening on the second-to-last night.

2. The importance a vendor places on an event is shown by:

- a. The keynote speakers they bring from within their organisation
- b. The square footage of their stand and technical team presence
- c. Their sponsorship of speakers and lunches
- d. The value and originality of the freebies on their stand.

3. You have two conferences to choose from, one about 100 miles away in a city conference facility and one on the other side of the globe in an events centre. Knowing that the conferences are both of the same importance, you would choose which one to attend by:

- a. Their value to your organisation
- b. Their relevance to both the industry and your personal experience
- c. The amount of money remaining in your training budget
- d. How your frequent flyer miles are doing.

4. You are asked to speak at a large international event as a guest speaker. You agree, so long as:

- a. They cover your airfare, meals and accommodation
- b. a, and they make a donation to charity in your name
- c. a, and they give you a small token of their appreciation
- d. a, and they pay for your limit of duty-free booze, the company of a supermodel for the term of the conference, and your hotel room has a revolving round bed with crimson silk bedsheets.

5. It's halfway through the conference and you realise that the depth of material is so shallow you're barely getting your technical ankles wet. You:

- a. Verify what was promised in the programme with the Registration booth.
- b. Demand your money back, but stay at the conference hoping it gets better
- c. Demand your money back and head straight back home.
- d. Demand your money back and head straight to the bar.

6. The time after the first keynote address of any junket should be used for:

- a. Getting a feel for the direction that the conference/course
- b. Establishing some key networking contacts amongst other attendees
- c. Throwing away all the crap in the freebie showbag
- d. Grabbing the free pen out of the freebie showbag and throwing it away

7. In your ID Badge Pack, you find a printed name plate, a mag swipe card, and a plastic ID Holder. You should

- a. Put the name plate into the ID Holder and the Swipe card into your pocket
- b. Put the name plate and swipe card into the ID holder for easy access at vendor booths
- c. Lose the ID Holder and flash the name plate only when asked, so as not to accidentally leave the ID Holder on when you leave the venue and look like a prat
- d. Whip back to your hotel, fire up the laptop and peripherals and: (a) Print a new Name Plate, changing your attendee-type from "Client" to "Guest Speaker", THEN, (b) reencode your Mag Stripe info, changing your name and email address to your Boss's Information (so you can tell him that you asked some people to get back to him on some things).

8 You make sure to carry a large bag with you at the conference so as to:

- a. Gather information from vendors
- b. a, and to keep a pen and paper for note taking
- c. To hold all the freebies you'll get when you repeatedly go back to stands when they change staff
- d. c, and to empty the business-card-draw bowls into prior to slapping 10 of your own into the bowl.

9. Your Boss always views junkets with a critical eye, so to ensure that he appreciates the value of attending this conference next year you should:

- a. Bring back a load of technical information
- b. Produce a verbal report for your department, distributing relevant information to people.
- c. Give the Boss a huge pack of freebies
- d. Give the Boss some freebies and a load of technical data.

10. You made a stupid mistake and chose (c) in question 9, and now the Boss wants to come to the next junket with you. You should:

- a. Welcome the chance to show him the value of these events

- b. Grin and bear it.
- c. Encourage him to come, then forget to register
- d. Book yourself into the dullest convention at the nastiest hotel at the nearest location (which is also JUST too far to commute to). And eat out at the dodgiest curry house you can find....

Scoring.

Mostly A: Dear oh Dear, you have a thing or two to learn about getting the full value out of a junket, don't you now?

Mostly B: You too, need to ask not what you can do for your junket, but what your junket can do for you!

Mostly C: You've had a little experience in this area, haven't you? You're a survivor, but maybe you need to hone those skills a little.

Mostly D: An attendee after my own heart. You know what you want, how to get it, and how to make it all look like a selfless act to the casual observer. I salute you!

The Bastard asks - are you a spy?

Are those workplace surveillance systems to protect you - or your company?

14 July 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

1. George Orwell popularised surveillance in his novel:

- a. War of the Worlds
- b. 1984
- c. 1985 - Return of the Cameras
- d. Ace Ventura, Pet Detective.

2. No-go areas for cctv cameras have been defined as:

- a. Toilets
- b. a. and changing rooms
- c. Break Rooms
- d. The lift after the Christmas party...

3. Analysis of a normal proxy contents would reveal that over 50% of the traffic is:

- a. Work related
- b. Work and personal contact
- c. Email
- d. Porn and games.

4. Content Filtering Servers are used:

- a. To protect the company from litigation
- b. To protect employees from unwanted content
- c. To protect clients of the company from unwelcome images
- d. To give the administrator a good list of sites to visit.

5. Administrators are rarely the ones dismissed for e-conduct issues because:

- a. Their exposure to the medium makes them aware of the risks and penalties
- b. They have a responsibility to be whiter than white
- c. They have no time to indulge in such activities
- d. They use fake usernames and use a window from the proxy server so the traffic is neither logged, nor noticed.

6. When asked the question, as a reviewer of usage logs, "Who watches the watchers?" the answer is:

- a. My immediate supervisor
- b. The company auditor
- c. The ISP
- d. One of the fake users created in question 5 - who incidentally has his own office, phone, voicemail message and is drawing a rather nice salary (and is about to get a P.A because he spends so much time out of the office).

7. Auditing a user's browsing logs is best done:

- a. In the presence of the user
- b. In the presence of the user's manager
- c. In the presence of an HR representative - in response to a complaint
- d. In a darkened room, late at night.

8. If you were to estimate the cost to the company, in terms of lost productivity, of people browsing porn, you would suggest:

- a. Tens of thousands of pounds
- b. Hundreds of thousands of pounds
- c. Millions of pounds
- d. A stack less than that lost sending email to friends and playing games.

9. Legitimate methods of recording people's workplace activity generally do NOT include:

- a. Hidden microphones
- b. Telephone bugging
- c. CCTV targeting of one individual
- d. Shoe cams.

10. Workplaces are generally targeted by users for internet abuse because:

- a. The person spends most of the day there
- b. They lack a PC at home
- c. It's relatively private
- d. The bandwidth is BLOODY FANTASTIC.

How to Score

The sad thing is that if you don't know how to score by now, you probably need to do a little more browsing. At work, in company time. You know you want to...

The Bastard wants to know: Should you be earning more?

What's it worth to get that rise

29 July 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Everyone wants more money, that's a given. From the Boss's P.A who thinks that typing is a value-added commodity, worth at least 2k a year, to the Helldesk Bloke who is sure that he could be earning more money telling people their Caps-Lock is down in a much larger company. The question we need to ask though, is do you deserve more money?

1. The company has a Christmas bonus based on the amount of money you have saved the company. You can easily prove your worth by referring to:

- a. The way you streamlined the operational budget
- b. The increased ROI figures in the company spreadsheet
- c. Your introduction of six monthly performance reviews to improve workflow
- d. The time you set fire to the building, but then put it out.

2. Technical skills are at a premium and you have a stack of them. The one that is most likely to get you a raise is:

- a. Your knowledge of a diverse range of programming languages
- b. Your knowledge of a diverse range of Operating Systems
- c. Your knowledge of a diverse range of User Applications
- d. Your knowledge of a diverse range of explosives

3. A customary method of getting a pay rise in the computing community is:

- a. Annual review of salary
- b. Annual review, based on current market rates

- c. 'Finding' a contractors invoice and demanding pay equity for salaried staff
- d. 'Finding' the boss's web browsing history and threatening to expose it.

4. Like tipping, there is a general expectation of a percentage rise involved in the calculation of a pay increase. This percentage is usually:

- a. 3 percent for technical staff, 5 percent for management
- b. 5 percent for technical staff, 3 percent for management
- c. Depending on the technical level, 3-8 percent
- d. Depending on what was in the pictures in 3(d), 10-50 percent

5. Pay rises to some staff have the ability to upset other staff. When you get a significant pay rise which you know has not been passed on to other staff in your area, you should:

- a. Not mention the amount
- b. Not mention that you have had a pay review at all
- c. Mention it to very few people
- d. Send out a group email with the words "IN YOUR FACE!", followed by the amount of your increase.

6. Key staff are typically paid higher than others in a manner that may not be apparent to the casual observer. These key staff are usually:

- a. Self motivated
- b. Highly technically skilled
- c. Experts in their field
- d. Closely related to the CEO.

7. Given the choice of two roles, one technical and interesting the other dull and monotonous but much higher paid, you would:

- a. Bite the bullet and take the higher paid job
- b. Not compromise your principles and take the technical role
- c. Take the higher paid job, but also do some of the technical role as well
- d. Take the technical role, but create a 'ghost worker' in the HR Database to grab the money from the dull position.

8. At review time your boss generally is apportioned a percentage of his or her annual salary budget to distribute amongst his people as he sees fit. You would ensure he looks favourably on you in the months leading up to the review by:

- a. Performing exceptional work
- b. a. and making him aware of this in your "weekly reports"
- c. Highlighting the shortcomings of others
- d. Mentioning you still have the information from 3(d).

9. Left to their own devices, managers would award those people:

- a. Who get the job done
- b. Who frequently report their progress to project completion
- c. Who are devout brownnosers
- d. Those people in 6(d).

10. You realise you're being paid far too much when:

- a. Your peers resent you
- b. Your boss resents you.
- c. Nothing in the job vacancies columns appeals to you
- d. You see a Nigerian 419 scam and realise you wouldn't get out of bed for that money...

Scoring

Mostly A: You have a long way to go if you expect to be the master of your own monetary destiny. Remember: blackmail isn't half as dodgy as it once was and only about 15 percent get imprisoned.

Mostly B: You're not completely green, and have nothing to be ashamed of (or proud of, for that matter).

Mostly C: OK, we're talking warm here. You know what you want, but you're not too sure how to get it although you're willing to put the legwork in where it counts. With a little tuning, you could be climbing the greasy pole like a pro.

Mostly D: I'm surprised you can find time in your busy banking schedule to read this! Sorted!

The Bastard's Guide to Mobile Comms

All you really need to know about mobility.

09 September 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Everyone likes the idea of mobile communications - the ability to do anything from anywhere. It's a dream we've all had bubbling away in our subconscious since we saw the shoephone on Get Smart.

The prehistory of portable computing - the portable computer

The first portable computers - luggables, as they were called - were about the size of 2.5 briefcases and weighed about the same - if the briefcases in question were owned by an anvil salesperson who liked to carry a lot of samples.

The beauty of a luggable was that you could take them anywhere, (before the 5kg limitation for carryon luggage of course) plug them in and it was just like being at the office.

With a tiny black and white screen.

With herc graphics, if you were lucky.

Then came the battery models which were a giant leap forward in the weight department.

Yes, you took something that was heavy, and added 20 pounds or so to make it really difficult to steal. And, if you managed your power usage carefully, you could get a couple of hours out of the batteries, ie about the time it took the machine to boot. Then came some real advances: LCD Displays, low power CPUs and peripherals etc., and before you knew it the portable computer was something that you could put down somewhere without seeking planning permission first. And it was feasible to take to the office and back!

Data Transfer

These were heady days for computing! Oh yes! On your desk you had a machine with almost 80 megs of disk space on it and in your portable you had at least 20 Megs free after you'd installed all the vital files (OS, Excel, Word Perfect, Leisuresuit Larry, Battlechess and Zork). So now you wanted to copy over some files to work on over the weekend (the LSL savegame where you'd almost won, but just needed those few extra points). Out came the serial cables and/or floppies, and two years later the transfer was complete. No-one outside of the Malaysian CD authoring community was happier than I when CD writers became commonplace.

"Portable" networking

So the users wanted more - it's the way of the world. Along came PCMCIA network cards and modems, and people could quickly synchronise their work from home - or even from a free port in someone's office - after a little stuffing around with network settings. Fantastic! Everyone carried around a hunk of thinwire, two T connectors and two terminators in their laptop bag.

In *these* heady days however, that's not enough. We now have mobile computing that Agent 86 never dreamed of; advances which mean that you can remain in touch over vast distances.

The Mars probe, for example, had mobile comms, and it ended up quite a bit further away from its last access point than you are from the 802.11b point at the other end of the building. Of course, the Mars probe cost pantloads of millions of US taxpayer dollars and was used to examine a barren featureless wasteland. Catching a minicab from Manchester to Leeds would have achieved much the same thing, but would still have cost a trolleyload less. Sadly, it probably would have taken about the same amount of time, what with the frequent stops for directions, but still.

What the user is looking for is exactly what the Mars probe had - only much smaller and much less expensive than the Mars probe, but which will still keep him or her in touch with everything that matters.

Your average sales shark will tell them they need Bluetooth.

Bluetooth

Bluetooth is a method for interactivity between devices which are very close together... ie your PDA talks to your desktop, cellphone, etc. Or, your cellphone talks to your desktop or to a wireless earpiece. In other words, its practical application is to replace a very short cable. That way, Bluetooth saves you having to plug your cellphone into your PDA when they're right next to each other... provided they support Bluetooth of course.

Pairing is what you need to do to get two Bluetoothed devices to talk to each other. It's the introduction phase where the security between the two devices is established - so that the local office propellorhead doesn't sneak up with his PDA and steal all your email addresses (sigh). When your devices are paired, they'll talk to themselves, not to others. There are very few security issues with Bluetooth because generally the person trying to eavesdrop or takeover your connection is so close to you that you can (a) see them and (b) drop a luggable onto them.

Infrared

This was going to be the "Coke(tm)" of the shortrange networking solutions.

Manufacturers were putting infrared into and onto everything. PDAs, Mice, Keyboards, Printers, it was *everywhere*. The next moment, strangely, it was old technology and in a downward spiral. Why? Same reason your remote control gets repeatedly beaten for not pausing at exactly the right place in Baywatch. The batteries are flat. Only it's not flat batteries - you find out later - some bastard stuck a small chunk of black plasticine over the infrared receiver with a tiny hole in it which means the remote only works from a certain position in the room. (NB, try this at someone else's home). Or, maybe it is your keyboard batteries, or maybe it's the bit of paper

that's worked its way between the keyboard and the receiver. Or maybe it's that no-one ever actually wrote a driver for this OS for the infrared device you just bought...

Wireless LANs

A WLAN is many things to many people, but in this instance we'll call it 802.11, a set of standards for communication between devices over a wireless link. The standard is used for both point-to-point installations (i.e. building to building) and for point to multipoint (WAP point to one or more portable devices). 802.11 comes in a few different flavours, namely b, a and g - for the moment, with the differences being in transmission methods, bandwidths, and transmission frequencies (i.e. pretty much everything).

802.11b is the most common implementation in offices, homes, etc, and is generally referred to as "Wi-fi", which stands for Wireless Fidelity - a name which immediately has people thinking of 70s' 3-in-1 stereos. It's generally seen as box on the wall or hidden in the roof or some other inconspicuous place, with a small aerial attached. If you're particularly lucky, you might get the 11Mbit/s that's promised, but be prepared for disappointment. In real life your 802.11b bandwidth will be determined by:

- Proximity to the WAP point
- Number of other users
- Interference from other devices
- Interference from building components between you and WAP point

It does not take a genius to realise that positioning is everything and that a careful choice could get you bandwidth galore whilst the person down the corridor has a dribble feed.

Large fast food companies are rumoured to be taking advantage of 802.11b by installing access points into their public stores to allow people to eat and browse at the same time. Personally, I'd keep WLAN points away from toilets, but that's your call...

802.11b Security

802.11b doesn't have a particularly good record for this. Well, 802.11 in general. Better than Microsoft, but worse than Cisco.

The problem was, in the rush to release *something*, the issue of security was glossed over somewhat, leading to an IIS-like scramble to put things right. WEP encryption wasn't much to begin with, and really only gave the illusion of security (as did things like Mac address authentication). Enter the warchalkers - batches of furry toothed geeks in cars, on foot, etc, locating and compromising networks. The press was onto it quicker than a politician onto an intern and suddenly wireless was the hugest hole known to man.

Or not if you put the the access point where it should be - on the other side of a firewall, requiring a VPN connection for connectivity. Sorted.

Did someone say VPN?

VPN, virtual private network - something that will create an encrypted private channel between two points using a public access network. Excellent for use on networks to establish a secure, trusted and authenticated channel between your Laptop and your workplace Wolfenstein server. Even better when used from an internet cafe or conference machine to get back to work to check your email. Also good over cellular connections, which are by far becoming the geek-snob access method of choice.

Cellular

Cellphones are moving in on the mobile comms market too - not wishing to be left out on the huge potential for revenue gouging.

In the dark ages of this technology, you could get a cord which would connect your laptop to your cellphone and sometimes squeeze up to 19.2kbit/s out of your mobile phone for an hour or so before the battery smoked out. But these days, cellphones are making impressive inroads into the 128kbit/s mark. With digital cellular networks, always-connected access, and a Bluetooth connection to your PDA it means you're getting way better connectivity from it than the dialup speed of your non-ADSL home machine.

Of course, you'll be paying the sort of connection and/or volume charges to your mobile provider that'll make you weep blood, but we never said it was cheap...

Personally, I'm a bit of a luddite with a 802.11 card on my Ipaq which only gets used to check my stunt email during the long reaches of a dull meeting, in between games of solitaire, but I could be the exception rather than the norm...

The Bastard's Guide to Operating Systems

All you need to know about keeping computers running.

21 October 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Remember the days when an Operating System was a complex set of cryptic commands that could be shortened (by the skilled) into a line-noise-like abbreviation, and a mouse was something that got fried gnawing into power cables?

I do.

Remember when the average user had at their disposal the full resources of the commands EDIT, PRINT, COPY, DELETE, RENAME, and most importantly LOGOUT?

And that was all.

When a 'configuration option' was limited to how many letters they used in their password, and a control panel was something that had "LINE FEED" "FORM FEED", "ONLINE" and "TEST" buttons on it?

I bloody do...

Ok, so I'm a bitter and twisted Old Bastard Operator from Hell. I admit it. But there's something about the ability to drive a text-only interface that demands respect!

Back in the good old days, the importance of an operation could be measured in the number of times you had to check that DELETE command before you hit "Return" to make sure you got all the user's files, including subdirectories...

Sure, we had look-and-feel before Windows, but then it was more to do with the adult entertainment industry than computing. I think that computing took a step backwards when the graphical interface came in.

Before, when you deleted a file from some user's directory there was an element of doubt in their minds about whether it **really was there** in the first place. (Of course they knew they'd just spent three hours typing the document in, but Did they type EX or QU before they exited the editor? And did they really want to suggest the operator might have deleted their files so that they could shutdown the print queues and go home early?)

A graphic interface removes the doubt. They see the icon, so they know the file is there.

NOW you have to use a tool like dd to echo exactly the right amount of garbage into their file to make it look untouched.

Still, a balanced view of operating systems might be:

VMS

Ah. Now this was/is a real operating system, full of the technical gibberish you come to expect of a truly good OS - the cruft that really sorts the men from the graphical interface users. Where else could you use the command:

```
MCR  UAF  MOD  user  /PASS=IMALOSERFORFORGETTINGMYPASSWORD  
/NOPWEXP /PWDMIN=40 /PWDLIFETIME=1 /FLAG=GENPWD
```

to teach a user about the finer points of remembering their password?

VMS was/is bloody great. Sure, they dabbled with DECwindows, an experiment in their version of the dark side of X, but they never really inhaled - the strength of the operating system was in the power of the qualifier delimiter, the ubiquitous '/'. Windowing was just a passing phase.

Another cool thing about VMS was the privileges you could amass if you were the right person. There are more VMS privileges than McDonald's staff merit badges, and there's one for everything! I'd bet good money that if you went into the VMS privilege architect's kitchen and opened up the drawers and cupboards, you'd find:

- all the tins had their labels facing the front, and
- all the utensils in their right compartments.

And they have an AK47 in the basement for when their redundancy notice arrives.

Still in use all over the world, VMS is going strong. As opposed to:

AOS/VS

This was one of the first *real* operating systems I used, and it was complex. (If you want to read up on its history *The soul of a new machine* by Tracy Kidder will tell you most of what you need to know in a non-threatening manner). Why use VMS's "SPAWN" or Unix's "sh", when AOS/VS let you say "PROC/DEF/IOC/BLOCK" instead? Many more letters and much more complex. I have no idea what it all meant, but it impressed the hell out of geeks.

The real beauty of the Data General operating system though, was the cool names they had for privilege classes. Every operating system has their version of SuperUser, but DG also had Superprocess. And, to add a nice touch, they'd change your prompt to denote your privilege level:

) = I am noone, please toy with me and my files

+) = I'm SuperProcess, where did that user's process go?

*) = I'm SuperUser and I'm having trouble finding that user's files?

#) = I'm both SuperUser AND SuperProcess and I don't believe there ever was a user of that name and defy you to prove otherwise!

Unix

Unix is big. Even waaaaay back when, Unix was big. Unix added choice. Unix added switches, pipes and redirects. Unix even added case sensitivity. And let's not forget, complexity. Mmmmmm.

Unix could never be described as being particularly user friendly - unless of course you were a technical user - in which case it was pretty bloody good, and let's have some more of those shifted numerics in the command line, thank you very much.

Along with it came a set of disgustingly dangerous utilities that meant nothing but could render your system unusable in seconds.

Initially, it was a grand project: make something better than Multics. Slowly at first, but increasing speed and complexity, Unix was built. And before you knew it, manufacturers who'd previously written Unix off as crap were bringing out THEIR versions of it. (Because it was popular, had a command set that people were used to, and best of all, cheaper than developing a new OS. (Not that this stopped manufacturers from spending megabucks layering their product and customisations on top of the base install)).

Before you know it, Unix was everywhere and every flavour. Some companies (i.e. DEC/Compaq/HP) had several rollouts of different flavours to really confuse their users before they decided on an implementation that had a fairly average following.

It was everywhere, and every vendor had a version. But to a man, those vendors mostly agreed on one thing: Linux was crap.

Linux

Linux, and the Open Source project in general, was communism of the most disgusting form. Why the hell would *anyone* develop something that they couldn't gouge trolley loads of cash for??! The idea in itself was more satanic than rock n roll!!!! And who was going to support such a project?

Yes, the vendors pooh-poohed the thought of Linux taking over, because they knew that the support issue was going to be the killer. And the logic was indisputable:

You could either:

Get some software authored by someone you didn't know with limited programming skills and no software support network to speak of,

OR:

Get some software authored by someone you didn't know with limited programming skills and no software support network to speak of - but who would tell you it was a known bug and would be fixed in the next major release - **and you could pay thousands of quid for it.**

Well obviously you're going to pay the thousands of quid aren't you? Because when your server's out of action and your nuts are, as they say, in the vice, you don't want to be the person saying "Support contract?"

So you paid. Except for the communists, who took over countries, introduced literacy and health programs and gave people a better way of live. And used Linux, the red bastards!

But then, in the late 90s, companies had a brainwave: *Why have a huge OS development team when you could "support" something that was supplied for free?*

Well, when I say free I mean free except for all the enhancements that you layer on top of it to make it an expensive item again... And the real beauty of it all was you could keep the crap software support team you already had by adding the excuses "It's Linus's fault", "SCO did it" and "I'm afraid we have very little control over a freeware operating system"

And it's only now that you find out that those major vendors were secretly wishing Linux well in it's formative years. Hell, they practically helped invent it with their criticisms, which in turn aided product development. The good bastards!

MacOS

Let's be honest, this was where the rot set in. I mean here's this box with an interface that a bloody child could use! What's that all about?

Ok, so they did start adding complexity around OS-X and it's unixness, but still, the graphical interface was it's selling point.

And how did Xerox miss out on cashing in on that??? Still, what goes around comes around. And then there was...

Windows

Ah, who can discount Windows - even the 3.11 version with the mouse - you know, like Macs had, the drag and drop - you know, like Macs had, and the everything else - you know, like Macs had. Well, except for the inbuilt networking, the posh hardware, etc, but still, it got there and further in the end...

I preferred DOS. Sure, it was, and is, retarded in comparison to most command line interfaces, but it was still a command line interface. And it still sort of is, in the same retarded manner.

We all thought NT was going to be the end. New Technology - what else could you want? Ok, security, stability, etc, but still, it was a great windows leap forward.

Unless you were a home user, stuck in 95, I mean 98, I mean 98 SE, I mean ME, I mean XP Home edition. ME was the best, being out of date around about the same time you finished installing it.

For serious users, tho, the path was a little shorter. NT, NT with a service pack, NT with a service pack, NT with a service pack, ...zzzzzz, Windows 2000, Windows 2003. Sorted. The transition from NT to 2000 was complex - which added an element of the REAL operating system into the mix. Many was the administrator who burnt out trying to follow the Microsoft recommended path for running non-windows domain controllers with Windows 2000. Still, at least they still had that AK47 in the basement.

One of 2k's best claims to fame was x-million new lines of code, or, alternatively, x-million new chances for memory and security problems. Lovely!

2k3 is better, faster, stronger though, and as a newly patched 2003 user I can assure you that there won't be any more security problems just as long as wdklhjwgflwrelihrjgrlkejfglkerjg;eklmvb'egjkev;lkje 'rvpoijeparogjq['e-gub'nqaeop rvj'peorjv]

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The BOFH asks how much you know about ROI

Return On Investment or Rip-Off Indicators?

18 November 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

ROI, who needs it? Management, right.

But underneath all the complex calculations designed to disguise the fact that the whole process is a monster crap shoot - there's an element of importance to the technical person.

So, how well do you think you'd do if you had to produce some ROI figures to justify your projected budgets for the coming quarter?

1. In a non-work situation, a good ROI would be when you:

- a. Bought a car that lasted 30 years and never needed serious maintenance
- b. Bought a PII 133 which still plays Leisure Suit Larry just like it used to
- c. Bought an investment book that earned its cover price back
- d. Bought someone a Diet Coke and scored!

2. A piece of hardware is generally considered to have a better ROI if it:

- a. Has an extended warranty
- b. Lasts three years longer than it should have
- c. Has permanent telephone support for the life of the machine
- d. Has a couple of bottles of Scotch in the case with it when delivered.

3. A salesperson determines that ROI affects his role in terms of:

- a. Increase in sales
- b. Increase in profit

- c. Expenditure / Increase in sales
- d. Increase in commission / number of lagers extracted from the expense account.

4. Of all investments that a company will make to secure a venture, the one with the greatest ROI and which customers most appreciate and respond to is:

- a. Targeted advertising
- b. Enhanced support
- c. Invites to sporting and cultural events
- d. Hookers and booze.

5. When investing in innovative technologies, Managers are most likely to focus on:

- a. Capital outlay
- b. Lifetime of product
- c. Capital outlay / lifetime of product
- d. The porn on the webpage he accidentally got to when he mistyped the webpage noted in your proposal.

6. The long term ROI of a product is generally calculated:

- a. By an analysis of needs in combination with a fitgap analysis of possible solutions
- b. In advance with sophisticated trend modelling, covering initial outlay, TCO and business benefits
- c. In retrospect once the guilty parties have left the company
- d. On a dartboard with your eyes closed.

7. You're giving a presentation about replacing the company's central network infrastructure - parts of which are so old they come with a morse handset - when a 'business' manager caustically asks what sort of ROI you expect from this. You mention:

- a. The improvement in business process of cleaning up infrastructure
- b. The improvement in business process of speeding up infrastructure
- c. The improvement in business process of having redundant infrastructure
- d. The improvement in business process of reducing middle management in tragic workplace accidents. This afternoon.

8. You need to show a high ROI value in your proposal to ensure your project goes ahead. You:

- a. Present it as it is, indicating that the long term benefits are incalculable
- b. Project long term benefits extremely favourably, whilst reducing initial costs
- c. Disguise the full cost of the project by doing it in yearly phases
- d. Hide the full cost of the project by moving the decimal point.

9. You're cornered by a salesperson who's using complex algebra to prove that the ROI of his suggested purchase is far and away better than anything the competitors can do. You say:

- a. Show me the up-front costs plus total ongoing yearly costs, ONLY
- b. Show me the up-front and ongoing costs along with intangible benefits as separate things
- c. Show me the TCO costs and ongoing benefits
- d. Show me a brown envelope with 2000 quid in used 20s.

10. You've done your best and presented the best solution you can to Management. They're convinced by the presentation from (9) above which shows that they're actually earning money by buying machines that have a 'turbo' Led on the front panel. You:

- a. Try to convince them that it's a load of bollocks
- b. Show them the working for the maths
- c. Let them make their decision and live with it

d. Support their idea and say that the machines have to be paid for in envelopes stuffed with used 20s. By the time your plane leaves for Jamaica.

Scoring

The scoring is simple. Anything but (d) means you have a misguided belief that ROI actually means something in real terms. It doesn't, never did, and is as pointless as ISO 9002 and IIS Security Service Packs.

Mostly d: The cynicism of a true professional who's seen marketing trends come and go, along with the smooth salesmen who present them. Isn't it a shame you can't lock a marketing trend in a comms closet over the Christmas break? Ah well.

Everything you wanted to know about extra costs...

...that the pre-sales support person didn't tell you

06 December 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Congratulations! You're quite happy with the way things have worked out with your last purchase. You met the pre-sales people, they sold you a vision of a fairly priced piece of equipment, and you're quite surprised that it all seems to have gone according to plan. Is this too good to be true?

Beware: in the salesperson's arsenal are a rich variety of tricks to obscure true cost, including:

Licensing Costs

This is a particularly good scam, affecting both hardware and software. The most common ways of getting the technical shaft are:

- **Embedded software cost** The kit you just bought has some software/firmware which *actually* came from somewhere else, and the purchase price only entitles you to use it within certain limitations (ie for a certain amount of time, for certain types of access, for a number of users, etc). Typically, the restriction is sufficient to get you hooked, or for you to unknowingly get some business process all hooked up in the product, before it cuts in. Alternatively, you buy the kit and the firmware comes free, but when you want to fix *any* bug in it, you have to get a licence from the firmware vendor. (All too common in thin client devices).
- **Ongoing Licensing/Maintenance Costs** You buy some software or firmware only to find out (the next year) you have an ongoing compulsory license or maintenance obligation. (And in some cases you find out that it's not compulsory at all, they just bill you for it)
- **Change of Use**
 - You use a product and cross some boundary by increasing your use, using 'advanced' features, or increasing the product's capacity in some manner and are obliged to pay licensing fees. (Often happens in products you wouldn't expect, such as wanting to add capacity to a SAN device, adding processors/memory to a machine or actually USING some of the features of the SAN that the salesman told you were 'available').
- **Revised Licensing Model**
 - A vendor realises that within a licensed bundle of products there is one which is a favourite with the punters - so it splits that item off into a separately billable licence for the next licensing round. Microsoft site-licensed customers might recognise this smell.

Installation Fees

- **The "Onsite Visit"** You to pay for the install engineer (and anyone else from the company who's never seen kit like this and wants to rack up some overtime) to come onsite, open some cardboard boxes, install a rack kit & power cords and then stand around with a vacant expression on their face (as opposed to getting a user to do that for FREE).
- **The 'Configuration Charge'** Often occurs with complicated installs like SANs from major vendors. The manuals, which as it happens are freely available on the web (on their website under the 'Pakistan' country code, 'accidentally' filed as 'Power Cable Safety Information' and printed in Chinese) are huge tomes that no-one wants to read. So you just end up paying the company a wadge of cash to come out and turn your SAN into 3 RAID 5 Arrays. And hope that nothing ever goes wrong in the future.

Warranty Period

A particularly good method of tucking your customer.

- **"Standard" Warranty** When someone tells you that you're getting a 'Standard' warranty with your kit, the following question should always be asked: "Which 'Standard' are we talking about - Corporate Business Continuity Standard, or Shuttle O-ring standard?" Some kit comes with a 3 year, 24x7 warranty, whilst other kit, say from a major network device vendor, comes with a 3 month "Standard" warranty. Often this warranty's expired before you've even bothered to install the kit in a rack.
- **"Terms and Conditions"** Your machine is fully covered by the Warranty - so long as it was installed by the vendor's support engineer (at your cost, including travel time), has a signed install document, has never been opened by anyone other than a registered service engineer, is running an approved Operating System and is in an approved machine room environment.
- **Warranty Registration** An absolute classic! You buy a server with a warranty extension, because you're no fool! Something goes wrong, and you make the call, only to find your kit isn't warrantied because you actually have to send in the warranty card that came with the warranty pack (often shipped separately) to get the maintenance. So you do, only to find that the warranty period that you haven't been registered for is 1/2 over because it starts ticking from the purchase date....
- **Warranty Location** You buy your maintenance with a four hour response, because the service is critical. When you make your first call, you find out that you're outside the four hour coverage area, so you'll have to deal with eight - or maybe next day. But you could buy some service spares from them to keep onsite. Not that the terms and conditions permit you to install them, of course.

- **Warranty Hours** In response to a fault you find out that its outside standard hours, "Standard Hours" being 10am till 3pm or some other disgustingly small window. But for a small fee you can upgrade to a better level of support...
- **Technical Support Line** Now I may be unduly picky but when I call a support line, it would be nice if:
 - The 'Support Professional' at the other end had actually seen kit like this before
 - Ok, so maybe if they'd seen a computer before
 - I'll settle for them being in the same country or speaking the same language as a first or second language.
- **Helpdesk Hours**
- **True story:** We registered some kit and paid for the 5 x 9 response. The server goes tits up, so we call the service number - in another country and time zone and get a 'normal hours of service' recorded message, and have to wait till their service desk turns up to work... **Another true story:** Same vendor, 24x7 cover. Same recorded message - for 24x7 cover. Sigh

Maintenance costs

You have your kit in use, and it's running well. One day though, an invoice appears, noting something to do with maintenance. What's happening?

- **Assumption of contract** A company has noticed that your initial warranty has expired and simply sends you an invoice for maintenance - with an upgrade to the deluxe, 24x7x1 hour response, gold-plated version. And the price tag...
- **No End of Life** Don't expect a vendor to query a maintenance contract on a machine - even after 10 years or more. If you don't explicitly remove it, it'll stay there. And, don't be surprised if some change to the contract regenerates the maintenance agreements for every piece of kit that you previously had under maintenance, but which was removed. A good little earner, that.
- **Base vs. Component Maintenance** You buy a box, asking how much the ongoing maintenance is. They tell you it's four potatoes a year. You get the bill a year later and it's for 17,000 potatoes. When queried, they tell you that that's the maintenance for the *box* but if you actually put *components* into it like a CPU, memory, or, dare I say it, a network card, the maintenance goes up. The explanation is that this is so as not to unfairly penalise those people who buy just the box, with no working parts. Because that happens all the time.
- **Urgent Callout Fee** "Unfortunately all our Engineers are unavailable at this time on High Priority calls and not just arsing about in the lunchroom. Should you wish to pay a

one-off Urgent callout fee, we will magically create an engineer out of thin air and send him to your site"

Expansion costs

You'd like to expand your hardware now that you're making full use of it so you check to be sure you aren't affected by any increased licensing costs. The answer's no, so you think, why not add a couple of gig of memory?

- **"Unsupported Parts" *True Story*:** A couple of years back, I was buying memory for a couple of large multiprocessor boxes and asked the vendor for a price on a gig of memory. The price came back at \$NZ17k and \$NZ18k for the two different models. Admittedly, the New Zealand dollar is at times worth its weight in potatoes, but one simply had to check with Kingston. Their price was \$NZ580 each at the same time noting that both machines actually used the same memory. When the vendor called back, they couldn't understand why we weren't considering OEM gear and warned us that we wouldn't get the same warranty. My argument - that at Kingston's price I could replace the memory EVERY BLOODY FORTNIGHT and STILL be ahead - seemed to end the conversation.
- **Incompatible Parts *Another True Story*:** A machine needed another PCI SCSI card. When the vendor rep had (eventually) finished trying to sell me a whole 'new technology' disk subsystem, we got a price out of him in the low thousands of potatoes. The third party card was priced at 400 potatoes. The Vendor then suggested that a third party card would be 'Incompatible Parts' which might void all, or part of, our maintenance contract, crash our machine, cause fire from the sky and possibly give me and everyone I worked with testicular cancer. It was only later we discovered that the third party card manufacturer also manufactured the vendor's cards too.
- **Unavailable Parts** You buy a quad box but for budgetary reasons only get dual processors, intending to install the remaining two next year. When next year comes around you're going to find that either they don't make that speed of processors any more, OR, they're more expensive than buying four of the latest processors...

Support software

You've got your box, it's up and running, and now you want to run that App that the salesman had which shows you all about how the system is running with little guages for environmental monitors, alerts, etc. **The rule of thumb is: IF IT WORKS WELL, IT'S GOING TO COST A LOT OF MONEY.** The other side of this is that if it's a sack of cack, it'll come free. Until they've ironed out all the bugs, at which time they'll slap a nice interface on the front, increment the version number and charge a pantload of cash for it. Oh, and stop supporting the previous versions, of course.

Conclusions

Ok, I am bitter and twisted and may have a persecution complex - I admit it.

Sometimes dealing with a vendor is like being sent to prison - you know you're going to be screwed, the only unknowns are how many times and how roughly.

That said, I have to admit that on the odd occasion you meet a salesperson who's a true gem - who'll tell you the traps and pitfalls in either purchasing their kit or another's kit. But the vendor will weed those people out really quickly....

The Bastard wants to know, how's your power?

Playing with electricity.

19 December 2003

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Power, the computing lifeblood. Without it, your systems are as much use as a vendor's support promise, as dead as OS2 development on a good day, and as likely to be appreciated as Richard Stallman at an MSDN conference.

You need power - you're dependent on it. So what steps have you and your company taken to ensure you're not the sad victim of the electrical equivalent of a coronary thrombosis?

Supply

1. The company has ensured the safety of your electricity supply by:

- a. Having a ring-main connection to separate external supplies
- b. Dual feeding (a) throughout the building
- c. (b) and ensuring that all power switchboards are locked
- d. (c) then putting a freely accessible, unlocked, master circuit breaker lever in a high traffic work area, knowing FULL BLOODY WELL THAT SOMEONE'S GOING TO WONDER WHAT THE HELL IT DOES!

UPS

2. The best install option for a UPS system is:

- a. Separate rack-mounted UPS units, one per rack
- b. One large UPS unit
- c. One large UPS for the machine room, separate units for comms rooms
- d. One large UPS unit, connected to your desktop. Oh, and the Unreal Tournament Server.

3. A UPS System is typically purchased with a capacity to ensure an off-supply runtime of:

- a. 15 minutes

- b. 1 hour
- c. Twice the expected time to shutdown all services
- d. Enough to run the Boss's bar heater for 3 hours.

4. Capacity testing for accurate measurement of UPS coverage time is determined by:

- a. Interrupting supply until $\frac{3}{4}$ battery capacity remains, then multiplying the observed outage time by 4
- b. Interrupt supply until $\frac{1}{2}$ battery capacity remains, then multiply by two
- c. Interrupt supply until $\frac{1}{4}$ battery capacity remains then multiply by $\frac{4}{3}$
- d. Interrupt supply until lights go out, then say a fuse blew.

Generators

5. Generator backup should be cued to start:

- a. The moment supply is interrupted
- b. After a supply outage, when the reinstatement time has been determined to be greater than remaining UPS capacity
- c. When UPS capacity is at $\frac{1}{2}$
- d. As soon as someone can find the keys to the generator control box.

6. Your generator runtime is limited by:

- a. The size of its fuel tank
- b. The availability of fuel
- c. Complaints about noise
- d. Carbon monoxide levels due to the exhaust pipe venting right next to the air conditioning intake.

7. The feed to your beancounter's computer racks is:

- a. Dual sourced supplies, each separately circuit breakered
- b. a. with Earth Leakage Detectors for safety
- c. Single phase supply, single breaker
- d. An extension lead from the multi-plug box in the room next door - to save money on having another point installed.

Systems

8. Your phone system is backed up by:

- a. Lead Acid battery bank installed in PABX unit
- b. UPS Power
- c. b, and a
- d. c, but it doesn't matter as you're using VOIP phones with individual adaptors which will go off with the supply.

9. Computer Suite UPS power should only be externally fed to:

- a. Comms Risers
- b. a, and Console rooms
- c. b, and Systems Administrators' rooms
- d. The red powerpoint beside your desk marked "dirty power, do not use", which all your gear is plugged into.

10. The most important machines to ensure are placed onto UPS supplies are:

- a. DNS, DHCP and Cache Servers
- b. Database Servers
- c. The Payroll Servers

d. The manky old VMS box with the game of dungeon you've been playing (badly) for three years - because you think you've almost cracked it, and if you lose the game now you'd have to kill someone.

Scoring

As usual, scoring is a tricky one. Do you answer the questions truthfully, or do you look at the scoring sheet first, using it as reference material so you get your answers right?

Sadly, there are no right answers, just a multitude of wrong ones.

Mostly A: The C- of Infrastructure Managers - i.e. Could do better.

Mostly B: You're good, but not great.

Mostly C: You're great.

Mostly D: You are bitter, twisted, and may have issues with authority. Still, no-one's perfect are they?

The BOFH Guide to Network Management

How you - and you alone - can manage the network.

30 January 2004

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

If I had 5 quid for every time a user asked me about Network Management, I'd have about 10 quid now (5 if I hadn't tricked one into asking me by saying his login problems were caused by "Strategic Network Management").

This is for two reasons:

- **Network Management is Complicated.** If you listen very, very carefully, when you've got the wipers in your car set to 'intermittent', you'll probably hear a little >click< just as the wipers start. This is because inside the wiper control circuit there's a small bimetallic strip consisting of two pieces of metal with different heat coefficients fused together in the control circuit. Current passes through this strip, heating it, which in turn (because of the different heat coefficients of the two bits of metal) bends the strip, breaking the circuit until the two pieces of metal cool down again, turning the wipers on. In a similar manner, if you talk to a non technical person about correct network configuration for too long, their brain will get warm and you may even hear a slight click before their eyes glaze over - similar to the one you heard in your head when the words "heat coefficient" were used above.
- **People don't care about network management - not unless it affects them intimately.** By intimately, we're not talking about slow porn downloads - although no-one likes it when a picture takes so long to download that you forget you even clicked on the thumbnail. Meanwhile, a user rocks into your office with a config question, and while you're explaining the virtues of the correct subnet mask something really, really nasty slowly appears behind your back (and by really, really nasty we're not talking about the Osbourne family).

So it's up to you - and you alone - to manage the network. Network management, like security, is a journey, not a destination. As a professional, you'll want to create a reliable and robust network - one that you can be proud of and one that will be the envy of small third world governments (ie Leeds City Council). Up against you are management and beancounters, who'd also like you to achieve this - only by converting all the old 10 meg hub kit, via "magical firmware upgrades" to switched gigabit. For 10 quid.

The clearest division that can be explained to a manager without the "Empty Bag" light coming on is that "The network" comprises of two main network 'buckets' - inside the Company and Outside the Company. Inside the Company costs money, Outside the Company, not so much money.

Once this has settled in their minds, you start putting things into the buckets. Porn belongs in the Outside the Company bucket (unless you're a highly privileged user, in which case it resides wherever you can carve out a chunk of space that no-one's ever going to look at). Things like the company's financials system, file sharing, the distal offices, etc., go into the Inside bucket. (Avoid topics like WAN, VPN, Wireless and Telephony like the plague, because they'll just muddy the water for no real benefit).

Once those ideas have gelled, you're going to have to talk components.

Cabling

To-the-desktop and between-devices, speed is particularly dependent on cabling, which should be a fairly simple affair. It goes in, it's patched around the active equipment, it never has power outages and for all intents and purposes is a static part of your infrastructure. Though:

Cat 5E .vs. Cat 6

These days it seems that every man and his cable monkey are installing Cat 6 to the desktop with a view to the future when gig to the desktop will be standard. (See 10/100/Gigabit to the Desktop below). Chances are by the time you're in a position to use the advance capabilities of Cat 6 you'll find:

Your cable has been damaged by the hordes of cable monkeys who've:

- tromped all over your cable, making it fail test
- cable tied it to cable trays, making it fail test
- bent it about the place like an old serial line, making it fail test
- laid power or control cabling alongside it, making it fail test
- installed stacks more Cat 6 on top of it, compressing it, making it (you guessed it) fail test.
- What you thought was top quality cable was in fact a third world knock-off (complete with "genuine" cable marking and boxes, which wouldn't have passed test in the BOX).
- Your cabling warranty isn't worth the ink used to sign it
- You probably should have run fibre.

The basic rules of thumb are:

- Get cables installed by someone who does data cabling for a job (and has done for some time) not as a pastime or sideline. Electricians are generally not considered to be cabling "professionals".

- Get a warranty (not worth anything, but keeps your cabling contractor honest) complete with pre and post build testing. Keep the test results.
- Make sure your comms risers aren't used for anything else. Ever.
- Copper and fibre bandwidth are always increasing. If you can put fibre between comms rooms, it's probably a good idea. You'll end up upgrading transceivers as opposed to running new cable, but it's worthwhile. It MIGHT even be more robust than the copper.

Active Equipment

Switches vs Hubs

When you've got your budget cap out and are looking to install network hardware, your average beancounter is going to show you the 8 port, 10 Meg hub advert in *Geeky Accountant Weekly* for 10 quid (with a MTBF measured in coffee breaks) and insist that it's a better investment than the 800 quid, Gigabit uplink, 100 Meg, fully managed switch that you're proposing. He will tell you that it makes much better financial sense to hugely over-purchase the former units, managing faults by simply swapping faulty units with service spares. Sure, you'll remind him of the cost of network outages, but this won't stop him being prepared to argue Reverse Total Cost of Ownership with you for a very, very long time. Long after, everyone in the beancounter dept will stop wondering when he's coming back from his impromptu holiday AND what that awful smell coming from his locker is.

Routers .vs. Switches

Don't try telling a manager about the layer model - it confuses them and wastes your time. What you should do is compare it to a model which they might understand, i.e. road traffic. A switch is traffic lights, which lets people in the correct lane go into the corresponding street. A router is a policeman, who does the above, but also notices that the car three back is the Queen's Roller and treats her with priority. He lets her drive on the footpath and run over pensioners, which is why routers are more expensive and hubs are like driving in Italy.

10/100/gigabit to the desktop

Show me an everyday user, outside the graphics processing community, who actually TRULY, NEEDS 100 Meg to the desktop and I'll show you a user in need of some radical, non-volatile reprogramming with a heavy object. Yet strangely a large number of users are under the misguided impression that if they get it - or better still - Gigabit to the desktop - their machine will boot instantly, browsing porn on the internet will work with the speed of a Powerpoint presentation, today's e-mail will arrive yesterday and they'll be the envy of everyone in their workplace.

In reality, bottlenecks are rarely in the final, to-the-desktop, hop. More often than not it's a piece of kit two or three hops from the user's box - i.e. their next door neighbour "backing up" their MP3 stash to a server on a different LAN segment, a 24 port hub that has been forgotten about in their local comms room, or a core router with the backplane speed of a ZX81.

Network security

Security at any level is a balance between making things easy and making things hard. At the end of the day your users will want transparent access to the things they need to get to, whilst simultaneously having protection from everything that they don't want to get to and everything they don't want getting to them. So long as it's convenient, everyone's happy.

The actual act of securing a network is a simple process and takes about 10 minutes, tops - 1 if you accomplish it using power switches. Securing a network so that it's easy for users to access the resources they want and still be protected will take the rest of your life. Everyone is an exception.

Monitoring tools

One of the first choices you're going to have to make when you have a network in place is how to monitor your network. You can do this empirically (i.e. by analysing the speed, response and jitter you get in multiplayer LAN game) or you can use one of a number of tools which analyse your network performance on an ongoing basis, raising alarms in response to adverse effects. I personally prefer a hybrid approach (i.e. I play games until there's an alarm, click the 'Silence Alarm' button and continue till the end of the round) which has all the benefits of both approaches to network management without the hassle of getting up out of your chair. When used in combination with fully managed network devices, the hybrid approach might even ensure that you could 'work' in a locked room for a whole shift, only getting up for toilet and food breaks.

Monitoring tools are great - if used sensibly with finely-tuned granularity (i.e. is it worth waking up for 1 user driving their network port at 60 percent or 100 users all driving their network ports at 60 percent? Or should you just tell your monitoring tool to reboot the network core silently?)

QoS (aka the new big thing)

With the emergence of VOIP, people are no longer satisfied with small bursts of large capacity, and instead want a constant, jitter-free stream of data so that their phone conversation to the next office doesn't resemble a toll call from a dalek in Darwin. To do this, your kit is going to have to understand and respect QoS and priority of traffic, and, most importantly, be up to the task of passing the volumes of data around that the users are used to. Meaning your management task is going to be a little more high-profile than the Boss wanting to know why his SI daily swimsuit calendar always pauses at chest height.. And, as your users can't call you to tell you how crap their phone conversation is, they'll be banging on your door, whining about how they said "Sell" but their broker distinctly heard "Buy", and how they now own a 98 percent shareholding in Chernobyl fine foods, etc etc. None of which you want cutting into your pub time...

So, maybe it's time to be reading those network management tomes you got the company to buy because they were the right weight to hold the Computer Room door open to air condition your office...

The Bastard wants to know - are you just a tad too geeky?

Do your neighbours shy away from you?

10 March 2004

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

It's a sad but true fact that civilians just don't understand the life of a technical person. You know, you've seen it - someone asks you why their machine is so slow to start and before you've even got to the part about the fundamental flaw in Microsoft's supposed defragmentation code, they've got the expression of someone who's just realised that it's not a dream and they really ARE at work in their underpants.

So we all know that it's hard to talk to non-geeks - they're just, well, so slow. But are you talking above their level? Are you laying on the technospeak a little thick

1. You're filling out a bereavement card and the most appropriate phrase you can think of is:

- a. Sorry to hear about your loss
- b. My thoughts are with you and your family
- c. You're in my prayers
- d. Sorry to hear about the SIGKILL

2. You're making smalltalk with your sister to pass the time and decide to enquire about her kids. You would say?

- a. How are the children?
- b. How are the young ones?
- c. Things going well with the offspring?
- d. What's the status of your detached processes?

3. The punchline to your favourite joke is:

- a. Don't call me wooden eye...

- b. I'm a FRAYED KNOT!
- c. Because it was STAPLED TO THE CHICKEN!!
- d. And the vicar said, that's not a 166 Front Side Bus!!! Haaaa ha ha ha >plop<

4. You receive your change at a supermarket and respond to "Have a nice day" with:

- a. Yes, You too
- b. I sure will
- c. Thanks
- d. Thanks 1E06

5. You're on your deathbed with friends and family around you. Your last words would be:

- a. The horror! The horror!
- b. The million dollars I embezzled from the company is hidden under the >urrgh<
- c. Rosebud
- d. End of Job. Runtime 80 years, 17 days, Av CPU 11%, Resources freed

6. You walk in the door after a hard day at the coalface. You say:

- a. Honey, I'm home
- b. I'm Home
- c. Computer, Lights on. Computer, TV on
- d. Computer, I've just returned from the work function with return status 0

7. You're at a meeting when nature calls. You make your excuses by saying:

- a. Excuse me, I have a quick phone call to make
- b. Sorry, I'll be back in a couple of minutes

- c. Sorry, have to make a rest stop
- d. Just got an urgent download of the old brownware

8. Your child wants to know about the birds and the bees. The best method to use is:

- a. Full and frank explanation
- b. a., with anatomically correct dolls
- c. Avoidance
- d. "When two processors in an SMP machine fully synchronise their memory management..."

9. You've met someone special and brought them home for a romantic dinner. To set the scene, your selection of audio accompaniment is:

- a. Barry White
- b. Air Supply
- c. The Carpenters
- d. The keynote address of the third annual Linux symposium

10. You meet some people at a company do. To start the conversation rolling, you ask:

- a. So, what about this weather?
- b. What are you lot up to for the weekend?
- c. Which department are you from?
- d. Guess how much RAM I have in my PDA?!!!

Scoring

I would think it was fairly evident, however:

Mostly A: You're the normal sort of person, fit in most places and with most people

Mostly B: A touch geeky, but who isn't

Mostly C: A bit more geeky, but nothing that can't be forgiven.

Mostly D: If there were two of you, you'd form a Vaxcluster. STAY AWAY FROM NORMAL PEOPLE!

The Bastard wants to know ... how's your computer theory?

Are you a classical scholar or someone from the coalface?

06 April 2004

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Some of us - and I'm not naming names here - had a 'classical' education in computing. They read all the Computer Science course notes about apps development, took advanced courses in Database optimisation and normalisation and generally got A passes in every course they took at University.

Others of us worked for a living - and in the course of that work, picked up, with the benefit of years of trial and error at the rockface, the skills needed to become leaders in our field. And, along the way, were exposed to some of the pieces of computer theory that permit us to join civilised conversation with the theoretical classes. But do we know enough? Test yourself now to see if you have what it takes to lecture computer science 101!

1. Moore's law states that:

- a. Processor speed will be twice as irrelevant to desktop performance every 18 months
- b. Twice as many days pass in 18 months as in 9
- c. Computers will halve in price every 18 months
- d. Manager's IQ will halve every 18 months till they reach amoeba-stage, at which time they're promoted.

2. The Software Life Cycle is Generally accepted as being:

- a. Analysis, Development, Testing, Deployment, Operation and Optimisation.
- b. Development, Testing, Deployment, Operation
- c. Development, Deployment, Operation
- d. Purchase, Deployment, Poor Operation, Punishment of the Innocent.

3. It is generally accepted that adding people to a late software project will:

- a. Briefly delay the project while new members come up to speed
- b. Moderately delay the project while new members come up to speed
- c. Moderately delay the project while the project aims and definitions are reevaluated
- d. Severely delay the project while the murder investigation caused by (c) progresses

4. The 80/20 rule of software projects states that:

- a. 80 percent of a project is completed in 20 percent of the time, with the remaining 20 percent taking percent of the time
- b. 80 percent of a software project is routine and consumes 20 percent of the programmer's time
- c. 20 percent of a software project is funky, innovative and interesting code and 80 percent is the sort of crap you would pass on to an intern
- d. 80 percent of a software project team will get caught up trying to get out of the maze in dungeon and forget all about what they're supposed to be paid for.

5. MTBF is generally calculated by:

- a. Averaging out the optimistic expected lifetime of a piece of kit
- b. Averaging out the pessimistic expected lifetime of a piece of kit
- c. Using the average observed lifetime of a piece of kit
- d. Throwing a dart at a dart board and adding "Years", "Months", "thousands of hours" to the number

6. ITIL is a industry standard to ensure:

- a. Best practice in computing projects
- b. Continual re-evaluation of best practice in IT
- c. The future of the forestry industry

d. That those people who didn't top themselves filling out forms in ISO 9000 will get another crack at it...

7. The effectiveness of a Cache is generally determined by:

- a. Ratio of hits to misses
- b. The ratio of Hits to Misses divided by cache size
- c. The delta of response times with the cache on and off
- d. The number of porn sites in squid's top-requested items list.

8. Data transfer bottlenecks which have the most impact on a company are generally seen between:

- a. Processor and L2 Cache
- b. L2 and Main memory
- c. Memory and Fixed disk
- d. Technical Staff and Manager.

9. In programming, major variable names should be:

- a. Linked to their purpose, i.e. timesinceupdate
- b. a. using case for readability, i.e. timeSinceUpdate
- c. As short as possible whilst retaining purpose & readability, i.e. tmSncUpdt
- d. As near to possible to system constants, functions or variables to obscure their purpose and make the code difficult for third parties to maintain (enhancing job security) , i.e. x, time_const, systime

10. Shared Memory Symmetric MultiProcessors have observable diminished performance expectations when:

- a. Sufficient processors are added to increase the impact of memory lookasides

- b. A non-threadable application with processor affinity is used
- c. The application is sufficiently compact, and the machine so lightly loaded so as not to take advantage of multiple CPUs
- d. All support phones are engaged and a really good cross-company multiplayer game is underway.

Scoring: How did you fare?

- a. Yes, you're the wingnut we're probably looking for at geekschool. Well done!
- b. Good, but I wouldn't start sending those resumes out yet...
- c. Ok, you've got what it takes to lie your way through an interview and/or teach at nightschool.
- d. There is next to NO similarity between your answers and those which would be supplied as answers in a theoretical exam. Still, you don't work in the theoretical world, and as such, you're on the money. Feel free to print yourself a fake MCSA and CCNA!

The BOFH's guide to ... comms

Be prepared ... but not terribly prepared.

23 April 2004

By The Bastard Operator from Hell

Being in the market for comms kit is a little like being an extra in the movie Caligula - you know you're going to be screwed, you just don't know where, when, how many times, by whom, or what with.

Apart from that though, it's pretty much plain sailing because comms, in one form or another, has existed since the dawn of man.

In fact scientists (well, the sane ones anyway) generally agree what the world looked like ten thousand years ago. Dinosaurs roamed the earth, Polar ice caps were larger, and I was using a common Visual 100 terminal, at 2400 baud.

The Visual 100 was a great piece of kit, and I used it looonnnng after it's sell-by date because it had the sweetest keyboard and a much larger screen than the Digital follow-up box to the VT100, the VT200. But I digress. The real beauty of the Visual 100 was that it could (arguably) do 19200 baud better than the VT100, particularly if the lifts (on the same power circuit as the multiplexors) were running.

Back in those days, "comms" was a serial cable network installed in the form of a huge web-like lightning attractor in every building you could gain access to, even if it meant drilling holes through the odd, structurally-integral part of a building.

But that era, like the building with all the holes in the supporting beams - and the machine that the lightning attractor was connected to - are long gone.

In a world where WAN doesn't mean toll calls, wireless doesn't mean non-networked, and building safety inspections are commonplace, relics like myself can often feel a little out of their depth when confronted with the myriad of communications solutions available to them.

Thank goodness I say, that we have, for example, Telco companies to explain how to achieve significant savings on our interoffice network traffic by implementing the new functionality, which is available on the front of the barrow that they're pushing this week.

And the technology seems so good you'd be a fool not to implement it! The conversation, typically, goes something like:

Telco: So how are things going?

You: Good, good

Telco: And your distal offices?

You: Yeah, great

Telco: Only we've got a customer quite a lot like you who's moving from the traditional land-based connectivity to wireless access over their mobile phone.

You: I'm not interested

Telco: No, no, of course not because your system is up and running sweetly, and there's no need for you to achieve impressive savings on rent, etc., by reducing the amount of office space you require by having a portion of your distal staff working remotely.

You: Uhhhhhh.. No.

Telco: No. I mean lets take your city offices - you'd only be paying, well say 50 quid a square foot for office space, so it would be ludicrous to spend 100 quid a month on a cellphone solution

You: Why?

Telco: Well obviously you like to spend money on offices, desks, extra load on your tea making facilities, etc.

You: How much will it cost me?

Telco: No, no, like you say, you don't need this! You're happy being screwed by your landlord and staff alike.

You: I still think I'd like to...

Telco: ..Increase your office space as you take on new staff, instead of having seasoned veterans with a track record of working well without supervision out in the field generating extra revenue for you and your company whilst simultaneously improving client relations?

You: Ok, let's try it!

Telco: No, like I said it was a company like yours and that trial is over. To do that now would involve a reasonable setup fee....

You: But the savings would pay for it wouldn't it?

Telco: You said it!

You: Ok, where do I sign?

. . . one month later . . .

Boss: So we bought 100 new cellphones with PC interfaces?

You: Yes, to save money on office space

Boss: Office space that we signed a 6 year lease commitment for. And then we signed up to a data-plan which says we'll pay the Telco a flat rate for mobile data traffic up to 2 megs a month... per phone.

You: Yes.

Boss: Which none of our staff are using.

You: No, but there are savings to be made.

Boss: How, exactly?

You: >long, disturbing, pregnant pause to consider your job prospects for the future< I've never liked you. Or your wife.

. . . two weeks later . . .

You: Spare some change for the price of a cup of coffee.

But don't misunderstand me, it's not just Telcos who need to be watched - in a world where ubiquitous connectivity, and increasing bandwidth requirements, are making bigger waves than processor speed, communications solutions are being marketed with even more vigour than before.

Connectivity is the issue, as companies are always looking at ways to reduce the costs and constraints of the physical world - most commonly unnecessary travel, lack of mobility and office space.

Travel Why on earth would you spend hours travelling all the way to a meeting in Leeds to call someone an uncultured git, when you can do it over a videoconferencing link in minutes? (Or hours, if you give them a chance to collect their thoughts...)

Lack of Mobility When you're a senior management person, you don't want to have to crawl around under a desk at the business centre of an airport looking for an RJ45. You want to be connected now! And when you hop aboard your lear jet and on a chance whim want to know what Jennifer Anniston is wearing RIGHT THIS MINUTE, you don't want to have to phone someone - you want to be able to see it yourself on your laptop in at least 16bit colour. (And save it for later if it's especially naughty).

Office Space Why have workers come all the way into work each day to consume your costly office space when a far better plan might be to get them to telecommute into work, relieving you of the financial burdens of furniture, Health and Safety compliance, lunchrooms etc. Better still, it's their spouse who catches them watching porn for 8 straight hours instead of Marjorie from accounts who had to have three weeks off with Post Traumatic Stress disorder the last time she wandered into an office without knocking... (Apparently she still just mumbles "The horror, the horror" at the IE banner)

But comms used to be so simple - For telecommunications you'd call the sole vendor tell them what you wanted. They'd go away on holiday for six or seven weeks then came back (if they remembered) with a figure on a piece of paper which they said was what it would cost to do. Depending on the complexity of what you were asking, that figure might bear some resemblance to an extension number down the hall from you, a house down the street from you, or a call to a phone booth on Saturn, relayed via the pakistani embassy.

LAN networking on the other hand, was simpler still. You could have a network connection anywhere you could run a cable to, so long as you observed the length limitations of the cabling by only overextending the network by 15%. (What the hell, they probably built in a bit of leeway).

These days it's not so simple. You tell someone you want a dedicated line between two offices and they start talking traffic protocols, compression, lag, etc., at you, when all you want is a simple pipe where you pour something in one end and it flows out the other.

Is a simplistic view of technology too much to ask?

So if I'm not going to be paying attention to the underlying technology, it must mean that someone, somewhere has a large parcel of brains which they're dedicating to the task. And those people are seriously bright! I mean you or I might go to the pub and talk, increasingly vocally (and inaccurately) about the reality show which neither of us watched on TV last night, but THESE people go to the pub and talk things like flux budgets, routing latency, protocol expansion etc., which can really make you start wondering if it's time to hit the books to protect your career (it's not). True, there is a small consolation in the fact that they're probably just as unlikely to score with their geek speak as we are after our 10 pints of heavy - even with their enhanced salary - but that's still cold comfort at closing time when the kebab shop beckons.

And so, because you're a geek, you sort of get tractor-beamed into their conversation from the other side of the room against your will by some chance accident. (I.e. You wander up to the bar to buy the next round, bump into uberwingnut and while apologizing, get dragged into a conversation on a topic that you know as much about as you could scratch on the back of an aspirin with a crowbar)

>bump<

You: Sorry about that mate.

They: No, no, my mistake entirely, I was getting a bit excited about Next Generation Internet.

You: Yeah, no, I never was a Star Trek fan - not even in the original form.

They: ha ha, but seriously, don't you think Dark Fibre will change the face of communications bundling?

You: Dark Fibre? You mean the Star Wars sequel is out?

So the choice is simple - not pull, get paid poor money and laughed out of your local, or get paid reasonably well and be a comms wingnut.

There's no question really, is there?

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How to get an upgrade, BOFH-style

BOFH 2004 Episode 1

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It's upgrade time again - like it always is when there's money laying about the place not being used - so I scan down the long list of complaint frequencies and pick the HR database server performance problem from near the top of the pile. I love upgrades!

In a word, crap! A ZX-81 with tape drive could almost give better performance than the server concerned, and it's easy to see why - all the money was spent on the chassis, not the internals, to give "room for expansion" which never occurred. With a single processor, 128 megs of memory and a single hard drive, it's all rather depressing. Something should be done.

"But it doesn't NEED an upgrade!" the Boss burbles, trying to hide the executive edition of the mobile phone and accessory brochure he's been looking through. "Anyway, we don't have the money!"

"Well as luck would have it, the beancounters misaddressed the finance reporting output, and it appears that our cost centre is over twenty thousand quid under spent this quarter - due to under-spending in the last quarter."

"Really?" the Boss asks. "How did that occur?"

"We put it down to the fact as that your predecessor was on life support for so long that he didn't have time to fritter money away on 'tat' like cellphones, handsfree kits, etc", I respond.

"Ah. And how much do you expect this upgrade to cost?"

"The HR Database server - uuuh, I dunno, not a lot. Maybe five k in processors, a couple in memory and another couple for disk and RAID card. Under ten?"

"Which would leave the remaining ten thousand for..."

"Projects which you consider strategically important," I respond, playing his game for him.

"Well... I **suppose** it might be in our best interests to address this," he grudgingly admits, "so long as your budget figures are accurate and you obtain written quotes."

"No sooner said than done," I say.

A statement which turns out to be bollocks.

"And the serial number of the machine is?" the vendor's sales droid asks.

"373847201B."

"B's not a number," he comments.

"It's on the panel at the back, beside the 'S', stroke and 'N'," I reply.

"Well it must be an eight!" he snaps back, oozing condescension.

"Not unless your eights have flat sides."

"Ah, so it's flat both sides?" he asks, thinking digitally.

"No, just the left. ONE flat side, you know, like the letter 'B'."

"The configurator isn't going to like it - it only expects numbers," he warns.

"Tell you what, why don't you punch it in anyway to save me popping down there and punching something myself?" I ask, testily.

"I... uh... >clickety< Well look at that! It **did** work. So, it's a quad box, four processors and a gig of RAM."

"It's a quad **capable** box, one processor, 128 meg of memory."

"That's not what it says here."

"But it **is** what I'm looking at here - I have the box with the lid off in front of me."

"I think you'll find it's got four processors. The configurator is never wrong! Big things with heatsinks on them, and fans."

"Yes, there's one of those. And in the other three slots are some proprietary looking cards with some active components on them instead."

"With heatsinks on them?" he asks, not wanting to give up too soon. "Told you the configurator is never wrong!"

"No. Just small cards."

"Screw-in cards?" he asks.

"No, not PCI cards, just cards," I sigh, putting the cattle prod battery pack into the charger.

"Well let's just skip that. What would you like?"

"A quote for three more processors the same as the original, two gig of memory in 512s, a high performance Ultra SCSI 3 Raid card, and four 15k RPM 36 gig Ultra SCSI 3 disks."

>clickety< "OK, you can't get processors for it, because it's full."

"It's got one processor."

"Yes, but the configurator says it's full."

"Tell it it's not."

"We can't. But we could do a field uninstall, but then it would automatically charge you three hours' engineer time for the uninstall."

"Tell it that the client will do it."

"But you'll void your warranty."

"It's not ON warranty. Besides, I've got the cover off and I'm not certified, so I think we've already crossed that bridge."

"Oh. Well >clickety< it'll only remove ALL four processors, unless we trade the processors in."

"Do that then."

"But you haven't got processors!" he blurts.

"Yes, we have, the configurator says so!"

"But you told me you didn't."

"Yes, when you mentioned the trade-in option, I just realized that they were."

"They can't be, they don't have heatsinks on them!"

"They will by the time your engineer gets here..."

"He'll never accept them - he'll know they're processor bypass cards!"

"Would this be the same engineer we normally get whose specialist technical field is lifting?"

"I..."

"So, we'll trade the four PROCESSORS in on four faster ones. And we'll trade the gig of RAM in on two gig."

"You said you had 128."

"No, no, it was a gig, I'm sure of it now!" I cry.

"He'll count it."

"I'm sure he will, and will not find me lacking. In fact, he can take as many SIMMs as he likes from the big bag under my desk."

"I think you mean DIMMs," he responds.

"Like your engineer is going to know."

>sob<</p>

"Is that all then?"

"No, I'd like to buy a Raid card and four disks."

>clickety< "We can only give you three - that's all that will fit into the machine."

"With ten slots in the front? Oh, how many disks have we currently got?"

"One."

"I think you're lying. And while you can lie to me, I don't think you want to lie to the configurator..."

"I... seven disks," he sniffs.

"Lets trade them in on four new ones. And a Raid card. Now, what's all that going to cost me?"

"Well, with... *trade-in allowance*... one thousand three hundred and forty quid."

"Really. It seems a little steep. Can I trade in anything else from my box?"

"That's all you have!"

"So of the eight PCI slots, there's nothing I can cash in on?"

"No."

"I think you're lying. Tell you what, configure me up the cheapest ten meg PCI NIC card."

"OK." >click<</p>

"What's the total?"

>clickety< "1380."

"Givvus another."

>tap tap< "1420."

"And another..."

>clickety< "1460."

"And another..."

>click< >click-click< "You can't, the configurator won't let you."

"Why?"

"Because the bus is full," he sighs, knowing he's trapped.

"What's in the box?" I ask.

"Five high-spec graphic cards with 256 meg."

"AGP Cards?" I ask.

"AGP 8s, yes."

"And how many AGP slots does the machine come with?"

"One."

"And so the configurator tells you that I have another four in there somewhere, taking up PCI slots?"

"Yes," he gabbles. "It's because the AGP Connector's right near the first PCI slot, so if you have a AGP card, you lose a PCI slot."

"Ah, and because I have five cards, I lose five slots."

"Yes," he sighs.

"OK, so I'll trade in the five cards and use the on-board video, drop the NIC cards, now what's the total."

"Minus 53 quid."

"Better. Have the cheque sent to me personally would you?"

"You'll never get away with it," he sneers. "They'll find out."

"Course they won't. It's all in the Configurator. And the Configurator's never wrong! Gosh, wouldn't it be **awful** if the we asked specifically for YOU to do the install and you returned to work with a box of old parts - and they started to suspect that you'd rigged the whole thing?"

"Make the cheque out to cash then?"

"That'll do nicely. And put an expedited delivery on those parts will you - I'd like to get this sorted out quickly so we don't have to upgrade another of your servers to cope with the load. We've got an eight-way in the computer room!"

>click<</p>

Now to forge a second quote and get the company cheque made out to Computing Access Support and Hardware (or its acronym) too...

Did I mention how much I love upgrades?

BOFH and the pointless questionnaire

BOFH 2004 Episode 2

Published Wednesday 25th February 2004 12:52 GMT

"Ah... Now I **don't** think you want to be doing that..." I murmur, watching the Boss authoring an online Client Survey form for the masses about things that don't matter. (i.e. their expectations, How they'd like us to deliver them, etc.)

"Really?" he asks "Why's that?"

"It doesn't pay to ask questions! We already know what people want - everything, yesterday. **AND** we know that they're used to disappointment. But if you start asking them what they think we should be doing, you'll just ignite a spark of hope"

"A spark is a good thing!"

"Not when I stamp that spark out with the cold hard boot of reality."

"What?! Why? I happen to think that some of the staff may have something valuable to contribute!"

"To the lengthening unemployment queues, yes. But you don't want them mixing stupidity with technology. That's **your** job. Leave it to them and they'll be recommending that we upgrade to those 'new' voice-operated computers they saw on Bladerunner... .. Oh, and you definitely **don't** want to be asking for any additional comments they might have about IT, the department, or our ongoing strategy."

"Why not!?"

"Because it's a drift net for stupid ideas. Sure, you'll get one or two people who actually give a sane suggestion, but then you'll hit all the dolphins - the people who, because they've been **asked** to contribute feel that they have to contribute - like it's an intelligence test or something. Only they've got nothing useful to contribute, so they start off on some innovative tangent, like if we installed a large plasma screen in reception we could use it to have customised messages of the day for staff and visitors, etc, instead of what it would really be used for"

"Which would be?"

"Security would use it to watch porn movies late at night when everyone's left the building."

"Oh I doubt that. Though the screen itself sounds like a good idea!"

"They all **sound** like good ideas...!"

"So what do you suggest?"

"Let's start with basic concepts. Firstly, the only cavassing of users you should be doing is with a heavy tarpaulin, a stack of bricks and a deep stretch of water"

"Huh?"

Completely over his head. Ah well.

"... When composing a questionnaire, you tailor the questions so that the answers can be made to support whatever it is you're after - sort of like the way they rig election popularity figures prior to the elections and **before** they get rigged at the electronic ballot boxes. "

"How do you mean?"

"What, the elections, the questionnaires or the ballot boxes?"

"Questionnaires."

"OK, as a for instance, say you wanted a pay rise."

"You'd ask if they think that we're paid enough?"

"No! No, if you ask that question, everyone would tick yes, with a few respondents writing '*too much*' in the margins. No, instead you ask something open ended like 'Should the company be paying market rates to retain the services of key technical staff?' to which most people will respond yes. **Then** you go find some IT rag that says that market rates have just risen by 20% in the past year, and pass it to the Head of IT to bring up with personnel.."

"I don't think it's tha.."

"Or maybe you ask the question 'Do you feel that IT doing a good job with the people they have?' with only two answers, Yes and No. All the Yes answers will end up supporting pay rises for the staff, while all the No answers support the requirement for more staff."

"That's ridiculous!"

"Oh Pullllllleeeeeeeze! Say you wanted a larger office. You don't say 'Do we need a larger office?'. You would ask a question like 'Of the two improvements that we have the money to finance this year, which would be of more benefit to the company - buying the a new espresso machine for the IT Administrators, or enlarging technical office space.'"

"And they'd say enlarging offices because they all hate you?"

"No, they'd say enlarging office spaces because they'd think that if they worked it properly they might qualify as 'technical staff' somehow."

"I see your point. But... No... I don't think I want to do that, it's just sneaky!"

"Of course it is! Look, You tell me the results you want and I'll give you a questionnaire that makes it look like the whole building supports it."

"And what's in it for you - You want to take the PR credit for the questionnaire?"

"No - I'm assuming that anything you improve can only be a knock-on improvement for us. I'll put your name as author if it makes you feel better.."

"Yes, I think that's best. Well I suppose what I'd really like to do is...."

Half an hour of rambling later. . .

"OK, Leave it to me!"

Three days and one survey later. . .

"Fantastic!" the Boss burbles, looking over the PFY's shoulder as the results are presented "That question about whether they have confidence in IT Management's ability to deliver service within the constraints of our budget is sure to get us good funding next year."

"Bound to," the PFY responds. "...unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Well unless - and I'm just suggesting this as a possibility - someone misread the question as an indication of a confidence problem instead of an indication of a budget problem".

"Well I don't see how tha... oh."

"Yes, and when you consider that with the question immediately following it 'Do you think that outsourcing IT Staff would improve delivery of services?'"

"And they said No!"

"Yes, which **could** mean that they're happy with the IT Staff, **or** it could mean that they think the poor delivery of services is because of IT Management - who should be outsourced."

"Well I... uh.. Do you think I've been set up?!" he gasps.

"I'd have thought that was obvious in question 23"

"Question 23?!"

"On the second webpage."

"What second webpage?"

"Ah well. Perhaps you'd like to take a couple of moments to collect your thoughts. And personal belongings. Question 23 was 'Who is the weakest link?' with your name .vs. the old mailroom guy - who's one year off retirement, wife just died, and who franks people's personal mail for free."

"Well, I..."

"And speaking of mail, Question 27, asking how offended staff would be at you reading their personal emails - that didn't go so well for you.."

"That's slander!"

"It's only slander if the question said you DID it, this just asks how offended they would be IF you did.."

"There'd have to be a good reason for me to read someone's personal email!"

"Toilet paper theft?"

"What?"

"Question 29. Do you think that cameras in the toilets would prevent toilet paper theft?"

"I.. I.."

"Yes, I know, it's all come as a bit of a shock, but that's how it goes around here. We like our bosses to rollover every couple of months or so - you know, so they don't get stagnant. Why don't I make you a nice cup of tea while you wait for the howling mob?"

...

Told you it doesn't pay to ask questions.

BOFH and the cyberchair

BOFH 2004 Episode 3

Published Tuesday 27th January 2004 13:41 GMT

So I'm relaxing in the office when the Boss has a loneliness attack and decides to come visiting. I know it's loneliness because he hasn't brought the wadge of paper he generally carries with him to remind him of what he came for.

"Just... ah... checking to see how things are going at... er... Mission Control. As it were..." he says, gesturing expansively about the room.

"Fine," I respond, "business as usual."

"And your assistant?" he asks as he sits in the PFY's vacant chair.

"Oh, he's out and about getti--"

"My, these are nice chairs!" he sighs, getting comfortable, just as the PFY arrives.

"Yes, they're the new Ergo 3000s," the PFY comments. "Full lumbar, thoracic and cervical support, built-in infrared linked multimedia speakers in the headpiece, servo-assisted adjustment, and full recline. This model even has the servo interface to your desktop to allow it tilt, roll and rise in response to computer control. They market it as the ultimate in gaming chairs, but we needed them because... uhhhhhm... BECAUSE they could proactively put you into micropause position!" he adlibs. "Do you mind?"

"No, not at all, don't want to interrupt your work! So where did they come from?" he asks. "Might grab myself one!"

"Dunno who the vendor is, but the secretary's got the catalogue in her admin folder," I respond, to the boss' departing back.

. . . Two minutes later . . .

"THEY'RE BLOODY 2500 QUID EACH!" the boss gasps "They're REAL LEATHER! You used the WHOLE of last year's furniture and fittings budget on a couple of chairs!"

"Well technically, we used the whole of last year's and the whole of this years as well," the PFY corrects. "For the chairs we use at home."

"YOU BOUGHT CHAIRS FOR HOME!?!"

"Of course! Wouldn't want to put my back in jeopardy by working remotely on a substandard item - that could cost you a stack in health penalties. It makes financial sense, because if we had to come in to work to use a proper chair to reboot a server - with a three-hour minimum call-out,

overtime, plus travel expenses - it'd only take about five call-outs and the chairs would be paid for."

"But you've used the entire furniture and fittings budget. What happens if someone else's chair breaks?"

"Get it fixed under the maintenance budget?" the PFY suggests.

"I'd use the training budget myself," I suggest. "And justify it by buying an ergonomic chair and saying that you're 'training' their posture."

"No, say it's a Health and Safety item!" the PFY cries. "That's centrally funded and there's always a stack of Health and Safety money for that sort of thing."

"There's no Health and Safety budget left this year, I checked - Sharon says that the money all went into building electrical safety after some incidents last year."

"Oh right - before your time," I concur. "Nasty business. Had to buy a huge box of warning labels to put on most of the building's powerpoints to indicate electricity is harmful and that it's dangerous to put foreign objects into them."

"What, people put all those things into power sockets?"

"Hard to believe, isn't it? Some even said that we'd TOLD them to do it!"

"Did you?"

"Of course not. They were just in shock - jumbles the mind, you know."

"So anyway, there's not enough budget for another chair," the Boss says, getting back to his favourite topic, himself.

"Yes, we know," I add. "We wanted one for the Computer Room Console desk, but the cupboard was bare. Still, can't you use the Management Innovation Budget?"

"Hmm?"

"The MIB - it's the slush fund for Company Managers to invest in 'Innovative' technology."

"I hardly think a chair counts as innovative."

"Neither's a GIS unit for your private car, but the Head of IT got one last week!" the PFY notes.

"Why?"

"Because it's a slush fund - they're always tapped out within weeks of the New Year by people wanting new gadgets!"

"What was the model number again?" the Boss burbles quickly, penny dropping.

I write the model number down, adding an "X 2" to the bottom of the page.

"Times TWO?!?" the Boss asks.

"You don't want to put yourself at risk when working from home now, do you?"

"I don't work from home. I haven't got a machine there."

"And you've never taken a work-related phone call?"

"Well, a couple of times..."

"And you sit down sometimes when you're on the phone?"

"Welllll, it's possible..."

"There you go then!"

Two days later, I notice the TWO chairs arrive in their spanky new plastic wrapping, and wait at my desk for the inevitable phone call.

> Ring, Ring <</p>

Told you so.

"How do you hook these things up again?" the Boss asks.

"Plug the chair into the charger for four hours..." I sigh. "The interface is infrared, so no wires needed after that."

"And what do I do with the coiled wire?"

"The coiled wire?"

"A long green curly wire connected to the arm rests. It says it's an... uh... 'antistatic safety earthing flylead'."

I cast a quick glance at my chair and notice the lead in question still in it's plastic bag, taped under the armrest. Woopsy.

"Just plug it into the earth pin of any power point."

"And which one's the earth pin?"

"Uh..." I say, thinking of how a good console chair would be good. And two, even better...

...

"Any of those warning labels left?" I ask the PFY minutes later, as a high pitched scream punctuates the building...

BOFH and the coffee machine

BOFH 2004 Episode 4

Published Wednesday 11th February 2004 16:52 GMT

"I... I... I'm not sure I'm up to work today," the PFY sighs sadly, staring vacantly in restrained grief.

"Oh for Pete's sake, pull yourself together, man!" the Boss snaps. "We can get past this!"

"I don't think we can..."

"Course we can. It'll be difficult for a while, but you'll get back into the swing of things. Think of the doors that are now open for you to explore new things!"

"I don't want to explore new things!" the PFY sniffs. "Why couldn't you have been more careful?"

"It was an accident," the Boss confesses, "a tragic accident. The sooner we put it behind us and move on, things will stand a chance of getting back to normal!"

"It won't be the same," the PFY sniffles. "It'll never be the same. It's all ruined now. You don't just replace the love and respect of a long working relationship!"

"Get a grip!" the Boss snaps. "It's not like you lost a family member!"

"May as well have..."

"Don't be ridiculous! Family bonds are much stronger than those in a workplace - everyone knows that!"

"You just don't understand..." the PFY sobs.

"You're right, I don't understand," the Boss blurts callously. "It's just a f***ing coffee machine!"

"What's 'just a f***ing coffee machine'?" I ask, entering the break room.

"That is," the PFY responds, pointing at the smoking mess that was a cafe-quality high volume three group espresso machine. "Well, was..."

"What happened?!?" I gasp.

"He broke it!" the PFY sniffles.

"How?!?"

"I don't know, it just stopped working!" the Boss snaps irritably.

"It's a cafe-issue machine - they don't just stop working!"

"That one did."

"Right, I'd better call the bloke!" the PFY says.

"Tell him it's urgent!" I add.

. . . Three hours later . . .

"TWO THOUSAND QUID!" the Boss gasps. "That's ridiculous. You could buy a new machine for that!"

"Not a high volume one like this," the coffee bloke replies. "That's a work of art. Apart from the stuffed pump, dodgy pressure switch and half blocked lines that is."

"I haven't got budget for that!" the Boss blurts.

"Sure you do. It's a small price to pay for a happy energetic workers," I chip in.

"You can switch to instant like the rest of them!"

Even the coffee bloke is stunned by the blasphemy.

"I'm NOT paying 2000 quid to get a coffee machine fixed!" the Boss repeats.

"He's right in a way," the coffee bloke adds unhelpfully. "Most big machines like this are treated well and last forever - well, outside of accidents. But I could line you up with a single group one for about 500."

"A home model?" I snap "That's not even plumbed in! I'd rather use a plunger! What's a new one of these worth?"

"These babies?" the coffee bloke replies, as the car salesman in him takes over. "Anything from four to ten kay, depending on the features you want with them. You can get them with computers in now."

"Really?" the PFY asks, interested.

"Yeah, for those cafes where the waiters use portable computers to take your order. They tap the info in by the time they get to the counter the coffee's ground, poured and ready!"

"I'm not buying one!" the Boss says firmly.

"Could we buy a base model and upgrade?" the PFY asks.

"The computer-controlled model is built on the mid-level three group unit," the coffee bloke chirps, "which is around six kay. The extras are relay controlled valves, conveyor and interface computer."

"So if we built our own interface and just got the valves and conveyor off you..."

"It'd cost around seven and a half."

"With trade in?" I ask.

"Well... it's a bit of a dinosaur, isn't it?"

"Dinosaur? You just said it was a work of art!"

"Yeah, and like most works of art it's old. Seven kay, and I'm doing you a favour!"

"Done!" I blurt.

"I'm not paying seven grand for a coffee machine!" the Boss snaps.

"No, I will. And I'll give the company a grand for the old one!"

"Done!" the Boss chortles.

"But it's only worth 500 as a trade-in!" the PFY snaps.

"Yeah, but I'll buy it under my private company, depreciate it at 30 per cent, then claim it's stuffed, claim tax back on it as a loss, buy the new one, claim THAT as a business expense, get you to whack the computer control on it, build a web front end and charge the hordes a quid a time for coffee which they can order from their desktop and collect from the machine."

I scratch out a cheque and hand it over to the Boss, who takes but a moment to scratch out a receipt before dashing off to get the cheque banked before I can cancel it.

"You're going to do all that?"

"The web coffee thing? Yeah!"

"And the depreciation thing?"

"Nah, it's too much hassle," I say, nabbing the coffee bloke's screwdriver. "How long would it take to source the base model?" >tweak< >tweak< >tweak<</p>

"Couple of days," the coffee bloke responds as we exit and I lock the break room door, snapping the key off in the process.

"Best get that ordered now then!"

"Running all the way," he responds, doing just that.

"What's going on?" the PFY asks, watching me wheel a large trolley in front of the door.

"Oh nothing. Fancy a couple of pints?"

...

Four days and one explosion later.

"So it all worked out in the end," the PFY burbles.

"Yes, the insurance company accepted the claim - apparently the coffee bloke found that the safety release valve didn't operate and the temperature sensor wasn't working, resulting in--"

"The creation of this very convenient servery hole in the wall," the PFY guestures, "and the replacement of your company's computer-controlled espresso machine."

"Indeed. Righto then" >click< >click< "One cappucino, charged" >clickety< "to the Boss' credit card, as Adult Entertainment Expenses?"

"Don't mind if I do!"

>Grind< >Grind< >Whirrrrrrrrr< >CCCCCssssssssss< >Rumble<<p>

BOFH: Interviewing for Helpdesk

BOFH 2004 Episode 5

Published Thursday 19th February 2004 12:40 GMT

Sigh.

Interviewing for new Helldesk types with the Boss and the Helldesk Coordinator is a tedious, timewasting and pointless job and I sometimes find myself wondering why the agency doesn't just cut out the middle man and send us people who've never used a computer before.

As the "technical person", I'm included in the interview process to contrive some tricky questions to determine the person's level of technical expertise. Once that's complete it's then my job to advise the interview committee that the prospective candidate has all the technical acumen of a sack of spanners. Which they then ignore by appointing the person anyway.

It's company policy.

"It's a bloody helldesk position!" I blurt, when the Boss tells me that we're up for **another** set of interviews. "It's not like their experience is going to make a difference!"

"Course it does!" the Helldesk Coordinator argues. "We need someone with experience of the software that our users have - so that problems are resolved in good time!"

"The only skill a Helldesk person needs is the ability to spot idiots!" I respond. "The rest is just tat you can pick up from the other Helldesk people. You know, like how many times you have to rapidly toggle the powersupply switch to open the secret Intel BIOS Easter Egg."

"What secret Intel BIOS Easter Egg?" the Helldesk Coordinator asks.

The fact that there's NO secret powersupply-toggle-activated Intel BIOS easter egg, never was, and never will be only serves to illustrate my key point about the ability to recognise idiots. They come in all shapes and sizes, and are represented at all levels of the IT foodchain.

"Nothing," I reply, faking sincerity badly to ensure at least one loud bang in the department before day's end.

"Well we still need some questions to help us determine his level of expertise, what extra skills he might have, and what sort of offer we make to him," the Boss comments.

"His, Him?" I ask, PC-ly

"Uh, Him or Her," the Boss responds quickly.

I make a mental note to *accidentally* mention this incident to one of the more rampant windup toys at HR for a bit of at-work entertainment later in the week...

...

"So you're wanting something like 'Can you name and explain the FSMO roles in a Windows 2000 Domain Controller?'" I ask later while we're waiting for the first victim to show.

"Pardon?" the Boss asks, while the Helldesk Coordinator looks on blankly.

"FSMO roles. In a Domain Controller."

"Ahh.. I was thinking about something a little, well, more user orientated."

"Without FSMO roles, we'd have no users!"

"Something a user would ask about!" the Helldesk Coordinator snaps.

"Oh you mean like 'What happened to all my files?', 'When are you going to let me out of this tape safe?', or 'Did you just break the key off in the lock?'"

"NO! I mean questions like 'A user is not able to login. What would you look at first?'"

"Ah!"

"But more open ended," the Boss comments, "like 'Can you give me an example of..' questions."

"Of course!" I blurt. "I think I've got the hang of it. Send in the accused!"

...

"Can you give me an example of..." I ask, watching the Boss and Helldesk Coordinator brace themselves, "...causes of login failure."

"Caps Lock down," the candidate replies knowledgably. "Wrong Password, the User's been disabled, they're not logging into the right domain..."

.. Several Interviews later ..

"Well," the Boss burbles. "They all seem to be of the same level to me."

"Yes," I respond. "Reasonably experienced too, which makes a change. They're all so similar it's going to be a hard choice."

"Perhaps not - One more to go," the Boss burbles. "Ah..uum I don't seem to have a name on my pad?"

"Late applicant," the Helldesk Coordinator responds. "HR emailed me the CV earlier this morning. He seemed the cream of the crop, loads of experience!"

"I'll get him in then," I say, noticing the name and wandering over to the door.

...

"Hello," the PFY says, sitting down in the candidate's chair.

"Is this some sort of joke?" the Boss asks.

"What?" the PFY asks.

"You've already got a job here!"

"Yes, but I was thinking of downskilling. And there's a lot of things about the helpdesk that appeal to me."

"Like what?" the Helldesk coordinator asks.

"The ability to sleep on the job, for one. And, I was thinking that I could just record the words 'Have you rebooted your machine?' and put them into an answerphone on my desk to increase resolution times."

"I think you'll find there's a lot more to a Helpdesk role than that!"

"Yes, drinking coffee and looking at porn, true, but I thought I'd just start off slowly and work my into the advanced career options over time..."

"I think this interview is over," the Boss snaps.

...

"So, how do we decide?" the Boss asks when we reconvene later.

"Well, I took the liberty of phoning the applicants and asking them another 'Can you give an example' question, and one candidate stands out head and shoulders above the rest. Number 3, uuum... Mr Watters."

"Really. You're that impressed with his answer?"

"Oh yes, his answer was a lot more than I'd expected and I think he's the man for the job. Told him so in fact!"

"Oh well, I suppose it works out. Ah.. What was the question?"

"Can you give an example of a situation where you bribed an interview panel to get a position?"

"Ah."

BOFH: Infesting the secure comms room

BOFH 2004 Episode 6

Published Tuesday 24th February 2004 17:00 GMT

So it's a site visit - one of those rare opportunities to check out a "superior" government installation on a brand new site which has won awards from those members of the industry easily impressed by colours and lights.

What the hell, it's a couple of hours off work with the chance of a protracted visit to the pub (after a quick spark plug lead reshuffle of the Boss' car).

So we're in.

The sad thing about new installations is that while they look nice and work well, it's the test of time which turns most comms rooms into rats' nests of cabling and pristine computer rooms into stacks of dead and dying equipment. Still, it looks nice in the beginning (before installation rot sets in) and that's when you grab the snapshots that you use in your publicity for years to come.

The Boss, the PFY and I rock on up at the appointed time and wait patiently at reception for the arrival of our host. The PFY takes this opportunity to excuse himself for a rest stop, returning with the slightly greasy hands that indicate a successful major engine timing rejig.

Sorted. Now just to put up with the condescending hour-long monologue... I know I'm not too far off in my expectations when a charcoal-suited bloke strolls over and introduces himself as Karl, the "Installation guru", noting his pride and joy - a monitor at reception showing the computer room in all its glory. I mentally prepare myself for the onslaught of smugness, the trauma of which will hopefully be alleviated by the presence of a couple of attractive female reporters who've also signed up for the tour...

. . Two hours of Powerpoint Presentations about how his installation is much better than everyone in the whole world's...

"And here we have our Comms room," he bumbles, gesturing through a viewing window at a clean new room. "As you can see, full patch by exception frames, Cat 6 cabling in structured cabling retaining systems, linked to dual redundant comms rooms at either end of each floor via twin redundant fibre in purpose-built risers completely isolated from other installation ducting. Full fire protection throughout, external and internal UPS systems, raised floor and full length armoured observation window allowing monitoring from the Control room. And here's the computer room. As you can see, it too has a fully armoured observation window - with redundant aircon, UPS, Fire systems. Obviously we'll fit the glass with a one way film once we commission the room - after the big party tomorrow."

"Party?" I ask, smelling free drinks, food and the chance to annoy politicians.

"Yes, for the opening. The new technology minister, a couple of MPs, some drinks - more of a photo op than anything else," he says, playing it down. "Right, we'll just pop through to the room so you can see some state-of-the-art installation techniques which I think you'll find surprising. Just have to swipe myself through - if you don't mind looking away."

"Not at all!" I burble, turning my back on the door while he swipes his card and types in enough numbers to program the Mars probe in binary.

We traipse into the computer room, and I have to admit that it is impressive.

"See these?" Karl says. "Quick-release sliding rack systems to enable rapid removal for maintenance. Fits all major vendor's equipment. Each rack unit has its own microprocessor controlled reactive venting to eliminate hotspots and power monitoring to indicate equipment which deviates from its normal consumption ... Yes?"

"Just need to pop off to the gents," the PFY murmurs. "Dicky bladder at the mo..."

"Right, press the red release button and it's the door over there," Karl responds, indicating a room off the Control Room through the glass.

"You have a toilet off the control room?" I ask.

"Oh yes. The Computing core is designed to be completely secure and self sustaining for 48 hours. We even have our own kitchen and everything - although the fridges are, at the moment, stocked with the drinks and nibbles for tomorrow."

"Why self sustaining?" one of the reporters asks.

"Terrorists," Karl responds. "This site will be doing some of the top level information processing for various government agencies, and as such might present a target. Anything untoward happens, the operational staff hit any of the emergency buttons in the control area and the three rooms are time-locked from each other and the rest of the building for 48 hours."

"Or until someone breaks through the walls or floors, or takes a hostage to make you open the door..."

"No," Karl burbles happily. "The Computing core is surrounded by three feet of vault-strength concrete, each room isolated from the other by armour glass and one foot of concrete. Emergency doors are three quadlayer isolation slides which lock into place, making the place impenetrable! **AND** you can't take a hostage to force someone to open the doors because all the phones are disconnected. Security has been the watchword for this installation!"

"It certainly seems that way," I say, as we make our way back into the control area, to the assenting voices of the reporters. "Is that a rat?!" I gasp pointing to the bottom of a rack in the computer room.

"It shouldn't be!" Karl gasps, worriedly typing the binary bible into the swipe card reader and rushing back with the Boss in tow. "We have traps in all the ducting!" . . . "No, nothing here,"

he chirps into the intercom after he and the Boss have a good look about. "Must have been your imagination!"

"Must've been," I agree as they wander back to the control room. "Don't worry, I'll get the doo..."

"NOT THAT BUTTON!" Karl screams just as a large armoured door slams shut, appearing from somewhere in the ceiling.

"Woopsy!" I gasp, looking through the observation window at the Boss and Karl's frantic attempts to cancel the lockdown. "How do I reverse it?"

"You can't reverse it!" Karl snaps angrily, "I told you!"

"Damn it!" the PFY snaps, not very convincingly, on his way to the kitchen.

"What'll we do?" one of the reporters asks unhappily.

"There's no need to panic," I respond, taking control. "I've been in situations like this before, and know that panic does not help!"

"Really?" the other reporter gasps.

"Not at all," the PFY replies, coming back from the fridge with laden arms. "Alcohol, on the other hand >ffsssss POP!< does. Anyone care for a glass of Champagne and ... errrm ... a canape of some sort?"

"That's for the opening!" Karl shouts through the intercom.

"Surely you don't expect us to starve or dehydrate?" I respond, tipping liberal amounts into the glasses of the reporters and the PFY.

"What about us?!" the Boss gasps, obviously feeling a little peckish.

"Well it doesn't look good. As far as I can see there's only one waterproof container in the room - which will have to suffice for both your ablutary and culinary needs for the next two days."

"MMmmmMMMM tasty!" the PFY adds turning back to the women brandishing another Moët & Chandon bottle. "Top you up?"

"Bit of a mistake that locking system," the PFY comments.

"I'd be more worried about that camera in the foyer when the thirst sets in," I add. "I wonder if they're taping it?"

"Could we get them a message?" the PFY asks evilly.

"Doesn't look like it," I sigh.

Nasty business these lock-ins.

BOFH: We who are about to dial salute you

BOFH 2004 Episode 7

Published Tuesday 2nd March 2004 11:46 GMT

It's quiet. Damn quiet.

And I like it! Apart from the boredom that is...

The PFY's skipped off to an extended lunch with some woman he was "accidentally" stuck in the lift with for a couple of hours yesterday, and I have the place to myself.

Peace.

Quiet.

Boredom.

>clickety<

>Ring<

"My mail's just come up with an error when I send - is there something wrong with the server?" the user whines.

"I doubt it, mail's still coming and going like it normally does," I respond, looking at the mailer logs.

"Not for me," the user snaps.

"Right, so the problem seems to be isolated to you, which means we should ask the technical fault diagnosis questions."

"You mean like: 'What has changed?'" he asks.

"No, more like: 'Who have you pissed off?'"

"What?!"

"Did you bring a car to work today?"

"Yes."

"Cut anyone off?"

"No."

"Park in someone else's park?"

"No."

"Fail to hold the lift door open for someone with a geeky look about them?"

"No."

"Say something nasty - however quietly and discreetly - about a technical support person?"

"No."

"Laugh when someone else did?"

"No."

"Date someone that a technical support person has had a recent failed relationship with?"

"No."

"Date someone that a technical support person is trying to have a failed relationship with?"

"What?! No."

"Run off at the mouth about some technical standard or the other which you don't subscribe to?"

"No."

"Push in front of someone at the lunch queue?"

"No."

"Push in front of someone geeky looking at the pub?"

"No."

"Spill your beer on someone geeky looking at the pub?"

"No."

"Only shout half-pints when it was your round at the pub?"

"No. And I don't go to the pub anyway."

"You don't go to the pub?! That could be it!"

"What?!"

"Yes, you're right, you're a user and it's next to impossible for a user to offend a technical person with their **absence**. Nope, you've got me stuffed, I have no idea why your mail client's not working!"

"It wouldn't be something to do with the O-something Service pack that the support guy installed this morning would it?"

"By service pack you mean something that looks like a cheap electronic clock with a couple of large waxy sticks connected to it by wires?"

"What! No, he installed something on my computer."

"Right, good point. Open your browser will you?"

>clickey< "Ok."

"Is your favourites tab full of links to porn sites, and has your hard drive been running non-stop since the 'Service Pack' was installed?"

"No, and.. uh.. No."

"Hmm. Perhaps they DID install a Service Pack..."

"That's what I told you!" he whines again.

"Yes yes, well done. What mailer are you using - Outlook Express?"

"No, Outlook."

"Which is updated by the Office Service Pack, not the OS Service pack."

"I...."

"Tricky."

"Yes, but when will I be able to send my email? It's important!"

"Of course it is - all our clients are important to us. Ok, I'll have to give you a call number to track this while I look into it. You'll need to quote this number when you call back, so write it down."

"OK."

"7PQ8339017B," I say, reading the serial number off my deskphone.

"7PQ8339017B."

"No, P."

"7PQ8339017P?"

"No 7PQ8339017**B**"

"That's what I said the first time!"

"Ok, read me what you've got?"

"7PQ8339017B," he blurts.

"Ah, I see the problem, it's 7**P**Q8339017**B**!"

"That's what I said!"

"With one B and one P."

"But not in that order," he says.

"In what order?"

"The BLOODY NUMBER!" he shouts. "7**P**Q8339017**B**!"

"Look, I can see that you're getting a little upset about this, so why don't I give you a shorter number," I say, calmly.

"Right. What?"

"17."

"17," he repeats.

"No 70, 7-0."

"70."

"And that's a shortcut to the first number?"

"Yeah, we don't get that many calls. OK, can you call me back in five minutes?"

. . . Five minutes of relaxation later . . .

>Ring<</p>

"I'm calling about my call."

"Which call was that?"

"Call number 70."

"Seventy? That's not a call number!"

"You said you'd give me a short one, 70!"

"Ah. You don't have the 11 digit one do you?"

"NNGggg.... Yes, I **WROTE** it down. 7PQ8339017B."

">clickety< Ah right, you can't get to the website www.screaminglygaycontacts.com. Huh, there's no username logged against it. Hang on, I'll just put yours in. >clickety<"

"THAT'S NOT MY CALL!"

"Sure it is - it's the number you gave me."

"7PQ8339017B?"

"uhhhhhh, yeah."

"What about 7BQ8339017P?"

">clickety< Ah, user can't send mail. Short call code 17."

"Nnnnggggg... Can you take my name off the other call please?"

"The first call you logged?"

"I DIDN'T LOG IT!!"

"Oh, right. Well, I've assigned it to the helpdesk group, so you'll have to talk to them to get them to cancel it."

"I DON'T WANT IT CANCELLED, I.."

"Just want to get to the website, I know. Although frankly I think you should probably be doing that sort of thing from home..."

"IT'S NOT MY BLOODY CALL!"

"But you gave me the call number?"

"It was the number **you** gave **me** when I logged my call!"

"About not being able to get to the screamingly gay site. Yes."

"No, about my mail!"

"Your mail? What mail?"

"BASTARDS!" he snaps, slamming the phone down.

"Who's bastards?" the PFY asks, back from the pub with a 5 degree lean.

"We are, apparently. Guy's mailer won't work."

"That the user you blacklisted this morning cos you were bored?"

"Probably."

"Service Pack Job?" he asks.

"I think so."

"The CD version?"

"He called you a bastard," I murmur.

"Not the CD version then. Got any clock batteries?"

...

Boredom. The silent killer.

BOFH: Protecting bodily waste in the public domain

BOFH 2004 Episode 8

Published Tuesday 9th March 2004 13:34 GMT

"You're looking pretty cheerful," the PFY observes, as the Boss rolls into mission control.

"Mmmf!" he responds, between mouthfuls of a large apple.

"Mmm?"

"It's this fruit, it's delicious!" he burbles.

"What, the cafeteria's run out of fried lavatory paper?" I ask. "Someone's going to have to update the menu on their webpage!"

"Funny you should say lavatory," the Boss continues, "as that's just where this item came from."

"You nicked an apple from the bog?!" the PFY responds. "That's hardly hygienic!"

"No, this apple is a direct product of our toilet system!" he snorts.

"You nicked an apple from out of the toilet?" the PFY gasps, wrinkling his nose.

"NO! No, the company signed up to a sustainability and reduced ecological impact initiative a couple of years back, and this is one of the outcomes!"

"How?"

"Simple. For the past two years we've been sending our effluent to one of those biodome things as a raw product for their planting system."

"We've been giving them crap?" the PFY asks.

"For want of better wording, yes."

"So does that mean we're giving our clients a break?" I ask, rhetorically.

"AND THE OUTCOME OF THIS," the Boss continues, ignoring me, "is fruit and veg, free for the taking, in the cafeteria!"

"So let me get this straight," I ask "You've been giving my excrement away to people."

"It's crap!" the boss responds.

“It’s MY crap, and I work long and hard choosing the products to eat to make it high yield fertiliser.”

“It would’ve got sent to the bloody sewer system anyway,” the Boss replies.

“If I so choose to release my products to the public domain, so be it. However, if you take something which is mine, which I created, and give it to another – well that’s theft!”

“Yeah, sure,” the Boss snaps wearily.

“I thought about it, and created it, it’s my intellectual property!”

“I doubt it!”

. . . three days later . . .

“What the hell is this?” the Head of IT snaps, crashing into mission control, waving a piece of paper.

“A ... piece of paper?” the PFY suggests.

“Well?” he asks, ignoring the PFY and addressing me directly.

“I can’t see from here.”

“It’s a letter from your solicitors, saying they’re going to take legal action against the company – and all the staff in the company who took any of the free fruit and veg earlier in the week!”

“Oh that!” I said. “Yes, about the company stealing my IP.”

“They stole your excrement!” he snaps.

“So you agree they stole it?” I ask.

“No, I didn’t mean that, I meant it was just ... shit.”

“It may be shit, but it was incorporated into a better product without my permission.”

“And so if we don’t.... *purchase a licence to your excrement*... you’re going to sue us.”

“Yes.”

“But we don’t want your excrement – it’s smelly and worthless.”

“That may be the case, but parts of my excrement made up the fruit and veg you took, without my permission. And as I don’t license components of my excrement, just the excrement, you’d need a license for my excrement to own the fruit and veg.”

“It’s SHIT!” he snaps.

“There would be few people in the world who would disagree with you. However, my thought went into its construction, and it’s my intellectual property.”

“It’s SHIT!”

“I’m not arguing with you.”

“OK, how much is the licence?”

“50 quid.”

“FIFTY BLOODY QUID!”

“Yes, now. Course if you wait till after the court case, the price might go up.”

“That’s extortion!”

“I’m not going to argue with you about that either.”

“But what good is an excrement license to me?”

“Well, should you want to use my excrement for something – in the future – you have a license for it. And you can keep eating the free fruit and veg!”

“So what PART of your excrement contributed to this carrot?”

“I’m afraid I’m not at liberty to disclose that.”

“We’ll I’ll tell the biodome to stop using your crap.”

“It would mean a complete cleanup, start from scratch, to remove all the vestiges of my IP from the ground substrate... Very costly. And it wouldn’t help all you people who still have the fruit and veg.”

“So let me get this straight – I buy a poo license from you for 50 quid.”

“At today’s prices, yes.”

“And you allow me to keep eating free fruit and veg.”

“Yes.”

“And if it transpires that you used a toilet that didn’t empty into the storage container, but into the sewer instead would you refund me?”

“Well no, because you bought a licence to use my poo. Contained in that license is the option to use things made from my poo. But you can still use my poo.”

“So if there was none of your poo in the biodome, I’d have paid you 50 quid.”

“At today's prices.”

“Yes, at today's prices, for nothing.”

“No, for the license to use my poo.”

“Right, well I'm not paying.”

“Well, I guess I'll see you in court.”

. . .

“Are you really going to take them to court?”

“Depends on how much money I get outside of court. If I get a lot, I've lined up a private investor who'll buy all the rights and then charge an annual support fee.”

“If not?”

“Dunno, I might settle for a couple of pints and a pickled egg at the pub. So, was that a pear you were eating yesterday?”

“You bastard.”

“I don't think Bastard goes anywhere near to describing the unmitigated scum sucking, bottom feeding toerag that is me. But hey – who knew shit could be worth so much...”

BOFH: Protecting our backs from litigious attack

By [Team Register](#)

Published Thursday 11th March 2004 10:54 GMT

Letters special It's not often that the Vulture Central Letters Directorate allows *Reg* reporters and contributors to bathe in the warm glow of praise.

This is not because the hacks don't occasionally knock out a half-decent piece, but rather to protect management against aggressive claims for more money/suite of offices/personal assistant, etc.

However, in the case of Simon Travaglia's recent [BOFH: Protecting bodily waste in the public domain](#), we've decided to make an exception. Let the plaudits flow, starting with Dan Shadix:

That just might be the best thing I've ever read. Truly awesome.

And there's more, from Marcus Giles:

You owe me a new keyboard... ;-)

That was the funniest piece of work ever.. well done mate.. well done indeed :-D

The US loves BOFH too, especially Kevin Curry of Virginia Beach:

I just linked to your article through a Slashdot user comment. "Protecting bodily waste in the public domain" is brilliant!

And now that I've clicked your email link and see that you are a New Zealander, I love your work even more. :^)

What that means is anyone's guess. Of course, there's more to the latest BOFH than meets the eye. That, at least is according to Jos Osborne:

<Round of applause>

Never have I seen the Litigious Bastards situation so well put.

I congratulate you sir.

Litigious Bastards? What's that all about? Let's ask Jeff Asselin:

Nice jab at SCO. It's a shame most people won't even get the point, but well.

Jeff, you'd be surprised how many people did get the point, or at least as they saw it. Tim Bowden demonstrates:

I like to read the BOFH's on el reg as they are amusing, but this one had me ROFL. It has SCO down to a T.

Sam Christie also thought he had the point, and was prepared to be a little more explicit:

Pure brilliance. BOFH #8 is simply genius. You got off calling SCO an "unmitigated scum sucking, bottom feeding toerag". I wish all media outlets had the balls to do that. Keep up the good work!

Those readers who are none the wiser should look no further than recent *Reg* articles on the massive [SCO IP punch-up](#) which has seen the software company file law suits against various outfits, DaimlerChrysler included. This particular suit primarily revolves around SCO's accusations that the company put bits of Unix Systems V code into Linux, thereby gang raping its intellectual property. You get the idea.

However, in this case, BOFH fans are seriously misguided. Simon Travaglia has asked us to point out that BOFH is an entirely fictitious character and - in the tradition of the best TV disclaimers - that any resemblance to any individual company, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Right, that's our arses covered. Let's end with the one lone criticism of this particular episode, courtesy of Fazal Majid:

Shit is worth far more than 50 quid, 550 pounds per tin, as a matter of fact:

www.telegraph.co.uk

www.miami.com

Duly noted.

BOFH: Enforcing the excremental IP

BOFH 2004 Episode 9

Published Tuesday 16th March 2004 13:22 GMT

So my plan to extort money from company staff under threats of legal action is coming along nicely. The case is fairly open and shut in that the staff consumed food grown with the aid of my excrement, which was in turn used without my knowledge or approval.

As I later revealed, my excrement is the 'fruit' of considerable intellectual effort, both in the selection of food of varying types, and the amount of lager to accompany it so as to reach it's full nutrient potential.

As expected, the weaker staff caved in almost immediately to my threats of legal action and bought licenses to use my excrement. The rest of them though, are waiting to see how things go, so it seems a couple of examples need to be made...

...a day later, the Boss and the PFY aren't happy.

"But I paid my license fee in pints!" the PFY snaps, annoyed, whilst scanning the content of my lawyer's letter.

"If that were true, you'd have a license certificate, surely."

"What, you actually **printed** license certificates for the use of your excrement?!" the Boss asks.

"Of course! What sort of vendor would I be if I didn't issue license certificates?"

"I paid!" the PFY snaps.

"Alright, have a license document," I say, handing over a tastefully printed document headed with a three letter acronym recognised in the computing community as being synonymous with excrement.

"You can't prove that **I** had any of the fruit or veg that has your IP in it!" the Boss blurts, placing his summons on my desk.

"You may be right," I say, "but I'm sure that a quick subpoena would sort everything out."

"Subpoena?" he asks. "What for?"

"Just a sample of your DNA - to prove that you now contain some of my IP."

"It won't show anything!"

"Oh, don't worry, I'd subpoena your tissue again if the first test was inconclusive."

"And keep on doing it until you find something I suppose?"

"Oh no. No, we only get two cracks at it - unless you've got three testicles"

"WHAT!"

"Yes, Well you realise that if you've absorbed my IP, any children you have would have to be licensed, and of course the only way I can prove absorption would be through your reproductive organs."

"That's preposterous!"

"I have the documented opinion of a couple of medical experts."

"You bribed them!"

"No," I lie. "If I'd bribed them, they'd say that they needed both your testicles to start with, and if any IP were found you'd need to be subjected to six months of female hormones to cleanse your system. Hmm, I might just make a quick phone call...."

"Do you take cheques?" the Boss asks, snapping like a twig.

"Of course. Made out to 'BIP PLC'."

...

As with all good plans, the PFY is there to throw a spanner in the works...

"Course..." he says, once the Boss has left, "I'd need my share."

"Of what?"

"Your IP - for my unpaid consultancy."

"When?"

"When I diagnosed the non-solid portions of your IP."

"?!"

"My opinion on your flatulence. Beta testing if you like. You altered your food intake in response to my diagnosis. Therefore not all the development credit is yours."

"And?"

"And so you owe me credit for what you call 'your' IP."

"?"

"Your product was modified in response to the feedback I gave you! Say I'd licensed some software off you, it was complete and utter crap - the stuff that all your clients couldn't WAIT to be shot of when something - ANYTHING - better came along. For instance. Hypothetically. Now because it's so crap, I'd be placing service calls to you to report the faults in your product, which would, in turn, cause you to alter your product in some way. In effect if you've actually modified your code in response to my service call, which means I'm helping to shape your product with my diagnosis. Now unless you had a contract with me that expressly stated that any problems I logged with you would become the property of your company, I would in fact be owed some compensation for helping to develop your software."

"So you're saying that by pointing out how smelly I am, you deserve a share of my product license fees for helping to develop it?"

"That's what my lawyer tells me," the PFY says, handing over an envelope.

"So you're suing me for a share of my excrement!"

"In a nutshell - to be O'Relily-like" he chirps.

"You bastard!"

"However, I will bring something tangible to the party."

"What's that?"

"I won't tell anyone that the supermarket down the road put you up to this, AND, I do believe that you could claim your food, drink and toilet paper as business expenses."

"Oooo yes," I blurt, penny dropping.

"So I take it I'm a 50 per cent shareholder in BIP PLC?"

"Ah... 25 per cent, and the company will shout you curry and lagers - for research purposes."

"Done!"

BOFH: Hitting the savegame panic button

BOFH 2004 Episode 10

Published Tuesday 23rd March 2004 14:36 GMT

Some days I just look at my Inbox and feel uninspired. Stacked ahead of me are the dull and mundane tasks that'd bore **anyone** with an IQ higher than their pants size. You know the sort of thing: "Can you install a printer driver on the server?", "Can we get more disk on the Homeshare machine?" etc.

So, at times like this, I like to take solace in something comforting.

>clickety..< >tap< >tap!<

>rustle< >tap!< >tap!<

"Bugger!"

>tap< >tap< >TAP!< >BASH!<

"What is it?" the PFY asks.

>BASH< >BASH!< >BASH!!!<

"The bloody VMS machine has crashed!"

"Is it still switched on, then?"

"Course it's bloody switched on!"

>tap< >tap<

"This calls for drastic measures!!!" >clickety<

>clickety<

. . 10 minutes later . .

"The HR Server is down!" the Boss burbles, ripping into Mission Control.

"No, no, it's fine," I say calmly.

"It's down. I've had three calls about it!"

"Yes, I've had a couple myself, but the server's up. It seems that it's got some... uh.. legacy.. application.. integration.. codedependencies..., which have upset it's network connectivity."

The PFY looks up at the unnotified use of the excuse calendar but remains silent.

"What does that mean, exactly?"

"It's plugged into the old VMS machine - which died this morning."

"Which one's that?" he asks, peering through the observation glass in the door.

"The big one in the middle."

"The one that looks like a big fridge?"

"Yeah."

"Oh. Have you rung the engineer?"

"No - it's not under maintenance."

"It's not under maintenance! Why not?!"

"Too expensive, I guess."

"Well can you see if you can fix it?"

"Nothing I can do - I left my hammer at home."

"Well can't you call someone out?"

"I could, but it's liable to cost money, so I didn't think you'd want to..."

"THE BLOODY HR SERVER IS DOWN!" the Boss gasps. "IF it's not up by midnight tonight the bank authorities won't go out and people won't be paid! It'll be bedlam!"

"Oh," I say, faking enlightenment. "So I should just get the engineer out?"

"Too bloody right."

"They'll need a Purchase Order Number."

"I'll get one to you - meantime, ring!" the Boss responds, exiting stage left.

...

"Since when has the HR system been linked to the VMS machine?" the PFY asks as I look up the VMS support company.

"Since the VMS machine crashed this morning!"

"No, that was you disabling the HR server's switch port."

"Yeah well, I needed to raise the priority of the fix!" I respond fervently.

"Why?"

"Because my dungeon savegame is on it!"

"Your dungeon savegame?"

"Yes, my dungeon savegame, WHICH I HAVE BEEN PLAYING FOR THE BETTER PART OF TEN YEARS!!!" I snap.

"Are you still playing that? Didn't I give you a map for it years ago? You should be through it by now!"

"That's cheating," I respond.

"*sigh*. Didn't you back your game up to tape?"

"Course I didn't bloody back it up to tape! It's a VMS machine! The internal drive failed about FIVE years ago. And even when it was working it had the error-free capacity of half a floppy!"

"So why didn't you get it fixed?"

"The machine's not on maintenance!"

"Why not?"

"Nothing runs on the box - Apart from my game of dungeon."

"So you're saying that we have this huge system which consumes GOBS of power, 1.5 square metres of extremely valuable computer room floor space, and has a lower processor spec than my cellphone - all because you want to play a game?"

"Not '*a game*', dungeon!"

"Which is a game.."

"No. Soltaire is '*a game*' - Ureal Tournament is '*a game*'.. Dungeon is.. an experience!"

"Yeah, yeah, I played Zork."

"Zork's a spinoff! It's the Angel to dungeon's Buffy!"

"Uh huh," the PFY adds, looking at me sadly, "And you didn't ftp it somewhere?"

"It's only got UCX installed."

"Ah, so no networking."

"No."

"And you're going to make the company pay for an engineer just for a game?"

"Uh-huh," I say, as the helpdesk answers...

. . . Two hours later . .

"We don't get many urgent calls," the Engineer blurts "Not any more leastways. Time was we'd have urgent calls from dawn till dusk, but these days you'd be lucky to get a couple of calls a week, and as far as URGENT calls go, I think the last one of THEM we got was about six months ago when..."

I shove some earplugs in before I lapse into a coma and motion him into the computer room. That's the problem with old engineers, they get called out so rarely they have to get over their Robinson Crusoe Syndrome by talking incessantly...

Like a true engineering professional he wanders around the machine for a couple of minutes mouthing things like "Interesting" and "Hmmm" before resetting the breaker handle at the rear of the machine, at which time the machine hmms to life.

"Just the breaker popped," he burbles as I pull the earplugs out, wandering around the front of the unit and opening the front panel "Sooooo.., that should be the lot, so you'll just be up for about 350 quid. Can you sign here?"

"Three hundred and fifty quid - just so you can play a game?!" the PFY blurts.

"Ah, it looks like a little more than that" the Engineer interrupts, looking at the console output, "I think you've lost the userdisk as well - probably stiction, maybe a headcrash."

"Ooooh, that's your savegame down the toilet!" the PFY smirks unkindly.

"The savegame yes, but not the game itself - installed in SYSEXEXE."

"What, you're going to start again from the beginning!!?"

"If I have to."

"Tell you what," the engineer blurts. "I got a couple of refurbished spares in the car with me - disk crashes are a VERY common occurrence in kit of this age. In fact ... >burble< >burble<. . ."

. . .

"TWO BLOODY GRAND!!!" the Boss cries. "What the hell for?"

"Power supply problem and a disk failure," I respond.

"And our HR system is dependent on this?"

"It won't come up till it's fixed," I reply. "Although I think I know a way to remove our dependancy on the kit."

"Before midnight!?"

"No, but before tomorrow - if my assistant and I... worked... on it.. all night."

"So you'll get it running before midnight and decoupled by morning?"

"I think we can," I respond, looking up the Gourmet Pizza Parlour in my address book. "But you're looking at maybe 12 hours, double time, times two people..."

"If it works, it'll be worth it?" he asks. "What sort of planning do you need to do?"

"Well I just have one document that I need to familiarise myself with," I respond, pulling the PFY's dungeon map from out of my filing cabinet. "But apart from that it'll just be hard slog..."

Funny how we get our inspiration, isn't it...

BOFH: Taking the fight to the beancounters

BOFH 2004 Episode 11

Published Thursday 1st April 2004 09:56 GMT

"Didn't we just DO an inventory?" the PFY asks, looking through the pages of items which we're going to have to find and account for.

"Yes, but that was an internal inventory - for the IT Department. This one's for the Beancounters."

"And the difference is?"

"Our internal inventory simply consists of us ticking off items as we locate them. The Beancounter inventory requires us to enter the serial number of the piece of kit with the supplied inventory number and description."

"Why?"

"To reduce the chance of 'shrinkage'. See, they check the serial number we supply against the one in their database - if they don't match, they know we've made it up and the piece of kit cannot be found."

"And?"

"And then they recommend a full and complete audit, A-Z of our equipment, complete with lazy beancounter overseer to sight every item and make sure it's legit."

"Ah."

"So, I suppose we'd better get down to it. Item 1. Alpha box, Inventory number 101211."

"We haven't got an Alpha box."

"No, I pushed it into the dumpster about 18 months ago during a cleanout, but couldn't be stuffed filling out an asset disposal form. So we'll mark that down as **missing**."

"Won't that mean we'll have to have the A-Z audit."

"Oh no. You need your 'missing' items. They'll expect something to be missing, and what they'll do is look at the unit's book value - which will be zero after all these years - and decide not to pursue it."

"Ah, right."

"Next. Anamorphous Solar Panels, two."

"On the roof of my flat."

"Missing."

"But we only bought them last year - they'll still have a book value!"

"Indeed. And the beancounter will think - the lazy bastards couldn't be bothered getting up onto the roof. Next Dell Server, 6600, four. Inventory numbers 330765, 330766, 334189 and 334190."

"Computer Room," the PFY says "First one: HZT881S."

"That's the service tag. They'll want the serial number, as that'll be what's in their database."

"Oh. 39170708416."

"Slower,"

"391 ... 707 ... 084 ... 16"

"**39170708416**, Right. Next one?"

"391..."

. . . and so it goes, box by box . . .

"Tape Drives, six, First Inventory Number 288907."

"Wow!"

"What?"

"Look at the serial number on that baby!"

"That's not the serial number, that's a dump of it's BIOS firmware!" I blurt hopefully. "I'm not writing that down! What is that, 70 characters?"

"...sixty... three," the PFY says, gazing intently at the number concerned "I think.. I might have lost my place there."

"Ok, **DAMAGED**."

"It's not..."

>CRASH!<

"Yes it is."

"You can't break them all!"

"True, we'll have to use the old list."

"The old list?!?"

"Yeah, the photocopy of the list we did last time."

"Last time?"

"A couple of years ago."

"If we've got a list, why are we doing this?!"

"Just establishing an alibi," I respond.

"?"

"The Boss has seen us in the computer room all morning, so when we're away all afternoon he'll think we're inventorising the kit in the comms rooms, etc., instead of at the pub."

"Ah!"

"So what do we do about the stuff we've bought since the 'old list'?"

"We just change the entries in the beancounter's database to be whatever number we think up at the pub this afternoon."

. . . two days later . . .

"Just a couple of things," the beancounter auditor chirps, reading down his clipboard. "Solar Panels, two - you say they're missing."

"Yes," I reply. "We turned the place over looking for them. Probably stolen."

"Did you check the roof?"

"The roof?"

"Yes, where solar panels normally live."

"Oh yes, you're right. That completely slipped my mind!"

"Next, these tape drives - you list their serial numbers as... **3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and Damaged.**"

"Is that what it says on the sheet?" the PFY asks.

"Yes."

"It must be the case then - we copied it off the units."

"But no-one would use a single digit serial number!"

"They might if they only made 10 of them," I point out. "Anyway, don't you guys keep records of serial numbers from the store when the kit arrives?"

"Yes."

"And?"

"Well the database has single digits too, but there must be some mistake."

"So you're complaining that our records match yours?!!!!"

"I... Well that's not the point. I mean look at this! >shuffle< UPS, Standalone. Serial Number: K-N-O-B,F-A-C-E."

"Yes?"

"It spells KNOBFACE!"

"It doesn't *spell* anything!" I cry. "It's a serial code. SERIAL. The UPS before it was K-N-O-B-F-A-C-D, the one after it was K-N-O-B-F-A-C-F. It's just random. We were just lucky."

"And I suppose... The UPS 20KVA really has a serial number of ALLBEANCOUNTERSARETOSSERS."

"That's what's on the machine!" the PFY replies.

"And the one before it was ALLBEANCOUNTERSARETOSSERR, and the one after it was ALLBEANCOUNTERSARETOSSERT?"

"Probably," I say, "If it's serial. Maybe the makers just didn't like beancounters?"

"I want to bloody see it!"

"It's in a secure area, I'm afraid, we can't possibly allow it."

"We'll see about that!" he snaps, grabbing my desk phone and punching out some numbers.

...

A couple of minutes later the Boss trundles in.

"I've just been talking to the Head of Accounting," he says officiously, "and this man here is to audit ALL equipment with any query against it. You are to provide him with COMPLETE access to sight this equipment so that he can verify it's serial and inventory numbers."

"I see," I respond. "Fair enough. What's first on the list?"

"Solar panels!" he snaps.

...

"... all a terrible accident," I say to the Boss as the ambulance pulls away. "He bent over to read the serial number and slipped. Six floors into the recycling bin!"

"We're very lucky all the cardboard was in there to break his fall," the Boss blurts.

"If you say so."

"He says you pushed him."

"That's just the shock talking!"

"He said there were no solar panels!"

"Ridiculous! He's had a bump to the head."

"I tend to believe him."

"You take his word against one of your employees! I'll take you up and show you if you like!"

The Boss eyes the bin with the newly "compacted" cardboard briefly.

"No, I think that will be OK..."

"What about you?" I say, to the Head of Accounting.

"I... ah.. think everything is in order."

"Because while I was up on the roof I found some more of the missing kit, and would you believe it, the serial numbers of all those are, coincidentally 'ALLBEANCOUNTERSARETOSSERS' too. I mean, what a coincidence. Would you like to check?"

"No, no, I'm sure you're right."

"Right, well, I'll have someone send the paperwork up to you this afternoon then?"

BOFH: Stuck on the 6.01999th floor

BOFH 2004 Episode 12

Published Tuesday 20th April 2004 12:04 GMT

"What do you mean, generic replacement?" I ask, thinking very unkind thoughts about the stores person.

"It's a substitute... for the part you ordered."

"It's not the same!"

"According to the system it is!" the stores bloke burbles.

"It's not!"

"But the system says they're the same - it must be a vendor substitute part."

"Is it THE vendors substitute part, or the substitute part of a third party vendor?"

"Well, a third party one, I guess. But it should work exactly the same as the power supply you want it to replace."

"Tell you what," I say, realising that this could go on for some time: "Why don't you pop up here and we'll show you the problem."

"I guess so," the stores guy says, knowing full well that he was employed a couple of days after the last time this phrase was used...

Ten minutes later, he's up in Mission Control, and unless I'm very much mistaken (which rarely occurs) he's got a dictaphone running in his pocket.

Sigh.

"OK!" I snap, "Let me show you what I mean. Over here, we have the dead power supply which came out of our box, and over here we have the replacement power supply. Does anything strike you as different about them?"

"Well the new one is smaller I guess."

"Indeed. Allow me to demonstrate!"

I slide the supply down the rails, wiggle it around for a bit until the contacts line up, then push it home.

"It plugs into the machine!" the stores bloke comments.

"Leaving a large hole along one edge."

"Couldn't you just cover it up with some tape?" he suggests helpfully

"Perhaps in the technological equivalent of the third world, yes, but in the real world, no. So how about we get the part we ordered?"

"Well it's like this," he starts "I enter your part in the system and it finds a cheaper alternative and automatically chooses it. I'm not allowed to chose anything else."

"You wa?" the PFY asks, horrified.

"It's the new financials system - it does everything for you. I just enter the number required and the shipping requirements" he sweats.

"I see. Thank you for your time"

. . one hour later . .

"It's a vendor substitute!" the Beancounter tells me, after I point out the fly in the ointment for the second time.

"It's **A** vendor substitute, not **THE** vendor substitute," I repeat.

"Yes but it must work exactly the same way!"

"It provides the same power, but it's not the same unit - so it doesn't fit properly."

"But it does the same job!"

"No, because an element of the power supply is cooling, and if it doesn't fit properly, the cooling doesn't work."

"It doesn't say 'Power supply **and cooling**' on the description," he responds.

"Ah right. So if it doesn't say it in the description, then it's not supposed to do it?"

"Obviously. I mean if it was meant to do cooling, they would call it a 'power and cooling unit' and probably charge us more for it."

"So we can't get the right power supply?" the PFY calls from across the room.

"The ordering system will choose the cheapest alternative. Perhaps you could get the original vendor to change the description of that part and give it a new part number?" he adds helpfully, not realising that the chances of getting a vendor to change a part number are lower than the Titanic's golden rivet... "That way there wouldn't be a substitute part."

"Or maybe we could just override it this once?" I suggest.

"Oh no," he blurts chuckling at the thought, "We have a policy of not overriding the system - it sets a bad precedent you see."

"So nothing's going to happen till we get the vendor to change their part number?" I ask.

"It's like you read my mind," he replies smugly.

...Later that same day....

>Ring<

"Systems!" the PFY blurts, slapping the phone on hands free as soon as he sees the calling number.

"There's a problem with the lift!" a familiar voice echoes tinnily.

"What's that then?" the PFY asks.

"It's stuck on the 6th floor!" the voice responds.

"No...." the PFY responds, tapping away on the lift interface. "It's stuck on the 6.01999th floor."

"What?"

"It's on the 6.01999ths floor. It's slightly overshoot the top floor."

"Well can you get it to get back down?"

"Hang on, I'll get Simon."

..The PFY and I finish our game of poker...

"Hello, Systems."

"I'm stuck in a lift on the 6.01999th floor."

"We haven't got a 6.01999th floor!" I reply.

"That's what your assistant said, we'd overshoot or something."

"Hang on." >clickety< "Ohh yes, so you have. That was silly."

"What do you mean? It's not like we chose to go there!"

"True."

"Can you get us down?"

"I'm not sure I can. You see it's described as a 'Lift', not a Drop or a Fall."

"What?"

"You're in a Lift, i.e. UP. I could call the service company, but they might say that if it were meant to go down as well as up it would be called a 'Lift **and Fall or Drop** or something'."

"What?!"

"See, it's lifted you, like it said in the description of the device - so technically, if the lift did anything else, it would be in the description and they'd charge more for it - like that power supply we had this morning."

"Oh. It's you."

"Now I **could** ring the lift company and ask them if they'd change the description of this unit so that it's clear that it goes both up and down - but that's liable to take some considerable time."

"Or we could just get out the escape hatch," he snaps.

"Ordinarily, yes, but when you're at the absolute top of the shaft the proximity of the motor prevents the escape hatch from opening - uh - so I've been told."

"Look just make the thing go down will you?" he says, a touch of angst creeping into his voice.

"You mean **override** the system?" I ask "Because we have a **policy** about overr.."

"ALRIGHT, I'LL GET YOUR BLOODY POWERSUPPLY."

"Really? Would you?" I gush "That would be fantastic! Now what about on all future lift trips?"

"What?"

"Well if you could permanently override the purchasing system for us, I **think** I might be able to override the lift system for you...."

"And if I don't agree I'll be stuck here forever?"

"It's like you read my mind!"

BOFH: The enemy at the gate

BOFH 2004 Episode 13

Published Tuesday 27th April 2004 11:04 GMT

So we've got someone on the network who considers themselves a bit of a 'leet dood' hacker.

I notice when IDS starts throwing up portscans stepping through our IP address range one at a time.

"He's not even bothering to disguise it..." the PFY remarks drily, pointing at an IP address allocated to one of the lesser machines in beancounter central.

"Yeah, AND he's using a desktop machine, not a service kiosk, which would have obscured the trail a little bit."

"Really? I prefer turning off Mac-Address change warnings on the router then use a networked printer's address."

"Sneaky," I comment.

"Yeah. So what's he doing now the scan has finished?"

>Clickety<

"Hmmm. Looks like he's testing rootpaks against our main web server."

"We're still running Apache on it aren't we?" the PFY asks worriedly.

"No no, 'secure' IIS."

We laugh a bit at that one, and continue watching. As if..

"Ah! Now he's switching to ftp vulnerabilities.. ... and now back to the portscanning again."

"So not much of a threat?"

"Not as yet. But bear in mind, once he gets into the Beancounters' area with their requirement to administer their own 'servers' it's going to be intrusion city Arizona!"

"Should we warn them?"

"Yeah, I suppose so."

"Give their geek a ring?"

"I was thinking more of pings-of-death on their older unpatched machines.."

... Several crashes later...

"There's something wrong with the network," the Boss blurts, bumbling into Mission Control.
"The phones are going mad!"

"Yes, it seems we have a hacker..." I say, pointing at the IDS console.

"It looks like he's using a prepackaged kit to attack our servers in a pseudo random manner to avoid detection," the PFY adds.

"Aren't you going to stop him?"

"Ordinarily yes, but we'd like him to get in somewhere so that we can eavesdrop and see what he's looking for."

"How?"

"We'll activate the remote snoop client on his machine."

"Remote snoop client?"

"Yeah, we fudged their install media to always install the snoop client. Just to... uh.. help them diagnose problems... if they ask us."

"So they don't know that it's installed on their machines?"

"No."

"Do you install this remote stuff on **everyone's** machines?" the Boss asks.

"What would be the point of that?" I respond, dodging the question so as to avoid putting a quid in the 'lie jar' that the PFY and I recently installed.

"Shouldn't we be calling the police?!" the Boss asks.

"What for?" the PFY asks. "It'll just be some wingnut down in Finance who's watched that movie *Wargames* one too many times in his childhood and believes he can use the system to trigger a nuclear incident if he tries really hard."

"Which of course he can't," the Boss finishes.

"Well..... probably not. Well 95 per cent certain," the PFY responds.

"You don't sound too sure."

"It's difficult - I mean he might be quite intelligent, he might have outside help, or he might just have beginner's luck."

"So do you know where it's coming from?"

"Yeah, down in accounts. From the IP number I'd guess it's over in the far corner, near where that new guy is."

"New guy?" the Boss asks, forming a theory.

"Yeah, what's his name..... Almed, Amal" the PFY replies, dropping a quid in the lie jar with a >clink<

"Amal," I say. "Remember, he came up to introduce himself. Arab guy, new to London," I say, adding a quid with another quid.

"I... uh..." the Boss says, not wanting to say it.

Honesty, it's just too bloody easy sometimes, and at this rate the jar will be full by lunchtime.

"What.. uh.. does he do?" the Boss asks.

"Something in accounts I think he said," the PFY says >clink<

"Yeah," >clink< I add. "But he needed to borrow a laptop for the time being because they didn't have a machine for him - hey, maybe that's the machine he's using!"

"And you checked his ID."

"WhatID?" the PFY asks.

"His company ID."

"You have to be here for a couple of weeks before your ID's made!" I say.

"Well did he have a swipe card?"

"Uuuuuhhhh, no, I think I let him through the door." >clink<

"Right. OK," the Boss chirps irrationally, trying to gather his thoughts while pacing excitedly
"Right! This Amal chap, what did he look like?"

"Hard to tell. Normal I spose, Tall, strong?"

"Strong."

"Yeah, he was carrying his bag like it was nothing. Huge bag, canvas thing. Green." >clink<

"Khaki, not green," >clink< I correct. "One of those army surplus things that flooded the market after the Gulf W..."

>slam<

. . . two hours later . . .

"Well it was all a bit of mistake," I say, to the Head of IT as the Boss is taken away for a bit of questioning. "It seems that someone down in Beancounter Central was running a Nessus scan across our hosts - without telling us, mind - which looked to all intents and purposes like an attack from inside the company. Meanwhile my assistant and I were talking about a movie that we'd seen sometime, and he must have mixed the two together in his head." >clink< "Unless of course, he had some other reason for calling the Antiterrorism people. "

"He's often said that he doesn't like the way Microsoft always chooses the American way of spelling," the PFY adds with another >clink<

"So the whole thing was a big mistake."

"Yeah. Well, 95 per cent certain..."

BOFH: Beware Mad Ron bearing Linux

BOFH 2004 Episode14

Published Tuesday 4th May 2004 14:31 GMT

"Yep?" I ask, as the boss rolls into mission control with a perplexed expression on his face.

"It's my machine," he says, "Got a bit of a problem accessing the I.T. Management share and I need to pick up this month's budget figures."

"And you're logged into your machine ok?" I sigh, looking vainly around for the PFY to palm this off to. Worst luck tho', he's doing some urgent installs in some new racks so I'm lumbered with the responsibility.

"Yes."

"And your network cable is in?" I ask, knowing the boss's habit of kicking cables out.

"Yes."

"And how do you open your share?"

"With the 'run' option."

"And what do you type?"

"\-\I-T-S-E-R-V-\-I-T-M-G-T," he spells, slowly.

"And does nothing?"

"No, it gives an error message."

"OK," I sigh, knowing that this is the quickest way back to peace and quiet. "I'll come take a look,"

. . 1 minute later, in the Boss' office . .

"You're running Linux!" I gasp.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because it's more advanced!"

"In what way?" I ask, prepared to be pleasantly surprised.

"Well, it's developed by thousands of people!"

"So was the Black Death, but that doesn't mean you want to expose yourself to it!"

"Yes, but it's the latest version!"

"And YOU installed this yourself?"

"Yeah. Well, with a couple of pointers from Ron."

"Ron?"

"Yeah, you know, the electrician guy."

"MAD RON THE SPARKY?!"

"Yes..."

"And you took the opinion of a fat bloke in shorts over that of your desktop support person?"

"You say desktop support are crap!"

"Of course they're crap, but they're a hell of a lot better than Ron!"

"But he says he runs Linux at home ok!"

"And his home bears a resemblance to our office how?" I ask, sarcastically.

"It's similar. He's got his own LAN!"

"That just proves he's SAD with no mates!"

"Well I think this Linux thing is worth looking into! AND I'm going to save a bomb in license fees!"

"Not when the company's got a site license you won't!"

"Well, Linux is more secure!"

"You're behind two firewalls protecting you both from the Internet and the rest of the company, AND you WERE on automatic update for both Apps and Antivirus definitions. A vanilla Linux install is a potential minefield!"

"Well it's... got a nice look-and-feel!" he says, really grasping at straws now.

"I'll put the swimsuit picture onto your windows background" I say, realising a pivotal argument when I see one.

"Would you?" he asks, problem solved.

Sigh...

"So... What else did Ron recommend?"

"Well he gave me a couple of sites to download some useful Linux applications from.." the boss responds, hesitantly.

"Tell me none of them ended in .nl or .fi ?"

"Uh... well... maybe a couple."

"Of course" I sigh, pulling his network cable out of the wall after just realising that the activity light on his NIC hasn't flickered OFF at all during our conversation... "And what were these backdoors to bring the company to its knees - I mean useful applications - going to do?"

"Uhhh... filesharing for music, cheap phone calls on the internet, and speed up downloads," he suggests.

Sigh.

>thinking<... >thinking<

"Ok, so here's what I think we'll do: We'll get the desktop support team to recover your machine from a backup, remove your CD drive to reduce the risk of this happening again, have Ron's legs broken - after making it look like an accident - and forget this ever happened."

"I don't think that w..." the Boss simpers.

"Or alternatively, I could track the source of the virus which is most likely running rampant around the company - to your desktop machine - tell the Head of IT how it occurred, and watch on as you're escorted from the building... Your call!"

"Ok," the Boss sighs. "But you weren't serious of breaking his legs..."

"Of course not" I respond "That's a hardware job. I'd get someone else to do it!"

"I..."

"Only joking. We're not that brutal. No, I'll just give him a quick talking to about how we in the IT department are responsible for technical advice and how he's responsible for changing fluorescent tubes and scrubbing toilets when the cleaner's sick."

"Changing lights and installing powerpoints," the Boss adds.

"No, like I said that's Mad Ron - A. He's colour blind and B. he's been electrocuted more times than the Northern Line. We contract out our real electrical work for Health and Safety reasons."

"No, he installed those powerpoints in the server room two days ago because you'd said it was a rush job..."

"No, he's not allowed in the computer room after that time he slapped his current tester across the UPS to determine what it's maximum output would be. It took 1/2 a day to bring the room back up."

"Oh."

"Oh?"

"Well, he said it was a rush job to put some racks in and so I let him..."

!!!!

Come to think of it, the PFY is taking rather a long time with that install....

...

BOFH: Frying the PFY

BOFH 2004 Episode 15

Published Friday 14th May 2004 11:21 GMT

It's not good.

I find the PFY flat on his back in the computer room with all but one of the telltale signs of electrocution (The missing sign being that he hadn't annoyed me in the recent past).

Using my rudimentary knowledge of First Aid and for once forsaking the medicinal properties of liberal application of the cattle prod, I keep him stable until the ambulance arrives. (After disconnecting the newly-installed rack from the power, of course)

One of the benefits of my long career in computing 'support' is that my location is a prerequisite for the ambulance drivers' [Knowledge](#) so they're usually fairly quick to respond to calls.

The PFY comes round before the ambulance gets there which is a good sign, however because of the nature of the accident the ambos tell me that it's best that he spends a night or two in the hospital under observation, getting some tests done. They seem somewhat surprised that he managed to survive what would appear to be sustained contact with the mains supply, but I tell them he's probably built up some immunity to the ravages of voltage over the years. I forgo the luxury of riding in the back of the ambo with him however, choosing instead to pick up some essentials for his stay.

Crisis over, my thoughts turn to voicing my displeasure.

"It's just another crap cost-cutting measure by the company!" I rant at the Boss as he drives us to hospital. Halfway there I realise it would have been quicker if I'd gone with the ambulance, however I'll probably get a second chance at that if the Boss's driving doesn't improve quickly...

"Well in this economic climate, savings have to be made.." the Boss sighs, practicing his kamikaze technique on a nearby lorry.

"I can think of one person you could get rid of!"

"As a matter of fact, Ron..."

"**Mad** Ron," I interject.

"...is a registered electrician. A service professional!"

"Registered where?" I ask. "They say he came with the building and that his electrical practical exam involved a kite, a key and a thunderstorm."

"I don't believe that he's quite that old!" the Boss.

"But he **is** crap!" I argue "and everyone knows it."

"He's not that bad!"

"HE MIXED UP THE BLOODY EARTH AND PHASE!!"

"Yes well, everyone makes mistakes..." he says, calmly.

"It's a pretty serious mistake!"

"Well, it's not really his fault though - after all, he is colour blind."

"HE'S COLOUR BLIND!?"

"Yes well, it's... ..an employment issue."

"I agree. He shouldn't BE employed."

"It's not that simple - we can't let him go because that would mean discriminating against someone on health grounds - a move the union wouldn't support."

"So you'd rather have him working there, introducing more health issues?"

"Our hands are tied," he sighs, pulling into the hospital carpark.

...

Three hours later we find out where the PFY is and make our way to his ward. Our numbers have swollen somewhat, with the PFY's latest female companion, a company lawyer and Mad Ron all in attendance...

...

"I have to admit, you seem to be taking this rather well," the Company legal representative says, as a precursor to greasing the PFY to sign away any liability that the company might have for his current condition.

"These things happen," the PFY says calmly, tapping on the ECG monitor "...and no harm done."

"Yes well, it was a narrow shave." Mad Ron says. "Still, you really should check the earthing of equipment before you use it."

"Wouldn't that normally be the role of the electrician?" the PFY asks quietly.

"Some might say, but you should really know better than to just trust anything electrical."

The PFY's "quiet" demeanour has just slipped into the "too quiet category", methinks...

"SO!" I say, sensing danger, "who's up for a coffee then?"

"Not me thanks," the Boss burbles.

"Really? Are you sure? Why LOOK AT THAT, your defibrillator isn't even plugged in!"

"Oh? Get that will you, Ron," the PFY gasps weakly.

"Actually I **DO** feel like a coffee, come to think of it!" the Boss blurts, dragging the Company Lawyer with him.

"Now," I say, as we're walking down the hallway, "I hope that colour recognition will be noted in the prerequisites for the new sparky?"

"What new sparky?" the lawyer asks.

The words are hardly out of his mouth when the lights dim slightly. "Ah, that new sparky!" he continues, without missing a step. "Yes, yes, good as done."

"And my assistant will probably be billing you separately for his... uhmm.. HR consultancy."

"Beg Pardon!?" he gasps.

"Or he could just proceed with the negligence case?"

"Oh THAT HR Consultancy, yes, by all means... so long as it's... reasonable."

"I'm sure that'll be no problem." I respond.

"What's going on?" the Boss asks blankly.

"Nothing - just pretend we're speaking a different language."

"Like English," the lawyer adds unkindly.

So unkindly you have to wonder if he'd make a good operator...

BOFH: One double espresso from meltdown

BOFH 2004 Episode 16

Published Wednesday 26th May 2004 09:02 GMT

A man could go mad in this business.

One minute you're hanging off the front of a mainframe shouting about how you're king of the world - the wave of technology heralding an install which would make even the most hardened geek weep just from the ingenuity, the next moment you've got a SCSI card in your hand, not able to understand how, when you put it into a specific machine, it fails to see the devices connected to it.

You plug the card into another box, no problems, the devices make themselves known as they should. You plug it back into the machine it's supposed to work on, nothing.

When hardware decides to misbehave, it really decides to misbehave.

Unlike the precocious child who will taunt you mercilessly, knowing just how to report the beating they deserve to their school teacher in a manner that will have you in Police custody before lunchtime, hardware is sneaky.

When hardware decides to misbehave, it starts out small. One tiny device doesn't work properly, but everything else is working exactly as it should. You wander in completely unprepared, believing it's a simple dud disk or a loose cable – because lets face it, that's what the statistics would suggest.

In today's case the cable is fine, and replacing the disk has no effect..

I mentally toss up the possibility that it's an addressing problem – something to do with that particular address - and change the address of the drive and probe the SCSI bus.

Another disk disappears.

I take a quick break to clear my rage and grab another coffee while I'm at it.

While I'm there, I realize that the new test address I chose must have conflicted with the address of the newly missing drive.

>clickety<

Then again, maybe not...

“What's the matter?” the PFY asks, blundering into a situation that could escalate out of control at a moment's notice if my temper doesn't remain in check...

I fill him in on the sordid details, the Boss asking me to get the server up, me lightly saying that it would be up in half an hour, tops, and then the myriad of hardware upsets till now.

“So where are you at?”

“A hardware wizard has popped up on the desktop asking if maybe I want to remove some SCSI devices. But it only has a 'Yes' and 'No' box”

“What other buttons were you expecting?” he asks, voice laced liberally with sarcasm.

“The button saying ‘F-ck off. If I’d wanted a f-ing hardware wizard to read my f-ing mind, I would have configured the f-ing thing in the first f-ing place. Only I didn’t get an option to NOT install the f-ing hardware wizard, did I? NO, because someone at Operating System Central thought that everying f-ing one would want a f-ing hardware wizard to make inane suggestions’,” I say.

“Ah THAT button,” the PFY says. “Say, how many double espressos have you had?”

“Three or Four. Why?”

“Well, I just noticed that you were a little – just a little, mind - testy, and maybe it’s time to take a break...”

“Yes, only I’m on a bit of a time budget with this box. Besides, the Espresso figure was only from this afternoon.”

“And how many this morning?”

“About ten I guess.”

“So you’re just taking your caffeine level past the medical definition of ‘stimulant’ into the ‘poisons’ category?”

“Whatever,” I blurt distractedly. “What’s coming up on the monitor now?” I ask holding the cable in a semi-angled position.

>clickety<

“Yep, I can see them 5 disks, addresses 1,2,3,4 and 5.”

“Bingo – it’s the socket in the cabinet!” I say triumphantly. “One of the connectors in the plug must have moved slightly, probably because the cable’s been bent around the place a bit, putting a lot of stress on the socket and forcing open a contact!”

“So how would you see ANY disks on the Bus?” the PFY asks

“Simple” I say smugly, knowing my experience in this particular field is far superior to the PFY’s own. “The pin concerned is one of the addressing pins.”

“And so how come you had another drive disappear?”

“The physical stress which caused one pin on the connector to fail has most likely caused another to become intermittent.”

So simple when you know how. I put all the disks into a new box and throw out both the box and the old cable, just to be on the safe side.

“Up she comes!” the PFY says, powering up the disk box and rebooting the machine.

“And?” I ask, pushing in front of him.

...

“No disks found!” he gasps.

...

“So how’s that server going?” the Boss asks, wandering in after what he believes to be a safe interval.

“It’s a hardware problem.” the PFY says “uh.... >flick< >flick< Transient Component Fatigue.”

“Really?” the Boss asks. “I’ve never seen that. Where’s the machine?”

“Well, there’s a bit of it over there in the corner, a bit of it under the desk, and some of it on the table.”

“Bloody Hell! It looks like it’s been hit with a sledgehammer!”

“Yes, TCF is particularly nasty,” I add, helping myself to another coffee. “Also known and TOTAL Component Fatigue. The box basically just falls to pieces.”

“Amazing! Although I did wonder if it might have been that batch of cheap cables we bought a couple of months back.”

“Cheap cables?” I gasp, as the blood rushes to my head and things start to go a little red...

...

"You people seen your Boss?" the Head of IT asks

"Went home sick." the PFY says "A touch of TCF."

"TCF," the Head chuckles. "You know back when I was an apprentice, that used to mean something had been hit with a sl... Oh. So who's going to be on the interview panel?"

Give him his due - for a computer crusty, he's a quick learner...

BOFH: Psst! Wanna buy an encryption device?

BOFH 2004 Episode 17

Published Tuesday 1st June 2004 11:28 GMT

So I'm tootling through the crowd at a security conference, minding my own business and getting down as many lagers as I can before the end-of-night gong sounds. It's an impressive turnout, with stacks of the industry represented, and, more importantly, lots of those mini-kebabs on a stick.

I cruise past some ubergeeks talking about something or the other as I head to the stand that's captured my interest

"And so we looked into to," Ubergeek#001 says, "and you wouldn't believe it, but he'd only configured the proxy with -d -d -d and put the **WHOLE THING INTO DEBUG MODE WITH NO ACCESS CHECKING!!!**"

The assembled ubergeeks laugh hilariously at this as if it were the greatest joke in the world (you know, the one about the three guys and the dead turkey).

The things you see when you don't have your overvoltage cattle prod, a shovel and a sack of lime...

I get to the stand I'm after only to find it's been abandoned by it's stallholder for now - which really annoys me as they had some really great pens earlier and I was more than prepared to feign interest (and possibly even lie about buying their product) in order to get one.

...

"So what's your product do?" a half-trolleyed IT Manager type demands, mistaking me for someone from the stand just because I'm standing behind it stuffing pens into my jacket. "What's a... hardware encryption device when it's at home?"

What the hell..

"Well.. er.. John," I say, popping out from behind the stand. "How's your data currently encrypted and transferred around your company LAN?"

"Buggered if I know!" he bubbles. "TCPIP?"

"Ok, TCPIP - but what about encryption?"

"DES?" he asks, remembering that from somewhere, and establishing his technical knowledge firmly in the upper IT Management scale (Which corresponds to would-even-get-an-interview level on most other scales).

Time to lay it on thick.

“DES, right, good answer. Now did you know that over half the CPU in your organization’s computing is wasted simply converting data into encrypted form, and decrypting it at the other end?”

“No!”

“As sure as I’m working here! AND, did you know that this encryption/decryption process causes a delay which can critically affect anything which has synchronisation dependencies – database logging and locking, disk IO, etc, so that the operational delays are magnified to such an extent that the performance of your organization will suffer – SILENTLY – for years.”

“You’re kidding.”

“You’d think so wouldn’t you?” I say, technically not actually telling a lie. “So what a... hardware encryption device does, it does all that encryption decryption stuff for you on-the-fly, freeing up CPU, which will in turn will be used to free up logging, locking and disk io operations.”

“If it was that bloody good, they’d be built into machines already!” John responds, dubiously.

“That’s what everyone today’s been asking me,” I burble, to kill time while I think of a response. “But until now, the NSAs been keeping a tight lid on these babies.”

“So the NSA made these – is that what you’re saying?” John asks, even more dubiously.

“Absolutely not!” I respond rapidly and emphatically, “And the company adamantly denies that. They don’t even USE our devices, anywhere.”

“Ah-HA!” John snaps, convinced he’s caught me out in a lie. “I didn’t ask whether they used them, I just asked if they made them.”

“They didn’t, we did. And I also said they didn’t use them.”

“I think you’re lying,” John says. “I think the NSA **does** use them, but you’re not allowed to say!”

“That’s preposterous!” I bluster, seeing an opportunity and going for it. “Anyway, we’re not selling these any more – I’m just packing the stand away.”

“You’re not selling them?” John asks. “But you were a moment ago!”

“No. There’s a.... a firmware problem... yes, a firmware problem.”

“I don’t believe you.” John smirks, knowing he has me in a corner. “And I want to buy one. How much are they?”

“The list price is seven thousand pounds,” I say, faking defeat.

“But there’s a show special, isn’t there?”

“I...”

“What’s the show special?”

“Two thousand quid.”

“I’ll take one.”

“We haven’t got any.”

“What about that one?”

“It’s a demo, we’re not allowed to sell it,” I say, playing my hand very, very carefully.

“Well take my order!”

“I can’t,” I say. “I.... ... don’t have an order pad – you’ll have to call us after the show.”

“When you don’t have a special price and probably won’t be selling the product any more because the NSA will stop you! I’ll give you a cheque as a deposit.”

...almost there...

“We don’t take cheques. And I don’t have a receipt book!”

“I’ve got cash – say 100 quid. And I’ll write a receipt on the back of one of my business cards.”

“I...”

“I don’t think the NSA would like it if I made a big fuss here, with all these people around – do you?”

“Ok, quickly then.”

2 minutes later I’m 100 quid richer, and John’s wandering around believing that he’s going to get some hardware encryption device the NSA doesn’t want him to have.

Sweet.

Half an hour later, I’m several thousand pounds richer, and there’s a lot of booze and rumour enhanced people wandering about the place. I’m going to have to make a break for it soon before the whole thing turns pear shaped...

“Excuse me,” another potential customer says from behind me.

I turn around and smell the pears, so to speak. It’s the bloke from the hardware encryption box stand.

“Uh yes?”

“I understand you’re selling ‘Hardware Encryption Boxes’ that the... NSA use?”

“No,” I respond.

“I was told you did”

“No,” I repeat.

“Whether you do or not is irrelevant. I was wanting to know if you’d allow me to access the firmware code of your device – for... peer review purposes.”

“So you want to look at my – I mean my company’s - code.”

“Yes.”

“Of my COMPANY’S hardware encryption device.”

“Yes.”

“Not ask to see my box, my stand, my business card or anything?”

“I know how these things work. You probably don’t even HAVE a business card. Or a real company address.”

I feel a little like I’m sitting in front of a one-armed bandit with three jackpot symbols showing and the final wheel still spinning.

“I see. And how much cash have you got on you?”

“A substantial amount. 20K, in non sequential small denomination bills.”

“I...” I say, now that the 4th wheel has stopped spinning. “Where?”

”In this case,” he says, handing it over.

“Right well, I’ll just go and pop this in my car. Where can I meet you in 10 minutes?”

10 minutes later he’s waiting patiently in his room and I’m waiting impatiently at some traffic lights 8 miles away.

The life of a geeky secret agent just doesn’t **get** any better than this...

BOFH: Wearing the graphite polymer wobbly shoe

BOFH 2004 Episode 18

Published Tuesday 8th June 2004 09:36 GMT

"Where the HELL have you been?" the Boss blurts unhappily as I enter Mission Control very queasily after a night on some paint thinner disguised as fruit punch.

"Recovering from a product launch party last night," I respond slowly.

"Well there's a bit of a flap on!" he responds, talking rapidly in an effort to make me walk faster.

"Mmmm?"

"The.. authentication server is down?" he suggests, replaying the contents of his recent memory.

"Anyway, no one can log in."

"Right. And what's the PFY done?"

"Your assistant? Nothing - he's not in yet."

I troll through the remnants of last night's revelries and do vaguely remember seeing the PFY 'with the wobbly shoe on' passing through the crowd with a half empty bottle of Ouzo.

"That's right, he's not well," I respond, covering for him. "He had a touch of the flu yesterday I think."

"Who's not well?" the PFY asks slowly, entering Mission Control grasping a bagful of sundries from the chemist down the road.

"uhhh... You?" the Boss asks, fooled momentarily by the bloodshot eyes, facial grazes and general bruising that indicates a fantastic night at a supplier's expense.

"Don't be ridiculous I'm... fit as a fiddle!" the PFY slurs, pausing momentarily to suppress a gag reflex which would have seen the Boss covered ouzo soaked kebab portions...

I decide to cut the interchange short as the PFY's blood alcohol level is probably very near the medical definition of a fatal overdose, which isn't conducive to conversations with one's superiors...

"Right, well, we'd best be looking into this authentication problem then!" I say, leading the PFY into Mission Control.

...

Half an hour later the Boss taps on the door, interrupting three things: the PFY's aspirin sandwich, the lager from our emergency stash that he's washing the sandwich down with, and an

amusing recollection of what transpired when he mistook the elevator at last night's venue for a Gentleman's convenience...

"So how's it going?" the Boss asks.

"Hard at it," I lie. "Just recovering some of the... uh.. firmware settings from... tape while we do some... probes of the... redundant network interfaces."

As far as excuses go it's not my best work, but with the amount I drank last night I'd qualify for the special Olympics just for being vertical.

...

...

...

"Right so... .. I.. I'll leave you to it"

The combined power buzzwords and lengthy silences is too much for the Boss, and he leaves us to get back to the PFY's story...

...

Half an hour later, he's back, finding me in a not very pleasant mood – probably because I was woken from a therapeutic nap...

"Were... you asleep?!" he gasps, obviously contemplating some form of disciplinary action.

"ASLEEP!" I shout loudly enough that the PFY can hear me from under his desk. "Of course not! I was resting my eyes."

"Resting your eyes!" he says dubiously

"Yes, it's these cheap bloody monitors" I snap, buying the PFY some more wake-up time. "They're ok to use for maybe an hour or two, but when you've been using them for a whole morning the.."

"But you've only been at work for an hour!"

"I'm probably hypersensitive because of the poor lighting over my desk – it's given me a monster headache!"

"Didn't you ARRIVE with a headache?!"

"Yes, you're right, it must be the cumulative effects of the years of poor working conditions. I must speak to my Union delegate."

"You're a contractor, not IN the Union."

“HERE IT IS!” the PFY interjects emerging from under his desk with a suitable technical excuse for his location “It must have been interfering with the network connectivity.”

“It’s a shoe!” the boss blurts disbelievingly.

I have to be honest here – I was expecting the PFY to deliver something a bit better than that. The UTP cable from his desktop at least. Still it’s not the excuse, but how you market it that counts...

“That’s not a... graphite polymer sole is it?”

“It might be” the PFY replies, injecting a bit of guilt in at the end of his reply in case that’s required.

(Honestly, it’s like writing a collaborative novel)

“But I’ve already told you, the graphite is a mild conductor and the polymer.....”

..and just then my overworked brain cuts out..

...

“..Causes the graphite to adhere to spring-metal contacts,” the PFY finishes, saving the day. “But I thought it would be ok out here in the control room, away from the uh...”

“Authentication servers?” I finish, my mind back from its short vacation “No – any reduction in signal voltage at any point in the network will be reflected in core router supply – potentially causing overheating.”

“You mean this whole thing’s been caused by a set of shoes?!” The boss gasps.

“Polymer Graphite shoes, yes.”

“So if I hear you correctly, *anyone* in the Company could bring the systems down just by wearing the wrong shoes?!”

Caught out in a lie!! It’s fairly easy to predict that the Boss will now check all shoes on premises, issue an edict about appropriate footwear sole material, find out (eventually) that it was all a fabrication, become a laughing stock, and eventually have his revenge upon us. I really it’s best to tell the truth and just fess up that we haven’t got around to looking at the servers yet.

“Yes,” the PFY responds, before I can get a word in.

What the hell, it’ll keep him busy for a day, which’ll be more than enough time to start that nasty rumour about him having a foot fetish.

...

Well, it’s a laugh isn’t it, which helps to pass the time between naps.

BOFH: Downsizing the human deadwood

BOFH 2004 Episode 19

Published Tuesday 15th June 2004 10:28 GMT

"Oh yeah, he's been with us a couple of years now and I have to say that he's got a fantastic grasp of IT!" I burble down the phone "Second to none!"

...

"S.A.P?" I continue. "Yeah, Phil practically installed and configured it singlehandedly - in under three months!!!!!"

...

"Team Player - hell yes! Though the funny thing is, I've found that he works just as well on solo unsupervised projects."

...

"Who're you talking about?" the PFY mouths silently, as I'm chatting away.

"Phil," I respond, covering the mouthpiece.

"Phil?"

"Shepherd."

"Phil Shepherd?" he asks, looking to the Boss to see if he knows anything.

The Boss shakes his head blankly.

"The tall guy with the tash on the Helldesk."

"**Crap** Phil?" the PFY asks. "The guy you said couldn't count to 21 without unzipping his fly?"

"That's him!"

"Oohhhh!" the PFY says, nodding.

"What **is** going on?" the Boss asks, drawn into the conversation by a feeling of being left out of something important.

"Simon's CV-loading."

"Huh?" the Boss asks.

"You know, falsifying a glowing reference for a chunk of human deadwood so they get a better job and leave the company."

"Are you sure that's... uh... entirely... ethical?" the Boss asks.

"Yeah, course it is," I say, hanging up.

"How?"

"If a prospective employer is stupid enough to believe the **current** employer when they're poaching staff they deserve everything they get."

"But don't you have some form of.. well.. duty.. to...."

"Help them steal staff? Piss off!"

"But won't they rumble your game? You know, wait for the opportunity to offload someone onto you when the time comes?"

"I think that's how we got Phil in the first place."

"Ooooooh, grudge match at the OK Computer Room!" the PFY chirps. "Surely they won't take him back if they know he's crap?" the boss asks.

"Ordinarily no, but it seems that half their organisation has left in the intervening period, and no-one seems to remember him. That happens a lot in large organisations. Besides, I put it in his CV that he's done a stack of training and really turned over a new leaf."

"**YOU** put in his CV?"

"Yeah - When I applied for the job on his behalf."

"You mean you applied for the job without his knowing?"

"Of course! I do it all the time with the crap people!"

"But what happens if he gets the job?"

"Ah, I'll just say it was a fortuitous error - something about his CV getting accidentally sent to an employment agency by a virus on the HR server."

"And you'd expect him to believe you and take the job?"

"Fairly sure. I'll be leaking hints of downsizing in the IT department at lunchtime, saying that I heard that the helldesk will be the first lot to go."

"But won't that rumour affect morale?"

"**Helpdesk** Morale? Have you actually **been** to the helpdesk?!"

"I... well... anyway, I still don't think any company would believe **your** recommendation."

"Of course they will. I'm telling them what they want to hear!"

"What do you mean?"

"Look, you've been in the business a while, you know which way the wind blows and you've got a handle on things, right?"

"Yes."

"No you don't, I was just telling you what you wanted to hear! Which is what I was doing for Phil's prospective new employers. They're stuck with an unfillable technical position with next to no job scope, and I'm creating a fictitious character with next to no personality - to **not** fill it. It's a quadruple negative, they cancel out, and everyone will be happy."

The Boss stops scratching his genitals, which is a sure sign he's putting his entire body into background processing while he tries to comprehend the logic.

"I..." he says, as he crosses the cpu limit of his attention span.

"And if we go back to the issue of ethics, don't you think it's **more** ethical of us to find a place of employment to which he is more suited?"

"I suppose..."

"With people who will respect his newfound experience?"

"I..."

"People who won't be waiting outside the building in the dark to give him a good hiding with a sock with a harddrive in it..."

"Ah..." the boss says uncomfortably.

"Or who won't be orchestrating a strange workplace accident involving his tie and the rollers of the photocopier feed mechanism - while he's still wearing the aforementioned tie..."

"Uhhhh" the Boss says, wondering if this means he's an accomplice before the act.... "I suppose if it's... going to save him.... some trouble it can't be too b..."

>Ring<

"Hello?" I respond.

...

"He's uh.... out of the office at the moment, can I take a message for you?"

. . .

"Really?" . . .

"Uh huh. Well thank you very much, I'm sure he'll be very pleased to hear it!"

>click<

"He got the job???" the Boss asks happily.

"I don't know, it's too soon. But good news, there was a virus on our HR server and your CV accidentally got sent to a placement agency..."

"You don't expect me to fall for that do you?" the Boss asks.

"True" I say. "Hey, has anyone seen that heavy woollen sock of mine?"

"Isn't it underneath that large pile of photocopying that needs to be done later on this evening when no-one's around to hear a choking sound?" the PFY asks.

The things I do to help people!

BOFH and the workplace hazards

BOFH 2004 Episode 20

Published Thursday 24th June 2004 21:07 GMT

"What the hell's that?" the PFY asks as he enters Mission Control, narrowly missing a huge pile of paper just inside the door.

"That would be the identified hazards in our workplace," I reply.

"What the **BLOODY HELL** are they playing at?!" the PFY snaps, echoing my own frustration. "They've been annoying us for more than a bloody year now!"

"They claim that the IT Division's injury rate approaches that of a small civil war so they're paying particular attention to the Division, and our office in particular."

"So that' the office covered then?"

"No that pile is just for this room!"

"You're joking!"

"No, they've really gone overboard," I reply, grabbing several sheets of paper. "These bookshelves, >tap< >wobble< >wobble<, are not fixed to the wall and have heavy objects at a height which raises its centre of gravity dangerously."

"But they made us put them there because they said they were too low before and would cause back strain in lifting!"

"Uh huh. >flip< And this table >clank< >clank< has a wobbly leg, which could mean that if someone stumbled into it, it would collapse, dropping that machine onto someone's foot."

"It was them who made us turn the table around because they said it blocked an egress path."

"Again, yes. >flip< These boxes of tapes are also dodgy, bump into them and they might topple down on top of you..."

"But they said the tape room was too overcrowded for people to access and that we'd have to store some tapes in a different location!"

"Uh-huh. >flip< The table top bulk eraser has no electrical earth."

"It's double insulated! It's not supposed to have an earth! The only way it'd cause a problem unless you poured water down it! Anyway it's isolated on the deskside UPS."

"**AH HAH!**" I cry ">flip< Overvoltage warning lamp on deskside UPS unit."

"It's done that since we bought it. It's perfectly alright. Anyway, it's only an eraser."

"You're talking to the wrong man. >flip< That >scuff< carpet tile in the doorway has lifted, causing a trip hazard."

"THEY BLOODY LIFTED IT WHEN THEY WERE TESTED THEM TO SEE HOW WELL STUCK DOWN THEY WERE."

"Again, I am not disagreeing with you."

"So you're just going to fix all these things now so that the solutions will be next inspection's problems?" he asks sarcastically.

"Not at all. I rang the inspector bloke, who, it has to be admitted, has the personality of a tamponvending machine, who told me that once we read the 150-page newly-revised safety-in-the-workplace manual, we'll know all we need to about making the place safe."

"I don't do manuals," the PFY snips.

"Yes, that's what I said, but he told me that it's our responsibility to have a safe workplace. He also said that he'll be doing fortnightly inspections to ensure that we comply with the company's new work-safe policy."

"What new work-safe policy?"

"Buggered if I know. Anyway he said he'd walk us through the main points today so that we could make a start and avoid the non-compliance penalties."

"Penalties?" the PFY says

"Yeah, in the work-safe policy. It's a carrot and stick idea, with more of the stick than the carrot. Apparently, the company's considering moving to a deferred bonus for staff and contractors, and this could be one of the things that puts the kybosh on your bonus. You know, too many accidents, no bonus."

"The bastard!"

"No, no, he's just doing his job, keeping us safe. Anyway, he should be here anytime to..."

>Knock Knock<

"Just thought I'd grab the bull by the horns and get down to business as soon as pos.." he starts, tripping on the aforementioned carpet tile, then regaining his balance momentarily by standing on the large stack of H&S violation reports ...

...which slides out from under his foot.

"Whoops!" he says, ploughing into one of the aforementioned bookcases.

>Wobble<

>CRASH!

"Hey, they were right about that bookcase!" the PFY cries, surprised.

>Clank!<

>Crash<

"And that table!"

>Topple<

>Crash< >crash< >crash<

"And the boxes of tapes."

>KZZZZZEeeerrrrt!<

>ZZzzzzzzzzzap<

>Bang!<

"Maybe that overvoltage light was actually working after all," he mumbles as the smoke clears.
"Bloody lucky we had a Health and Safety bloke to point it all out to us..."

>slam<

"What the hell is going o..." the Boss starts, crashing into Mission Control to see what all the noise is about.

>trip<

>Wobble<

>CRASH<

>BZZZERRRRRT!<

>Zip< >Zip< >zzzzap<

.. one ambulance ride for two later . .

"This place is a **BLOODY DEATHTRAP!**" I gasp, recounting the past half-hour.

"I'd agree," the PFY responds. "We definitely need to be putting some things into place."

"Warning signs?" I suggest.

"I was thinking more of a video camera. I almost pissed myself when the boss faceplanted the bulk eraser. A memory like that would have been priceless on tape."

"Yeah. And we could have made a tidy little sum from those bloopers shows too."

"Ah well, there's always next time," the PFY sighs, picking at the corner of a floor tile...

BOFH peers through the proxy mirror

BOFH 2004 Episode 21

Published Wednesday 30th June 2004 12:18 GMT

I CAN'T TAKE IT ANY MORE!!!!

>bip< >bip< >bip< >bip<

>brrrr< >brrrr< ... >brrrr< >brrrr<

"Hello?" the user answers.

"**ASTALAVISTA!**" I snap down the phone at the user.

"What?!" he gasps, not exactly sure about the reason for my unsolicited call nor its one word content.

"**ASTALAVISTA**, not **ALTAVISTA!**"

"What do you mean?" he asks, warily.

"The search engine you wanted - for software cracks."

"Software cracks?" he gasps, faking ignorance.

"Yes, for the pirate game you just downloaded."

"I didn't download a pirate game."

"Of course you did, I saw you on the proxy mirror. I've been watching your session."

"Proxy mirror?" the PFY whispers.

"Yes," I say, muting the phone. "I made some quick changes to the Squid and Mozilla source allowing me to pick a client IP on the proxy and basically get the same content as them."

"Smooth," the PFY responds, nodding. "What if they're using IE?"

"I've dumbed Mozilla down to cope with it."

"Isn't that... an invasion of privacy?" the user interrupts tentatively.

"No, an invasion of privacy would be if I were to ring your wife and ask her how she liked those flowers you ordered over the Internet and mistakenly sent to the new girl in salaries, who is *patently* disinterested in your advances..."

"I..."

"Or if I played back your website browsing of two weeks ago, when you were 'working late'. That was a flashcard session I don't think I'll forget in a hurry!"

"A..."

"So, if we go back to the original case in point, astalavista. Not altavista."

"I..."

>click<

"He hung up!" the PFY blurts.

"True. But look, he's going to astalavista, so my work is done. What are you up to?"

"As it happens, something which fits in snugly with you?"

"You're dating the new girl in salaries!" I gasp, foiled again. "After all that work I did on changing the attached note on that guy's flower order."

"What? No no, I've just submitted **OUR** proxy address to an open, anonymous proxy list on some questionable websites."

"And you were going to use my proxy mirror."

"No, I was just going to turn on full cacheing and grab copies of anything interesting that people 'found' on the Web."

"And by interesting you were meaning..."

"Pirated software mainly," the PFY blurts.

"Not Internet porn?"

"Nah, you can get that anywhere. But a limited pre-release version of a new first person shooter game is worth it's weight in gold."

"Of course it is!" I say doubtfully.

"So how does this proxy mirror of yours work then?" the PFY asks.

"You go to the index page, which lists the IP addresses it believes are still currently using the proxy and the last link they actively clicked on. Using your advanced ferret-like nose for naughtiness, you click on the address most likely to be doing dodgy stuff and bob's your auntie, the proxy feeds both of you the content that they're seeing - without them knowing."

"That's fantastic!" the Boss blurts, appearing as if by magic behind us.

"Where the hell did you come from?"

"The tape cupboard you locked me in this morning!"

"Oh yeah," the PFY murmurs to himself. "I really should have put up a sign."

"I'll get back to that later," the Boss seethes, "but for the meantime, tell me more about this mirror thing. You can watch anyone's traffic?"

"I suppose," I admit grudgingly.

"And they don't know."

"No."

"And how do you access it?"

"You don't - it's not really in production yet - more of a work in progress," I babble.

"Yeah well, I think I'd like to have a look at the sort of thing we're downloading, so just email me the address," he says, ambling at a slow run to get back to his desktop in time.

"Houston, we have a problem," I say to the PFY once he's gone.

"Why?"

"Because in no time he'll realise just how little work-related stuff is done, do a bit of maths about how much the network connectivity costs us, and recommend something stupid like bandwidth restrictions or content filtering at the ISP?!"

"We could turn the proxy off."

"He'd notice."

"Disable new connections."

"The users would complain pretty quick and give the game away."

"Tricky," the PFY blurts. "Unless..."

"Unless?"

...

"Disgusting," the Head of IT says, as I show him the proxy mirror in action. "Is that sort of thing even legal here?"

"I don't even think it's even legal in Leeds!" I blurt.

"And you're sure you're not mistaken?"

"Only one way to find out..." I respond.

...

Ten minutes after the Boss's door has been crash-opened by security I let the PFY know that he can stop his whirlwind tour of the nastiest sites on the Internet. The damage is done, and the Boss' protestations of innocence fall on deaf ears. Doubly so, when the head of IT notes he's been saving some of the data to his desktop machine. Naughty!

Five minutes after that, as the Boss is hailing a cab with his box of personal possessions, the PFY stops in to congratulate me on my work.

"Work?" I say. "No, I just consider it pushing back the frontiers of Computing Science."

Lets face it, some of us are born sneaky, others have sneakiness thrust upon them.

BOFH: Addressing the Computer Usage Policy

BOFH 2004 Episode 22

Published Tuesday 6th July 2004 16:32 GMT

Sometimes, the urge to strangle someone is so strong it's almost as if there's a higher power calling you to follow your instincts...

Take today, for instance. A normal, ordinary day at Mission Control. The usual bunch of what the PFY and I refer to as idiot calls, but nothing untoward or out of the ordinary.

A day like any other.

Till the Boss gets involved because no one's paid attention to him all week. His need to be recognised in his role manifests itself today as the requirement to make some sweeping changes to the Computer Usage Policy of the company.

"It's just that we should be consistent with our other policies," he says. "We should have some form of statement to say that you mustn't use computers to harass people for instance."

"Isn't that already in the company's code-of-conduct?"

"Yes, but it doesn't refer to using computers!"

"It's a *blanket* cover!" I respond.

"No, because someone could say that email isn't harassing."

"Something a mailbomb program takes a very short time to disprove."

"So it's true, you can harass someone with email!"

"YOU CAN HARRASS SOMEONE WITH A BLOODY SAUSAGE ON A STICK, BUT WE DON'T NEED A SAUSAGE USE POLICY TO TELL US NOT TO!" I shout, losing my rag.

"And you **really** don't want him to prove that last point...." the PFY advises.

"But shouldn't we be clear about what people should and shouldn't do with computers?"

"Indeed." I say, rage subsiding. "But if an existing policy has it covered, why introduce another piece of bureaucracy?"

"Ok, so maybe harassment is covered, but what about privacy? What about someone reading my email?" he asks.

"What do you mean?" the PFY asks a little **too** casually.

"Someone. Reading my email without my permission."

"I think that's covered by the existing Computer Usage Policy where it says that no one should attempt to access information that they're not entitled to access."

"But someone might access it, mightn't they?"

"They could, yes, but they'd leave audit information in the server logs."

"But **YOU** can erase that information, can't you?" he asks.

"We **COULD** erase it, yes, but in practice it's a lot harder than that," I admit.

"Really? How?"

"Well, there's audit trails, gaps in logfiles, that sort of thing. I mean if someone were to cover up access to your email, there'd be a myriad of things they'd have to do to make sure it remains undiscovered."

"Like what?"

"Suspend auditing, strip the evidence from the audit file, recreate false evidence to cover up the gaps when the evidence disappeared, possibly tamper with the system time, insert false audit records to cover the time lapse where the auditing was suspended, untamper with the system time and then resume auditing. Off the top of my head of course."

"And how long would that take?"

"Oh, the commonplace user would take days - with mistakes, etc. - to do all that."

"And you?"

"I usually do it while the PFY's getting a coffee. Mind you, I do have a script that does most of it..."

"THIS IS EXACTLY MY POINT! WE NEED POLICY TO SAY IT SHOULDN'T BE DONE."

"And you believe that a **policy** would prevent this?"

"Yes."

"There's no policy to say that I shouldn't push the social club piano off the balcony while you're walking underneath it, but it hasn't happened so far!!"

"It's not my problem, because I'm only interested in computing policy."

"So if he pushed a desktop machine off the balcony, you'd be concerned?" the PFY asks.

"It's not a recognized or commonplace use of a computer."

"It is if it's got OS2 installed on it!" I respond, confusing the Boss and alienating another batch of OS2-loving readers. On purpose.

"All I'm worried about is computers," the Boss re-states. "And **now**, the privacy of my email."

"Don't worry, we don't access email that we're not entitled to access," I respond.

"Which email is that?"

"What do you mean?"

"Which email are you **not** entitled to access?"

"None of it."

"So you mean that you're entitled to access all email?"

"Yes, for the purposes outlined in the service level agreement in our individual contracts with the company. In fact, we're pretty much **required** to read your email."

"Why?"

"To maintain performance and reliability of the server, to fix problems before they occur."

"How?" the Boss gasps, completely thrown by this revelation.

"Well say there's a server issue with lack of disk resource in the mail store. Obviously we would need to investigate the individual users to see where the resource is wasted."

"Why not just see who's using the most space?"

"Because that doesn't necessarily find mailboxes responsible for, say, fragmentation. I mean do you honestly think that the PFY and I enjoy trolling through the inane messages to your sister-in-law? You **might** wish to slip away for a quiet weekend in Bristol with her while your wife's visiting your son in Egypt, but WE just don't need to know that."

"But we do," the PFY adds slyly.

"So you're saying I should just drop the policy idea altogether and nothing more will be said?"

"Exactly."

"But how do we discipline questionable computer use?"

"The old fashioned way," I reply.

"Interviews, recommendations then dismissal?"

"No, I said the old fashioned way, not the slow way."

"What's the old fashioned way?"

"Threats, blackmail."

"And when that doesn't work?" the Boss asks, doubtfully.

"The old toaster in the shower has been known to work."

"I.. ... We thought that was a cry for help?!" the Boss gasps, remembering an incident a few weeks back involving a helpdesker with a penchant for running port scanners to find fileshares he shouldn't...

"I think I actually did hear a cry for help at the time. But that was a **LONG** time before the ambulance showed up..."

"I can't believe you'd do that!" the Boss gasps.

"*I* can't believe the PFY would put a couple of slices of bread in the toaster beforehand," I add.
"Now **that** really confused people - bizarre accident or strange cry for help?"

"Yes," the PFY chuckles, remembering the incident fondly.

"Right, well, I'll just... go and put this in..."

"The shredder," the PFY says.

What do you know, it looks like being a good day after all!

BOFH gets an RFID he can't refuse

BOFH 2004 Episode 23

Published Monday 19th July 2004 15:24 GMT

"It's.... a new ID card!?" the PFY says, looking at the item proffered to him by the Boss.

"Yes, and here's yours," the Boss responds, handing me a duplicate of my current ID card. "If you two could just give me your old ones back - to.. stop them getting um.. mislaid, or into the wrong hands."

"Sure," I respond, handing mine over. "And we're getting new cards because why?"

"Some magnetic stripe thing for the security system - they're upgrading or something and the old cards won't work."

"Oh, of course!" I blurt, feigning knowledge. "That's probably what all the work on the readers has been about. Tightening up the place a little?"

"Yes, well, in these troubled times..." the Boss burbles, moving quickly on to the next batch of people.

"Troubled times, my arse!" the PFY snaps, echoing my own thoughts.

"Indeed," I say. "Let's just see what the Mailsafex has to say!"

I chuck the card into the X-ray unit we borrowed (late at night, without asking, for an indefinite period) from the mail room.

"Ooooh," I blurt. "I spy, with my little eye, something beginning with RFID transponder."

"An RFID transponder?" the PFY suggests.

"Indeed! >sigh< They must think we came down in the last service pack..."

...

Later that day at the Boss' office.

>knock< >knock<

"Wha - how the hell did you get there?" the Boss asks, quickly flicking away from what looks to be a geeky version of the Marauders Map, complete with thumbnails of people wandering about the building.

"Walked?"

"Uh - yes, right, of course, how interesting," the Boss gabbles, as he attempts to seem busy and distract my attention till the application closes.

"I was just wanting you to sign off this expense claim," I say, handing over a piece of paper.

"Not a problem," he gabbles, so rattled he's not noticed that the important fields are filled out in pencil. "So how's that.. uh.. new ID card working out for you?"

"This?" I say, holding up my card.

"Yes, that's it...or is that the old one?" the Boss says, holding out his hand.

I hand the card over and he burbles about appreciating technology of modern access methods, blah, blah, blah, whilst copping a quick shufti at it.

"It's got a hole in it!" he says.

"Yeah, I was going to hang it off one of those retractable cord things that people hook onto their belts, then I remembered how sad and geeky they look. You know, when people wear them believing them to be some form of fashion accessory or status symbol and that if they turn up at the pub with one dangling off their beergut Claudia Schiffer is just going to drop everything and go for them like a ferret up a trouser le.."

"I wear **mine** on my belt!" the Boss snaps.

"And that M'Lord concludes the case for the prosecution," the PFY chirps, appearing from below the partition immediately behind me.

"How long have **you** been there?" the Boss gasps.

"Ages! I'm installing the secretary's copier."

"And you put a hole in your card as well?" the Boss asks drily.

"Yeah, and I thought the better of wearing it!"

"So you know about the RFID thing?" he sighs.

"What RFID thing?" I ask blankly.

"Don't play games with me - in your ID card. They're afraid of a civil liberties outcry."

"So why did you do it?"

The Boss thinks about it for a bit, then makes a quick decision.

"Come in - both of you - and close the door. . . >slam< This isn't for public consumption" he blurts.

"Ah... like the cafeteria's macaroni cheese" the PFY nods.

The Boss ignores him and continues. "There's been a lot of thefts recently – small things mostly, a coffee mug here, a pair of sunglasses there – nothing much to get upset about. But last month someone stole the X-ray machine from the mailroom!"

"The thieving bastards!" the PFY cries "What did security say?"

"Nothing. As usual," he snaps, annoyed. "So we got a private company in to fit these detectors under the guise of upgrading the readers so we'll know where everyone is. And we're changing things so you'll need a card for everything - to use the lifts, do photocopying, get lunch at the cafeteria – you name it."

"So people keep their cards with them. Sneaky," the PFY says. "And then you'll know **EXACTLY** where people are."

"You know what you should do?" I say.

"What?" the Boss asks.

"Replace all asset tags with RFIDs as well - like RFIDs are supposed to be used - that way you'll know who left the building **AND** what equipment they took with them...."

"I... Yes!" the Boss gasps. "So we'll know who stole it!!"

"Exactly!"

...two weeks later the Boss is helping security with their enquiries...

It seems he didn't notice the self-adhesive RFID tag (of every piece of kit we wanted replaced) stuck on the 'letters to the editor page' of the newspaper he obligingly took to the tube with him on the way home.

And it seems that no-one noticed the aforementioned pieces of kit accelerating at 9.81m/s from the second floor Mission Control window into the skip bin below.

But security did notice the thefts, eventually.

And the discovery of the mail scanner in the Boss's office didn't help either...

BOFH: Might as well face it, you're addicted to smut

BOFH 2004 Episode 24

Published Thursday 29th July 2004 13:41 GMT

I get **so** bored at times...

The sort of bored you are when you can't even be stuffed firing up a browser and seeing what's new at smuttysmuttychicks.com.

But if I don't do it, who's going to care about the girls?!

The Boss comes in mid browse, and starts rabbiting on about how it's not acceptable workplace behaviour, etc., etc.

I ask him to kindly be quiet because I'm not giving the girls the attention they deserve.

Next thing you know, he's back with a guy from HR. And they want to have a quiet interview!!!

...

What the hell, I am bored.

"Is there some reason you were looking at that porn site?" the HR Guy asks, carefully

"Apart from checking out the girls?" I ask.

"Yes."

"I don't think so. Hang on!"

"What?"

"Nope, I've got nothing."

"And you're aware that the company has a policy regarding acceptable use of computers?"

"Really?"

"**YES**" the Boss snaps, annoyed. "It's been in place for *at least* 18 months!"

"Ah, I see, so it's **not** actually a policy I agreed to several years ago when I started."

"Your contract gives the company the right to vary acceptable behaviour policies."

"Not my contract," I say

"I think you'll find it does," the HR Guy responds.

"No, mine was sent as an electronic document, so I just cut out the clauses I didn't like, added a couple of my own, printed two copies and signed them. Then your guy signed them too – probably without checking. Or maybe he liked the idea of clause F.3 that I'm allowed to call Managers... 'knobface'."

"I.." the HR Guy says, then ducks out the door to check something.

... two hours later . . .

"It's true," the HR Guy says. "There is a clause saying he can call you knobface."

"Which was also signed by your HR guy – in ink," I add.

"Yes."

"Including the eight or so extra clauses I added... er.. Knobface?"

There's an extended pause while the HR Guy contemplates some form of retaliatory attack, thinks the better of it, and goes to weep to the company solicitors. A couple of hours later he comes back with some fairly weak Force Majeur clause which would hold as much water as a paper g-string.

Still, I **am** bored....

"Which leads us to the fact that you're still in contravention of company policy," the HR guy continues.

"Ok, it's a fair cop," I say.

"So you're admitting that you committed an act which could have you dismissed?"

"My contract terminated, yes."

"Knowingly?"

"Sure."

"You don't seem to be taking this situation very seriously. You realise that if the company were to publicly terminate your contract for browsing porn, it's possible you'd never work in the industry again?"

"I think you're forgetting I work in the **Computing** Industry..."

"I don't think even **they** would tolerate this activity - if we were to let you go."

It would seem that the HR Guy has his heart set on me breaking down and blubbing like a big girl's blouse - which just isn't going to happen. Well, not now I've had my brainwave anyway.

"I don't actually think you **CAN** fire me for browsing porn.."

"Why not?"

"Well, I think I'm addicted to porn."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Addicted. To porn."

"You're joking!"

"Oh no. You see I'm fairly sure that the browsing of porn causes the release of testosterone, endorphins or something like that, which in turn causes a pleasure response in the body – or so my doctor will tell me if I ask. I'm addicted to that pleasure response, in much the same way as a drug addict is addicted to the pleasure they obtain from their drugs."

"So you're saying you have no control over your actions?"

"None."

"And you.... Believe that this is somehow the company's problem?"

"Oh no."

"Good."

"No, I think it's the company's **fault**. It's completely different."

"I think you'll find that to demonstrate fault, the company would have to be aware of a problem."

"They are. I filled out a workplace hazard form about it six months ago."

The HR Guy looks at the Boss, who shrugs silently, having only been in the company a few weeks.

"The company **MADE** me look at porn – what people were browsing, what was in their fileshares, etc."

"Eh?"

"I didn't want to - but it was my job! The things I've seen! The nightmares I have!"

"That's ridiculous - no-one can prove it's harmful!"

"Ah yes - the asbestos company defence," I say. "Still, you have your job to do..."

"So you're going to go quietly?"

"Of course! Although I **will** be pursuing the company for the costs of my treatment."

"What treatment?"

"The porn equivalent of methadone. Apparently it involves daily doses of bikini calendar photos."

"You can't be serious!"

"No, you're probably right. I guess I'll just have to make a full and frank disclosure as part of my class action suit against the company - just before the big share float."

"I think you'll find a class action suit is where a **group** of ..."

"Would you look at the bezels on her!" the PFY snaps from behind his monitor having until now been silent.

"Ah. Well, how about we forget the whole thing then?" the HR Guy says, realising that this could get rather nasty...

"That'll be fine," I say. "And could you close the door on your way out... knobface?"

I think I'll wait till next week to get help for my p2p piracy problem....

BOFH: Tripping the mangelfreuzer switch

BOFH 2004 Episode 25

Published Wednesday 11th August 2004 08:24 GMT

"..and so the point of this meeting is to decide on the service level for your equipment, so we know what you're expecting when we purchase your new box."

"Well, 24 by 7 obviously," one of the assembled beancounters responds.

It never, EVER, amazes me at how a box in the throes of dying sharpens the minds of the beancounters - particularly when it's their box that's going down every half hour or so.

"Ordinarily I'd agree with you, but seeing as the company would appear to be 'beancounter rich', with **none** of you starting before 9 **or** staying after 4, I'm wondering if this is the most cost effective way of providing coverage for your machines?"

"We **do** run batch jobs out of hours," another beancounter adds drily.

"Yes, a weekly pay preparation for the HR machine, a weekly report, a monthly projection plus the annualised runs - from what I can determine. The annual combined total of which is about 40 hours runtime..."

"So you're suggesting **what** exactly?"

"I'm suggesting that as we're about to replace your financials box you might want to revise your service level to determine if you really want to be paying for 24x7 maintenance when you could probably get away with 9x5 or less?"

"Couldn't **you** people just maintain the equipment and reduce the cost further?"

"We could, but there's always the chance the mangelfreuzer switch will trip - which would be a problem."

"What's a mangelf.. r."

"Mangelfreuzer - as in Mangle-Froy-TSir. It's a switch or other device that hardware manufacturers put into their equipment to detect unauthorised access to a box - and makes the system act strangely."

"Strangely?"

"Yes, you know, the odd memory error, harddisk write error, machine crashes, etc. To encourage you not to tamper with the box. And generate revenue for the maintenance provider of course."

"Are you serious?!"

"Of course. Some of our major outages have been those exact same problems."

"You mean they're all caused by a manglefreuzer?"

"Some of them, yes. Obviously no sane vendor would build in something which could be conclusively linked as the source of a problem, so they make the outages sporadic and hard to track down..."

"And people know about this?"

"Technical people, yes."

"And you're ok with that?"

"We don't really have that much choice in the matter, do we? Anyway all the vendors do it - and not just in computers."

"I bet that's what's wrong with my home machine!" one beancounter adds, accompanied by the nods of other would be system builders.

"Yes," I comment. "It's bound to be that and not your lack of antistatic protection, earthing and poor installation method. Those vendor bastards!"

I avoid the topic of the PFY's habit of onselling dodgy RAM to company staff as this could muddy the discussion somewhat...

"So what you're saying is **you** can't look after the kit properly and you're recommending that we buy a machine that has a warranty that matches our real need for server availability?" one the beancounters asks - basically reiterating the content of the email message which asked for this meeting.

"Yes," I sigh.

"And does this come at a premium?"

"Any extra service comes at a premium, but when you take into account the potential impact of not doing it - like the outages you've been having - it's a small price to pay."

"So what are we talking about?"

"It's about triple the price for a five-year onsite warranty."

"TRIPLE?!" a beancounter gasps.

"**BUT**, if you reduce the service level to 5x9, 4 hour response, it's only about twice the price."

"**TWICE!** Is that what we've paid in the past?!!!"

"No, we've paid nothing in the past, which is why you've had to spend so much time waiting for engineers to show up for machine failures."

"Yes, I suppose we realise that now - but surely machines should last longer than a year?!"

"Entry level desktops, you'd get four years out of - I guess. But leading edge hardware like yours is pretty special and as computer vendors say - the candle that burns twice as bright burns half as long..."

"I... well how much is it going to cost?"

"All up, maybe 4000 quid."

"Oh! Well that's not as bad as..."

"Plus maintenance," I add, *carpe diem*ing.

"8000 quid!!!!"

"Worst case scenario. I mean we might be able to get the vendor to drop a couple of grand if we pushed it - but no promises..."

"How much do you think?"

"Maybe - if we can really get them over a barrel - 6k - but like I say, no promises."

"Really?" the Head beancounter gasps, semi-happily.

"Maybe."

"Well, I **suppose** we can go with that, and the level of support. But how long would it take to get a stable system back again?"

"Delivery time on this kit - if we're lucky - could be something like two weeks if they have the units on hand"

"And how long to change over to the new machine?"

"If we pulled an all-nighter we could probably do it in one - if it's urgent."

...

Later, in Mission Control.

"So how'd it go?" the PFY asks.

"Two new top-of-the-range desktops and a stack of overtime!!!"

"Excellent."

"Just remember to put a note in your diary for a fortnight away to remind you to stop powercycling their server every time you go into the computer room."

"Sorted!"

"And start mentioning the manglefreuzer problems on the Human Resources server - I fancy a new laptop."

"Good as done..."

BOFH: How dangerous are your users?

BOFH Userometer - an online sysadmins resource

Published Friday 13th August 2004 11:15 GMT

BOFH Userometer - an online sysadmins resource

Sure, your users may look about as likely to rebel as the pack of mindless sheep that they are - but can they be trusted?

Are your users reading forbidden literature?

Are they trying to climb the technical greasy pole behind your back?

How will you know?

Can the cattle prod be trusted to solicit the truth?

It's time to put it to the test!

Top of Form

Put yourself in your users' place and answer these simple questions to see if things are going according to plan at **YOUR** workplace.

1. A MAC Address is:

A. A place you get Quarter Pounders



B. A street address in Scotland



C. Something Technical



D. A Hardware Address in Networking



E. Something technical a system administrator changes to cause the Boss's machine to lose network connection



2. You ring your Systems and Network people because the server has just gone down and you want to know when it will be up again. You expect them to tell you:

A. A number of minutes



B. A number of days



C. To sod off



D. The incriminating evidence they found in your email folder



E. The incriminating evidence they just placed in your email folder



3. The low-power components in your laptop are optimised to run at what voltage?

A. DC



B. AC



C. Whatever the adapter says



D. Just under 3 volts




E. 240 volts AC, and not a volt less!





4. You bring a box of 9 track tapes of your life's work to the operators to read in so that you can download them to your PC. The operator tells you it should be there in an hour. This means:


A. It will be loaded into your home share in an hour




B. It will be loaded into your home share today
sometime 


C. It will be loaded into your home share this week
sometime 


D. It will be loaded into your home share when hell
freezes over 


E. The Operator's bin has recently become full 


5. You smell smoke in the building. You know immediately that:

A. You should sound the alarm 


B. You should make your way quickly to the exit,
notifying staff as you go 


C. You should turn your machine off in case the
sprinklers activate 


D. The System Administrator is interviewing
consultants again 


E. The operator's bin doesn't need emptying any more 


6. The faultiest piece of crap in the building is:

A. Sitting in the bin outside the head of IT's office 


B. Sitting on the floor outside the head of IT's office 


C. Sitting on the floor inside the head of IT's office 


D. Sitting on the desk inside the head of IT's office 


E. Sitting on the chair behind the Head of IT's desk, talking on the phone. 


7. The best place to backup your files is:

A. To your Home Share, just like the System Admin said 

B. To the TEMP directory, just like the System Admin said 


C. To ZIP disk 

D. (c) to Several Zip disks, and possibly CD-ROM 

E. To the Recycle bin, to save the System Admin the trouble 


8. The danger of leaving your machine switched on is:

A. It could catch fire 

B. It could become a security risk 

C. The disk could crash 

D. It wastes lots of power 

E. The processor might burn the System Administrators hand when he replaces it with a ... faster one ... late at night. 

9. The security and integrity of your email is protected by:

A. Your password



B. Company Policy



C. PGP Encryption



D. Microsoft's pursuit of excellence. Waaaaaa ha ha ha!



E. Two pints for the System Administrator every Friday night



10. A System Administrator slaps a piece of paper down in front of you with lots of large technical words on it... which don't mean anything to you. He also indicates a line, with a large X beside it. You:

A. Sign on the line



B. Sign on the line



C. Sign on the line



D. Sign on the line



E. Refuse to sign on the line then check on your life Insurance Payments.



Anything to worry about?

BOFH takes a hit from Cupid's arrow

BOFH 2004 Episode 26

Published Tuesday 17th August 2004 11:36 GMT

So the Boss wanders into the office with the yellow folder of doom. Ever since the Beancounters discovered the horrendous disappearance rate of our kit they've been getting us to do a six-monthly asset audit to track its movements.

"I've just got a little job for you - in your free time," he bumbles.

"We don't have any free time!" the PFY responds, knowing full well what the folder bodes.

"So what I'd like you to do," he continues, ignoring the PFY, "is to fill in the last three digits of the asset number once you've located the machine in question."

"Sneaky," the PFY replies.

"What?"

"Sneaky. It means we have to actually *GO* to the machine - instead of just ticking it off. Which means it'll take months to get around everything."

"I..." the Boss says, a bit concerned at the turn of events , "... I could get a temp in?"

"A temp!" the PFY gasps. "But we'll spend as much time helping them find things as doing it ourselves."

"No, no, I think a temp would work," I add.

"Right, so it's sorted then!" the Boss gasps, happy to be leaving on a high note.

"?" the PFY asks, once the Boss has gone. "They'll be more a nuisance than anything!"

"Not exactly. We say it'll take two weeks, then get the temp to just copy the asset numbers over from a dump I'll grab out of the asset database. The remaining temp time can be used for something worthwhile, like painting the office..."

"Fantastic!"

"I thought so."

...

Two days later...

"And I'd like you to meet the two men you'll be working for. Guys, this is Cathy."

"A. Mmm," the PFY and I respond.

...

"Breathtaking," the PFY says, once the Boss has taken her off to find some office supplies.

"What's the word?" I respond. "Unspoilt? You know, like a tract of rainforest?"

"Like a silent and crystal clear mountain lake," the PFY sighs.

"Like a breath of fresh country air."

"Like an Intel box with no OS2 on it," the PFY adds, taking my role in annoying the two OS2-loving readers.

...

"And so what we'd like you to do, Cathy, is just copy these numbers from this page onto this page," I say.

"Is that all you'll need me to do? Your Boss said there was a lot of leg work?"

"We did all that before you got here, but unfortunately we just need the data across," I respond, stifling the mental image that the words 'leg work' inspired.

"Or I could just sample your handwriting and reprint those pages in colour with the correct data," the PFY offers, trying to win some brownie points.

"No, they'd spot the similarity of characters which would result in Cathy being blamed for not doing her job properly."

"I could fill them in for you," the PFY says.

"And I could get you tea and biscuits," I say, raising the stakes somewhat.

...

As the afternoon wears on, it becomes increasingly apparent that the office is witnessing a geeky re-enactment of clash of the Titans, with the PFY and I attempting to win Cathy's affection with our every deed.

...

Though it's only later in the afternoon as the PFY is calling out Asset Numbers to me to write down that I fully appreciate the irony of the situation.

"You realise that we're actually doing what we're supposed to with this Asset Inventory?" I say.

"You mean we were set up?!?! The Boss actually **PLANNED** all this!?!?"

"No, I think it was purely coincidental - but still, you have to laugh!"

"So what should we do?"

"I don't think either of us wants to disappoint Cathy, so we may as well finish this page, then come up with some form of plan."

"OK. But I want to tell Cathy!"

"Yes, yes, but I think we should possibly declare a truce for now, and find some other way of deciding the matter. So let's finish this page before one of those helldesk geeks sees her and does some spade work in our absence."

"Right!" the PFY responds, realising the dangers.

"Of course you do. OK, second to last item, a thick wire repeater."

"Where the hell would that be?"

"I don't think it's actually in use, so it's probably in the spares cupboard."

"Can't see it!" the PFY.

"Top shelf, behind the Macintosh boxes."

"No.. nothing here but..:"

>Boot!< >Slam!<

"Hey!" the PFY shouts from within the cupboard, as I up-end a desk in front of the door. "What about our truce."

"I did say '**possibly** declare a truce'," I say in my defence, as I make a break for the door.

...

"So we've worked our way through these pages and wonder if you could just.. check them against the list. I'll help you if you like," I say, brownnosing like a champ.

"And the other guy, where's he gone?"

"The VD clinic," I say, before I can stop myself.

I know, it's cruel, unsportsmanlike and not all that nice, but all's fair...

"What **IS** it with this place?" Cathy asks.

"What do you mean?"

"Well **he's** got VD, **you're** HIV positive..."

THE SCHEMING BASTARD! I knew I shouldn't have ducked out to the toilet with the PFY in the room.

Denying the accusation at this time would be pointless, because no matter what I say I'm relegated to the bench from now on. A true gentleman knows when he's been bested and accepts defeat gracefully...

"Tell me, you've obviously spoken to my assistant at length - do you know why all his ex-girlfriends call him JustIn?"

So I'm not a gentleman, sue me.

"No. But Grandpa says that you've worked with each other for years, so why don't you ask him?"

"Grandpa."

"Gerry. Davis. The CEO."

****WOOP WOOP, PULL UP!****

"Ah!"

...

The crashing about in the cupboard stops as I enter the Computer room and the PFY senses a shift in the power of the force. Opening the storage cover door reveals that he's made reasonable progress cutting the wood around the hinges with a mounting bracket and is probably only a couple of hours away from freedom.

"It's over," I say. "I've sent her away."

"You **WHAT!?**"

"Sent her away. She was the CEO's granddaughter."

"So?"

"So when things turned to custard, hell would have no fury like him. One or both of us would be down the road in an instant - regardless of our indispensability."

"Why do you automatically think it'd turn to custard?"

"History. Think about it. You **know** it'd end badly..."

The PFY thinks about it for a bit. "Yeah, you're probably right. No hard feelings?"

"None!"

>Boot!< >Slam<

Well, maybe just a little.

BOFH: How do you deal with authority?





BOFH 2004 Episode 27

Published Tuesday 24th August 2004 11:18 GMT





The problem with being an authority for something is there's always a bit of testosterone involved when someone wants to show you who's really boss.

How do you handle the transition of power into another hands? Take this little test to find out...

1. The boss is concerned about the amount of network traffic you consume and asks you to come and explain it. You'd take with you:

- A. Traffic logs showing it was mostly Windows security updates 
- B. Falsified traffic logs showing it was mostly... 
- C. Your union representative 
- D. An axe, a large roll of carpet, and a large quantity of polythene, a bag of lime... 

2. The finance user group wants you to explain the poor performance of their fileshare at their weekly meeting. Your first response is:

- A. What finance user group? 
- B. What weekly meeting? 
- C. What performance problems? 
- D. >clickety< what fileshare? 

3. The company auditor is concerned about anomalies in the asset register. You would assuage his fears with:

A. Comprehensive asset tracking information



B. Falsified tracking information



C. A large cash payment



D. An axe, a large roll of carpet...



4. The police are called in because of the disappearance of some senior members of staff. In helping them with their enquiries, you might need access to:

A. Security camera footage.



B. Swipe card access records



C. A bank vault



D. A hardware shop and a carpet factory...



5. A staff member complains about his files disappearing from the fileshare and the poor quality of the recovery mechanism. You would:

A. Check records for evidence of the files existence




B. Check backup logs for evidence of their removal




C. Cast your mind back to your recent needs for space to store music





D. Clean out his desktop machine as well - as a warning to others 

6. The helpdesk would like a definitive answer on the time to resolve a user's problem. You would approximate the time by:


A. Past experience 


B. Passing the case onto an assistant 


C. Picking a number out of the air 


D. (C) and reporting it in weeks. 

7. Security want you to account for your movements the night you were working overtime and the boardroom plasma screen disappeared. You would:


A. Produce swipe card logs for the period 


B. Produce login information and records 

C. Produce your online gaming stats for the time 

D. Produce a cattleprod and ask them to repeat the question... 

8. With the turnover of managers, one thing that concerns you is:

A. The loss of institutional knowledge about why you do things the way you do 

B. The need for some managers to assert their authority over you 

C. Their bitchiness when you convince them otherwise

D. The high price of carpet and lime when they can't come to terms with (C)

9. The buildings maintenance people have identified that the computer room is only half utilised and wish to recover some space to create a new office, citing the opinion that the building is theirs to allocate as required. You would:

A. Argue that the growth of computing will more than account for your ongoing needs for office real estate

B. (A), then take them on a field trip to a similar organisation

C. (A), then take them on a field trip to a group of similar organisations

D. (A), then take them on a field trip to an end-of-run carpet warehouse...

10. You've got a floor tile up moving some cabling inside Mission Control when the Health and Safety person informs you that you haven't put high visibility warning signs outside the office, filed a work plan with the Buildings Maintenance people, roped off the open area... You:

A. Thank them for their input and suspend your activities

B. Say you did, but Security's dog ate all your documentation

C. Say you did all the paperwork and left it beside the pump action shotgun in the computer room, and hopefully you'll remember which one you're supposed to bring back - if you have to go and get it

D. Remember to tell everyone that you saw a rat's nest under the floor - to explain the smell in a couple of weeks...

Anything to worry about?

BOFH switches to power-saving mode

BOFH 2004 Episode 28

Published Tuesday 31st August 2004 09:02 GMT

"What's he reading?" I ask the PFY, noticing the Boss standing outside his office pointing excitedly at a magazine while one of our nastier buildings maintenance people looks on.

"Ah. An article about saving power. The boss was in earlier with the buildings bloke, wanting to know if we shutdown or 'put our servers to sleep' at night."

"And you told them that servers were like old people - you put them to sleep at night and there's a few dead ones in the morning?"

"Yeah; then he asked why we didn't spin down the disk drives at night like the powersave options on most computers allow you to."

"And you told him that if he asked really nicely we'd cancel backups to let that happen?"

"Uh-huh."

"Management!" I sigh.

"What about management?" the Boss asks, entering the room with the buildings bloke in tow.

"I was talking about Power Management," I say. "It's not my problem - it's everyone's problem!"

"Exactly what I was saying!!" the Boss gasps happily "So you won't mind getting rid of your bar heater then?"

"What?! Didn't you just hear me when I said it wasn't my problem?"

"You said it was everyone's problem!"

"Yes, but I'm someone, not everyone."

"So you're saying you're a special case?"

"Of course. While the normal run-of-the-mill worker in this building occupies their workplace during the hours of 9-5, my assistant and I are called upon to attend problems at any time of the day or night. You can't expect us to come to a freezing cold office!!!"

"I.. Well what about lighting - surely you don't need all this lighting on all the time - even when you're **not** here?"

"You know that's just what I said, till a security guy known for his nosiness tripped in the dark in an incident that has all the hallmarks of someone stringing a piece of 100lb breaking strain

fishing line across the doorway. Very nasty. After that H&S got in on the act and the place is lit up like a Christmas tree, 24x7!"

"I see. What about your desktop machines?"

"What about them?"

"You could switch them off at night.."

"Four machines won't make a hell of a lot of difference.."

"Well what about if **everyone** in the building's desktop machine was switched off?"

"Good luck getting that to happen! Getting people to remember to switch their desktops off is about as likely as getting them to change their passwords every 90 days."

"Surely we can control it... ..remotely?" he asks carefully, giving the proverbial sleeping tiger of user annoyance a tentative prod.

"It'd take a lot of jiggering about and testing," the PFY warns.

"We can justify it, in power savings alone!" he says, as the buildings maintenance guy nods happily.

...15 company-wide reboots and two hours later. . . "Ok, I need you to stop testing the shutdown thing," the Boss gasps.

"Really?" the PFY asks. "I think we've almost cracked it!"

"How close are you?"

"Well we got the company-wide shutdown going ages ago, but getting the little machine icons to change from blue to red giving us a little trouble.."

"You've rebooted the whole company repeatedly just to get an icon to change!!!" the Boss blurts, horrified.

"Yeah?"

"Did you refresh your screen?" I ask.

"Actually no!" the PFY gasps "Maybe that was it!!!"

"!" the boss says wordlessly.

"It's the little things that always trip you up.." I say, nodding sagely to the Boss.

"I see," the Boss seethes. "So it's working now?"

"Yep," I say. "All you need to do is click on this button here >click< and everything shuts down."

>whirr< >click<

...Five minutes later...

"DON'T TOUCH THAT BUTTON AGAIN!" the Boss says testily.

"Wouldn't dream of it, complete accident last time - didn't realise it was actually hooked up. Anyway, we'll schedule the shutdown from now on - to take place automatically at... what time?"

"6:15pm."

"6:15pm it is then!" I say, entering the time.

>whirr< >click<

"What just happened?"

"My mistake!" I say "I set the **clock** time on this machine to 6:15 instead of the **shutdown** time. And the preset value of the shutdown time was 5:30pm, which is after the clock time, which means that all..."

The Boss has just realised that he's going to be as big a joke in the department as unbreakable Oracle - although less well received - and will be needing someone to blame if he doesn't want a new job in unemployment statistics...

"I can't **believe** that you'd cause so many problems for the company!" he says to me, hoping **I'll** fall on my sword.

"We **did** tell you it would require a lot of testing," I respond, passing the fiery mantle back to him.

"Well **surely** your assistant should have known the disruption this would cause to the workplace?!"

"You and the buildings guy **did** okay the testing...."

"Yes!" the boss gasps, dashing from the room to spread the word around the building. "It was the buildings guy!"

"Say," the PFY says. "Does the buildings guy still eavesdrop on conversations through the old heating vents?"

>CLACK!<

"What happened to the lights?!" the PFY gasps.

"Allow me," I reply, thinking quickly. "OF.. COURSE.. HE.. DOESN'T LISTEN IN. HE'S TOO BUSY... WORKING."

>CLACK!<

"And there was light!" the PFY says quietly.

"You think he can still hear us?" the PFY whispers. >CLACK!< >CLACK!<

"It would seem that way.." I respond "Which can mean only one thing."

"It was the Bosses fault after all?"

>CLACK!< >CLACK!<

"And.." I ask.

"I should.... update the boss's online calendar to reflect the amount of time he'll be stuck in the lift due to... engineering problems?"

>CLACK!< >CLACK!<

It's always good when professionals from different spheres can reach an understanding...

Introducing the BOFH-brand internet café

BOFH 2004 Episode 29

Published Tuesday 7th September 2004 12:02 GMT

"What's going on downstairs?" the Boss asks excitedly slipping into Mission Control.

"Can I have a sports question?" I ask, not knowing what he's going on about.

"The building!"

"The one we're in, or another building?"

"I mean the **CONSTRUCTION**, in the foyer!"

"Oh I think it's a visitor's centre," the PFY responds.

"The Technology Centre?" the Boss asks, happily.

"No, I think it's just a visitor's area - desk, couch, phone and coffee machine?"

"No, no, no!" the Boss chatters excitedly, "If it's any centre it'll be the Technology Centre for building visitors to plug themselves in and work online back to home."

"Technology' being a phone line and a 56k modem?" the PFY asks.

"Oh no, it's going to be very impressive, Video conferencing, wireless, infrared, VPN thingies, connections to various ISPs, etc. Then there's those big plasma screens, wireless peripherals, and integrated something or the other. There's going to be a whole network of them all over the country - maybe even the world."

"When did we budget for that sort of thing?" I ask.

"We don't - it's all being done by some startup venture thingummy company. They pay the setup costs and your visitors pay the running costs."

"So it costs people money to use?" the PFY asks.

"Oh yes. You just swipe your credit card to enter and the centre comes alive, and then swipe it again when you exit to shut it down and get your bill. It's all automated!!!" he gasps.

"I think I might just mosey on down and take a butcher's," the PFY says, exiting stage left.

.. Half an hour later ..

"So who's setting up the geeky stuff?" I ask.

"Some external company that the technology centre people have hired," the PFY replies. "Get this, though, they even have their own *Interior Designer* who specialises in IT installs. Apparently these centres really **are** going to go in companies all over the place, as well as train stations, tourist spots, the works!"

"Like a geeky phone booth. And so what's the 'designer' going to make it look like?"

"His name's Patriq - with a Q - What do you think it's going to be like?"

"Oh dear."

"Well, at least it'll have nice curtains," the PFY adds .

"**ACTUALLY**," the Boss cries, ending his eavesdropping and entering the conversation, "they want the centres to all look the same and have the same features whilst still aligning with the company theme."

"So our one will have a Mickey Mouse outfit over the door?" I ask.

"What?"

"Nothing," the PFY responds. "Private joke. .. About you... .. You'd have liked it too... .. Except that it was about you."

"What?!"

"Just ignore him," I say, tapping the side of my head. "He missed his prescription this morning and so he's failing parity checks."

"What?"

"So anyway, this centre - what will it look like?"

"Oh it'll be a full business centre - pen, paper, workstation, video suite, meeting room, leather couches and plasma screens in the viewing centre, deskside expresso machines, conferencing phones, wireless network, everything a travelling business person would want."

"It sounds rather large."

"That's the beauty of it - it's using all the empty foyer space and giving us a technology centre!"

"Don't we already have all that technology here?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, but this stuff's all in one place."

"As opposed to a walk of about 30 metres."

"Everyone likes it!" the Boss responds, having run out of real reasons.

"By everyone, you mean?"

The Boss pauses for a moment, not wanting to add names to tomorrow's workplace accident register.

"Oh, just everyone. The media too. They're all excited about the big unveiling tomorrow."

"It'll be up by tomorrow?"

"It'll be up by this afternoon! That's the beauty of it, it's all modular, just plug it into the power and you're away! An idiot could assemble one."

"And we're having an unveiling?"

"Yes, well, because it's the first in London!"

"They're opening the first in London... here?"

"Yes, because..." the Boss burbles, then stopping abruptly

"Because?"

"Oh, no reason."

"I'm sure there's a reason," the PFY says kindly, closing the office door.

The soundproof office door..

"The company's a major shareholder in the business centre startup company!" the Boss gasps, crumpling quicker than a SCO press release at a Linux conference.

"And they got someone **else** in to do the technical stuff instead of us?" the PFY asks.

"Yes."

"And installed it into the building using outside staff instead of us?"

"Yes."

"And weren't even going to tell us about it till it was over?"

"Uhhh. No."

"Why not?"

"I don't know," the Boss lies.

"I think you do.." the PFY says gently, locking the office door from the inside.

"I... Well it's because they were afraid there might..."

"Go on..."

"...be some problems at the unveiling. **NOT** because they don't trust your technical ability, but because if there were problems then they could just blame the installing company," the Boss gabbles. "They just want it to go smoothly."

"And they thought we'd be that shallow?"

"I.." the Boss says, embarrassed.

"There **are** limits to our childishness," the PFY sighs, unlocking the door. "They could have simply explained it."

"I..." the Boss says, exiting shamefully.

...

"So how do you think the unveiling is going?" the PFY asks the next morning when we're out of the building getting our mid-morning coffee at a brand new internet cafe round the corner.

"Dunno, but I have to admit that the Boss was right about one thing."

"What?"

"That modularity business - not only can an idiot assemble it, but they can also disassemble it, carry it round the corner and reassemble it again."

"Wha?"

"Obviously getting a lease and signage overnight was a little bit of an ask, but I know some people..."

"You stole the Technology centre!!!"

"Of course not, I simply replaced it with functional substitutes."

"?"

"A kitchen table and chair, a 486 and a 14" black and white telly. Oh and a beta video player - had to ring around a bit to find that baby!"

"And security didn't ask any questions?"

"Not once they'd settled into their new leather couch.. Now, would you like another cappuccino from this deskside unit."

"I..."

"Don't worry, the Boss is paying," I say, holding up his credit card.
Obviously I haven't reached the limit of my childishness just yet...

Poker-faced BOFH plays jokers wild

BOFH 2004 Episode 30

Published Tuesday 14th September 2004 09:18 GMT

Sometimes the offer of a junket from a vendor simply **MUST** be avoided. Particularly when you just **know** that the torture you're going to endure is not going to be outweighed by the benefits. Take, for instance, the slimy reptile who's been chasing me for a couple of days to meet him and listen to him talk about how his company has the best whatever-it-is that ever was, and how I would be completely remiss in my duties as an IT professional to not subscribe to, purchase, lease, or at least want to steal whatever it is that he's panhandling today.

"He can't be that bad," the PFY says, hanging up after failing to take yet another 'please call me back message' from the salesman in question.

"He is," I say. "He probably left the used car sales force because they weren't hard-sell enough for him."

"I..."

"Before that, he would've left Real Estate because they'd run out of ex-nuclear waste storage sites to whack low cost homes onto."

"He can't b.."

"And before **that**, he sold one of the ex-bosses that room full of NeXTs that no-one used."

"Really?"

"Uh-huh, and before that, the stack of Archimedes boxes stashed in the basement."

"The bastard!"

"Indeed."

"And you don't want to meet with him?"

"And get the hard sell for a couple of hours? I'd rather talk in reverse Polish notation for the rest of my life."

"Huh?"

"Yoda like is it."

"Oh. So why do you get me to take messages?"

"Just seeing what's on offer. You see, meeting a salesperson can be a little like playing poker."

"?"

"You look at what they might bring to the table before you decide to play."

"?"

"Ok, so you've got some junior salesdroid, who's probably only going to be able to pony up with a business card and maybe a pen and pad with the company logo all over it. Mid-rangers can probably ante up with a vinyl writing set and a seat in an average position at a sporting event - with the possibility of a couple of drinks at half time. The Kenny Rogers Gambler types, on the other hand, are likely to have the keys to the Corporate box, endless bar tabs, quality company merchandise and a bit of international travel under the guise of technical briefings."

"I see, so where does this guy fit?"

"He's new so it's hard to tell. He opened with a coffee - the equivalent of a couple of matchsticks. He raised it to brunch, which is more like 50p."

"Right. And where are you in all this?"

"I'm on the other side of the table with a pair of twos, bluffing and holding out for more substantial stakes. At this point, I'll need to flash him a card or two to keep him keen - by implying that we have money coming out our petootie and don't know what to spend it on."

"And then?"

"One of three things will happen. 1. He'll fold and I'll get a call from a senior salesperson who wants to get in the game; 2. He'll have - or assume he has - enough to cover his bets and raise me... or..."

"Or.."

"Or 3. He'll go balls out and pull **everything** on the table on a spectacular gamble that'll either earn him big dosh and a seat at the big card table of multinational marketing."

".. or?"

"Have him launching a Hutchence in the local by lunchtime."

>ring ring<

"And so the game commences.. Hello?"

"Simon hi, it's Dave here, wanting to touch base with you over lunch, don't know how you're fixed for, say, tomorrow, one, at the Ritz?"

"Ritz is good," the PFY whispers.

"Yeah Dave, not too sure if I can make it, it's a little tricky, what with our budget planning and stuff. It's so busy I'm lucky to step out of the office to fart."

"Ooh, a bluff **and** a raise," the PFY comments.

"Well I suppose we could catch up after your budget planning - or I guess we could just meet up after work sometime if it's convenient. Is the budget thing running on a bit long?"

"Gentle probe for what you're holding," the PFY murmurs.

"Yeah, it's a bloody infrastructure replacement plan for year end, it's driving me barmy! One minute they're saying we can spend whatever it takes, the next they're cutting it back to a couple of million. I mean what can you bloody acheive with a couple of bloody million?"

"Smooth," the PFY nods, translating: "I have two diamonds and three hearts and think that's what I need for a flush..."

We wait patiently, giving Dave time to wet himself.

".... ..Yeah, I see what you mean," he commiserates, masking his excitement. "Tell you what, I could share a few ideas with you about some innovative approaches that our company's been using to leverage effect replacement plans in the States - In fact, I think I could probably jack up a quick weekend trip to the Big Apple to talk to a couple of our previous synergy-solution recipients."

"There he goes," the PFY sighs. "Nuts in a vice time."

"Well, I was planning to get a bit of rest in the weekend," I reply.

"What the hell, we'll go first class and you can catch some zeds on the flight!" he says.

"And there goes the farm," the PFY sighs.

"Well....."

...

"So are you going to go through with it?"

"Well, I have to admit that it'd give me little joy to see his career go down the toilet. Still, sometimes a little joy is better than nothing!"

PFY proves self abuse cures male-pattern baldness

BOFH 2004 Episode 31

Published Friday 17th September 2004 11:57 GMT

Slow weeks are bad for systems people, you end up having to make your own fun. To pass the dull week, I challenge the PFY to make me a truly inventive mod for our proxy server. The stakes are a night of drinking at the other person's expense.

Like I said, it passes the time...

Two days on, he's ready for his demo, which I'm convinced is bound to be far less spectacular than my proxy mirror and will ultimately lead to my whipping up a nice fresh pavement pizza by the end of the night...

"Ladies und Gentlemen, I present to you... The Newsmaker!" the PFY chirps happily, waving his hand at his squid plug-in.

"Which does?"

"Give me a news headline, anything, no matter how ridiculous!"

"Scientists discover intelligent life in Redmond!"

>clickety< >clickety< >click< >clickety< >tap< >tap< >clickety< ... >click<

"Right, now Google for it!"

I dutifully fire up Google, bash in Redmond and Intelligence, and roger me senseless with a full height drive if the first 10 hits don't point show up the headline I've just created, pointing at Time Warner, Yahoo News, all the greats...

"Interesting - injecting false links into Google to point at news sites. I like it!"

"Ahem," the PFY interrupts. "Click on one of the links."

I do so, and grab that hard drive for a second go if the site concerned doesn't come up with the headline in question!

"You hacked the news site?"

"Not at all! I used the base idea behind banner blocking to remove the lead headline of a news site and insert my headline instead. You can even add a picture if you want, but obviously only for things that are possible to prove."

"So will this work for **all** the news sites listed?"

"Oh yes. And more importantly, the various search sites as well. So no matter what common search engine you use, the proxy discards the first 100 matches and inserts 100 of its own 'matches' instead."

"What about secure sites?"

"Oh, you fake that. Most people wouldn't check for or be concerned about security - outside their personal banking anyway."

"Ok, so you've thought this through. Now why are you so pleased with yourself?"

"Because of the potential applications!!! You can lie your way into anything! You tell the Boss that wheelie chairs cause bum cancer and he'll say it's rubbish, then check the web, just to make sure. Next thing you know, he's replacing all the chairs in the department for 'Health reasons'. If anyone in the building calls him on it, he'll tell them that it's news, they'll check on the web..."

"And on it goes. Hmmm. He who controls the proxy controls the world... Ok, I admit, it's a great mod, and worth a pint."

"All the pints I can drink, I believe you said. But wait, there's more!"

"What?"

"It also catches dictionary and thesaurus sites and sends back deliberate misspellings, antonyms instead of synonyms, etc. And, as a bonus the thesaurus introduces hundreds of 'new words' into the English language which idiots will pretentiously add into their memos - and which **no-one** will understand."

"Ok, I'll buy you drinks for a night - but only because the Boss using 'New' words in his official documents would be as funny as the time you mapped all his keyboard shortcut keys to bring up porn."

"Well **speaking** of porn, how about a proxy that makes all his searches which **aren't** related to our fake news link instead to porn pages?"

"Nah, he'd click on the back button to prove that he didn't go there in the first place."

"**UNLESS**... Some bastard set the proxy to make the pages non-browser-cached, so you can't click back, then delivering a disgusting porn bbs in response to a refresh...."

"Nasty. But it'll never work, no-one's that stupid!"

"How stupid?" the Boss asks, rolling into Mission Control.

"As stupid as the guy in the news," the PFY replies.

"Mmm?"

"The one on the web who claims he has proof," the PFY adlibs, drying up on the details.

"Proof of what?"

"That the research that proves that masturbation reverses male pattern baldness has been suppressed by the Catholic church."

"That's ridiculous!" the Boss says touching his head self-consciously.

Honestly, it's not fair that it's so easy!

"That's just what I said," I respond. "But you know the idiocy of youth."

The boss wanders nonchalantly back to his office, and I take the opportunity to ring the head of IT to say the Boss had something to show him.

"Why'd you do that?" the PFY says.

"So the Boss is looking up Masturbation and hair loss on the web, right."

"Uhuh."

"And he sees the Head walking up, what's he going to do?"

"Close the browser?"

"Get serious, everyone knows what a disappearing window means. No, he'll type a quick word like 'DOG' into Google and click on the first link."

"Which will go to a porn site," the PFY smiles.

"And he'll get flustered and click back, to get to the dog page to have an excuse in case the Head saw something."

"And get a porn bbs..."

"And panic some more."

"And click back again to get out of it..."

"And get the masturbation search again..."

"Which, if you turn off your newsmaker at exactly the right moment..."

"Would give no headlines, just stick links..."

"Oooh, there goes the Head now..."

We hear the very distant sounds of scrabbling...

Slow weeks are bad for everyone.

BOFH: What to do when the Boss gets touchy-feely

BOFH 2004 Episode 32

Published Friday 24th September 2004 11:58 GMT

"I'M NOT A SIMPLEMINDED BLOODY IDIOT YOU KNOW!" the Boss shouts.

"MMmmmmff," the PFY responds, getting a mouthful of the book I'm holding before he can say something he'll regret. Well, something that the Boss will regret. Actually, something the Boss won't understand, ask for clarification for, get annoyed about, do something stupid and retaliatory, in turn receive something from the PFY in the stupid and retaliatory line. That he'll regret.

"What's wrong with me having full network access?"

>Sigh<

"If we allow the application you're using to contact the internet, it'll most likely cause your machine to be infected with one of a number of new viruses, which will most likely cause a lot of the workplace machines to be infected."

"Don't people have antivirus programs on their machines?"

"Yes, but the definitions are rarely up to date - and peer-to-peer networking is a good way of downloading the latest in viruses."

"But if I kept **my** machine up to date, it would all be ok then?"

"Not necessarily, no," I reply.

"Why not?"

"Because you're an idiot," the PFY blurts, before I can install another chapter.

"I beg your pardon?" the Boss says, in a tone which would tend to suggest the matter isn't going to end here.

"ID-I-OT," the PFY says slowly. "YOU... ARE... ONE."

Which clears up any potential misunderstanding the boss might have about the message that the PFY is trying to convey to him. All that we need now is the Boss to want to make a big deal out of it...

"Right!" the Boss says, storming out.

Cat, Pigeons, frantic fluttering noises.

...

"So the purpose of this interview is to investigate the complaint that's been made to ascertain what actually took place from the viewpoint of all parties," the HR woman says. "Now we have a statement here, which I'll read shortly, but at this point I'd just like you to recount **your** memory of what took place earlier today - in your own words. Bear in mind that anything said in this room should remain in this room."

"Well," the PFY starts. "I got to work at about 8:15am..."

"Yes, ok, I should have been a bit more precise," the HR rep says. "What I actually meant was what occurred earlier this morning - in the conversation with your manager."

"The conversation with my manager?" the PFY repeats vacantly.

"I think you know which conversation..." the HR rep says kindly.

"Do we **really** have to go into it - I mean it's all water under the bridge!"

"Once a complaint's been made, we have to investigate it thoroughly."

"But what if Simon withdraws it?"

"Withdraws what?!" the Boss snaps.

"Why would you think that Simon would've brought the complaint?" the HR person asks, raising a finger for the Boss's silence.

"I... Isn't this about the harassment thing?"

"The harassment thing?"

"The boss. Propositioning me. I only told Simon because it disturbed me - I didn't want to get anyone in trouble."

Ooooh, the old "boss is all over me" defence.

"WHAT!?" the boss shouts.

"I didn't even mention the doors thing," the PFY adds.

"The doors thing?" the HR person asks.

"The way he... always closes the door when I go into his office. It makes me... uncomfortable."

"It's for privacy!"

"You never close the door for the secretary or the Head's PA!"

"I don't get complaints about them!"

"Actually, people complain about me," I add, "but I don't get the closed door treatment."

"You never bloody turn up!"

"Uh-huh. Very convenient."

"I'M A HAPPILY MARRIED MAN - WITH TWO CHILDREN!"

"Cover story," the PFY murmurs quietly.

"Ok, I... I think this may have got a little out of hand," The HR droid interjects, holding up a hand. "Simon, what's your opinion?"

"I'm sure **some** people find my assistant attractive, but I favour the child bearing - as opposed to ball bearing – gender."

"I'M NOT BLOODY GAY!"

"Sure, Elton," the PFY snaps.

"Well I have to say that this complicates matters somewhat," the HR person interrupts. "I'm going to have to seek some advice from my supervisor before we go any further."

...

Several extended "counselling" sessions later...

"So we're agreed that you might have misheard him, and he, in turn might have misunderstood your... concern for his wellbeing," the HR rep says, scratching notes as she goes.

"I suppose I **may** have been mistaken," the PFY admits.

"And I **might** have heard him say something else I guess," the Boss responds.

"Ok, in that case I can't see any reason in us following this up any further," the HR rep says, signing the bottom of her page and making to leave.

"All this because you don't want me to run a file sharing program," the Boss murmurs to the PFY quietly. "It's sort of pathetic really." "Plonker," the PFY mouths back.

And there go those words he's going to regret... Well, the Boss is going to regret..

"BAD TOUCHING!" the PFY shouts, jumping up from the table and hiding behind the HR rep before Boss can move.

Sigh. It is sort of pathetic really. But the touch of fun makes everything worthwhile.

"I saw everything!!!!." I blurt.

BOFH tests the law of redundant supply

BOFH 2004 Episode 33

Published Monday 4th October 2004 12:50 GMT

Exciting times...

It seems the power supply of our webserver crapped itself and, in an excellent example of superior technology, grounded the phase for the rack - which in turn tripped the breaker and took out all the non-redundant powered systems within.

The PFY is on the job in a flash having seen exactly this type of thing many times before in kit from this vendor. (It's always reassuring to note that when a company merges with a company that in turn merged with the original hardware manufacturer, they still manage to incorporate the worst design features from the original product.)

But I digress.

"When's the website going to be up?" the Boss asks, sputniking around me madly.

"Not sure," I respond. "It'll depend on how long the engineer takes to get here."

"Can't **you** fix it?"

"I **could**, but it would void the warranty - me not being a certified engineer and all."

"Well, have you called it in?"

"Just getting round to it," I say, firing up the systems page on the browser to get the serial number. >scratchey< >scratch< "Righto, Sorted."

"Where are you going now?!" the Boss gasps as I get up.

"Just getting a coffee and some lunch."

"But it's only 11:30?!"

"Yeah but I **am** planning on waiting on the line till they answer..."

..later that day outside the Boss' office..

"So how important is it that we get the website back online?" I ask.

"Very!!!" the boss blurts.

"Ah!"

"Why?"

"I told them it was a severity three call."

"That's good isn't it?"

"Not really. Watering their pot plants is Sev-2, so I doubt they'll be here today..."

"What?! Ring them back, change the severity!"

"Well, I could try calling, but it's 4pm now and their call desk closes at five."

"THAT ISN'T SERVICE!"

"No, but it's only a web server."

"Every minute the site's down we're losing money!" he gasps.

"No we're not. We don't do any business over the web so we're not losing money! Had it been the Stocks trading server at this time of day though, it'd be a **completely** different story and half the company would be banging on your door.."

"But the web's a valuable customer interface!"

"If you're Amazon, or Sendit, but not if you're us. We're a web nothing! Baby seals get more hits!"

Somewhere in the recesses of my mind I realise I may have stepped over a line here - if only in good taste.

"I..." the Boss says, slightly deterred, "... but it's core business!"

"Nah, that's just what the website company said. In reality, it could disappear without anyone noticing."

"I think that's an overstatement!"

"How much traffic does the website do on the average day?" I ask the PFY.

>clickety< >tap< >tap< >click<

"Hmm, about a meg. Including the index rebuild," The PFY responds.

"And the index rebuild generates?"

"Just under a meg."

"So in effect, the loss of our website would have as much impact..."

"As Karen Carpenter on a Salad Bar," the PFY says, joining me over this side of the line.

"Well I still want it up!" the Boss snaps, liking the feel of an executive decision.

"But the only way to get it up today would be to borrow the spare supply out of another server," the PFY suggests. "A more important server. We don't generally like to do it beca.."

"JUST DO IT!"

"Bu.."

"GET IT DONE!"

Five minutes and one large >clack< from the powerboard later.

"What the hell's happened?" the Boss blurts.

"The only similar power supply was in the Stocks and Tradings server, so I whipped that out to test if it would work, but the problem seems to be on the motherboard so it's cooked another supply," the PFY gabbles.

"YOU USED THE REDUNDANT SUPPLY FROM THE STOCKS TRADING SERVER!" the Boss gasps. "No."

"Oh thankgoodnessforthat!"

"No it seems it wasn't redundant after all."

"What are you telling me?" the Boss asks, paling slightly.

"You can take the power supply out and the machine will work ok."

"Yes?"

"..for about five minutes, then it overheats because the cooling fan in the power supply is missing from the machine," the PFY finishes.

"THAT'S BLOODY CRAP REDUNDANCY!" the Boss shouts.

"Sort of. You see, there's a fan unit somewhere that you remove when you install the redundant power supply."

"Then put it back in the machine!"

"There's the problem, no-one knows where it is, and there's less than a minute left."

"So what do we do?"

"I'm going to check the stock exchange website to see what the company's holding in its system and get a printout up to the traders. You might want to grab the newspaper."

"To check stock prices?"

"Nah. The job pages. I foresee another crap redundancy on the horizon..."

BOFH: A ringside seat at the Boss-baiting pit

BOFH 2004 Episode 34

Published Friday 8th October 2004 10:21 GMT

"And this is what again?"

"The heatsink," the PFY responds calmly. "It fits on top of the processor."

"And the fan sits on top of it!" the new Boss says happily.

"Yes. No, not **that** fan, that's a **case** fan. The **small** fan screws into the heatsink."

"Of course - it's obvious when you think about it!"

"**If** you think about it, yes."

Building your own PC is not one of the activities we recommend for non-technical managers. Or technical managers for that matter. Even more so for technical managers who aren't all that technical, but think they are. It's **even worse** when the non-technical technical manager is the new boss with a great idea of saving cash by making our own machines. The PFY, after trying to talk him out of it by recounting the MTBF of build-your-own-kit and the sliding scale of cost over reliability decides - out of the kindness of his heart and stupidity of his mind - to help the new Boss in his endeavour.

"And we swing the little lever over now?"

"No, screw the fan to the heatsink first, THEN we put the processor in, THEN we swing the lever over, THEN we take the little sticker off the heatsink, THEN we clip the heatsink on."

"And you have to be careful to get the chip in the right way around?"

"Yes."

"Well there doesn't seem to be all that much to it really. Honestly, the way you people talk, you'd think you were building Beagle III, when in actual fact it's more like Meccano."

"Yeah, we do make it out to be a lot more than it is," he responds drily.

If I could somehow distract the PFY, I'd to warn the Boss that comments like this are the equivalent of teasing a hungry attack dog...

Still, it **is** a slow week...

>click<

"And I plug the memory in now?"

"Uh huh, but the other way around," the PFY says, gesturing.

"Yes yes, I'm not stupid," the Boss snaps.

(>tease tease<)

>clip<

"And now I connect up the power supply!" he says.

"No, plug the disk cables in first."

"Yes, yes, I was going to do that."

"And now the disk power cables."

"GIVE ME A BLOODY CHANCE, I'M MAKING SURE THE CABLES ARE THE RIGHT WAY AROUND!" the Boss lies, annoyed. "Honestly."

(>tease< >tease< >jab with a sharp stick<)

"Oh, you're right, they're not in the right way," the PFY adds. "Which is surprising, because you shouldn't be able to do that!"

"Well you **are** in my light..." the boss snips.

(>jab< >jab<)

Around about now I'm wondering who's going to crack first as the Boss is starting to get a little testy too.

Ooooooh BITCH FIGHT! I'd best get a coffee and some popcorn!

By the time I'm back from the coffee machine, the Boss has tried to bury the hatchet .in a non-escalating manner by apologising to the PFY.

Ah well, Can't win em all.

"And so it should be able to start now?" the Boss asks.

"Should do, yes."

The Boss pushes the power switch, and, in the manner of a poorly located xyzzy, Nothing happens.

"It's broken," the Boss says.

"No, it's probably something simple," the PFY says. "Lets have a look inside."

An hour later. . .

"I don't get it," the PFY says. "I've checked everything on another box and they're all working ok."

"Perhaps it's something you've forgotten," the Boss says smarmily.

>prod< >tease<

"The power supply is switched off at the back of the machine!" the Boss notes, locating the source of the problem.

When caught out by someone with technical ability so far below yours it looks like an ant on a runway, there are two possible responses: Like 98 per cent of the population and admit that you have made a mistake, or lie like a bastard in a pathetic manner to cover up for your momentary lapse of technical acumen.

"No, I turned that off to isolate the unit," the PFY lies, taking the path less traveled. "So that won't be the problem. But I think it's possibly a thermal lag heating coefficient problem in the processor mount."

Now that the PFY has gone down this road the Boss' machine is a goner. There's no way on earth he's going to let it work once the power is switched on.

Which means its popcorn time!

"A what?" the Boss asks, being new and not knowing the smell of recycled hay.

"It doesn't matter," the PFY says. "We just need to remove and reseal all the components again."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Right, I'll just plug myself in," the Boss says, clipping the earth lead onto his antistatic bracelet.

"Don't worry about that," the PFY blurts. "You plugged it in earlier so it'll be operating in wireless mode! Oh, look, you haven't secured the CPU fan. Right, grab the hot glue gun and drop a huge glob onto the fan just there."

"Right, done," the Boss says dully. "Anything else?"

"You'll want to zero the memory."

"How?"

"Just pop it out and rub it up and down on the carpet tiles for a couple of minutes..."

. . .

Switching the voltage on the power supply to 115 just after the processor cooked was just cruel, and I would have called a halt to the whole thing if I hadn't been videotaping it.

She's a hard road finding the perfect balance of cost to reliability though...

BOFH: Seek, locate and destroy

BOFH 2004 Episode 35

Published Friday 15th October 2004 09:39 GMT

*There are times in a professional Systems Administrator's life when he must ignore the opinion of Managers and even cast aside the sage advice of his assistant. For from his experience he knows what all others do not - that this is a pivotal situation with issues at stake that others are unaware of. In these situations, the professional administrator shines out, weighing up his practical experience and taking the burden of decision (and possible blame) upon himself - **The Bastard Operator's Manual***

It's one of those times. It's dark - almost pitch black thanks to a cleverly disabled switchboard - and I'm outside a prison camp with my MP5. And I'm annoyed...

"Switch off Night Vision and creep up to the Guard Box!" the Boss whispers.

"No," the PFY counters. "The Proximity Detector's off, no-one's there! Keep night vision on, do a circuit of the Camp to eliminating any guards, THEN switch Night Vision off, and enter through the main tower!"

"Sssh!" I murmur, flipping on the Sniper Scope and looking around the camp. BINGO! Guard standing beside the far tower...

Playing Ghost Recon during work hours isn't an approved work activity, but it certainly draws the crowds and passes the time. The entertainment provided by a Quick Mission during a slow period can only be devalued by the input and distraction presented by others. I decide on the unsubtle approach to the tower problem...

>BZerrrrrt!< >BZzzzzzerrrt<

I wheel the recently cattleprodded PFY and Boss into the corner of the room, returning to my desk to find that I've lost a team member. Suppressing the urge to give them another zap for the inconvenience, I get back to the game...

I sneak up to the Camp doorway as the proximity detector comes on. I slowly creep around the corner...

>RING!<

The game's interrupted by a phone call from HR.

"Systems," I say on hands free while creeping up the Prison Camp steps.

"The helpdesk say I have to talk to you about a file problem, they can't help me - it's something to do with a space problem on the Server."

"Which means you'll need to delete some files to free up space."

"But we need all our files!"

"When the disk space runs out, it runs out. It's what we call a **finite** resource..."

"Can't you do something?"

"Well **I** could delete all your files for you?"

"I... uh.. No.."

"Ok, nice talking with you then!"

I get back to the game and am creeping into the Camp with the phone rings again. The tiny distraction of looking at the caller ID display is all that's required for me to lose another man >BOOM< to a grenade launcher.

"YES?" I snap.

"Uh, it's me again. The helpdesk said that maybe you can archive some material from the server."

"Did they? Well sure, just slap it into a folder called 'DELETE ME' and I'll back it up for you."

"Don't you mean 'Archive Me'?"

"Yes, of course - my mistake, I was distracted."

"And when can you have that done by?"

"The stuff in the 'DELETE ME' Folder?"

"No The 'Archive Me' Folder!"

"Yes, right! Ahh.. I'm copying it over now."

One drag-and-drop later...

"Is it done?"

"You betcha!"

"Ok, Thank... Was that the trash bin emptying noise?!?!"

"No no, that was something else. Bye now."

I'm in the prison camp and am half way to the prisoner's compound when THE BLOODY PHONE GOES AGAIN! The Boss and PFY are no help, still being in half-stupor (although the

PFY twitches slightly as >Boom!< I LOSE ANOTHER MAN TO THAT BLOODY GRENADE LAUNCHER!)

"YES?!"

"Sorry, I need to revert to the first version of the file I was working on, which is in the Archived folder. Can you bring it back online please?"

"Sure, but it's on tape, so it'll take a day to recover."

"You just deleted my files before didn't you?" the user sighs, "and now you're going to recover them from backup tape - aren't you?"

"No..."

"So you **did** archive them?!" he gasps.

"No."

"But you said they weren't on backup tape either."

"No, I **said** I wasn't going to recover them. But they are on backup tape and NOT on archive."

"Well how do I get them back?"

"You'll have to speak to my assistant."

"Can I speak to him?"

"He's Incapac... >BANG!< BUGGER IT TWO DOWN!. You'll have to ring back later!"

>slam<

The remains of my team make it through the prison camp gates and I progress slowly through the camp eliminating my opposition, which has a strangely calming effect on the annoyance I felt moments ago. It's almost enough to...

>RING!<

>BOOM!<

"Yes?"

"Just ringing back to tell you that you don't need to recover that file after all, I just undid all the changes I'd made and it's all worked out. Hey, was that an explosion sound? Are you playing games..... Hello? Anyone there...?"

...

It's dark - almost pitch black thanks to a cleverly disabled switchboard - and I'm in the HR stairwell with my cattleprod. And I'm annoyed... I reach up to the fire alarm breakglass...

The BOFH mobile comms quiz

Published Monday 18th October 2004 12:17 GMT

It's mobile, it's comms, it's great - you know it, your geeky users want it.

But then people are rarely happy. They want 802.11b and they want it yesterday, and you're the one who's supposed to have installed it. Yesterday. However, as a seasoned computing veteran, before you put your budget where someone's mouth has been, just ask yourself these questions:

1. Mobile comms in your workplace currently consists of:

- A. Full 802.11b/g coverage ☐
- B. Partial 802.11b/g coverage ☐
- C. Unadvertised 802.11b/g coverage in your region
the IT Dept ☐
- D. Anywhere the roll of thinwire cable can get to! ☐

2. You would install 802.11 in your workplace except that:

- A. You're unsure of the security implications ☐
- B. The building would have too many dead spots ☐
- C. The budget would be difficult to justify ☐
- D. Half the staff would come to work with tinfoil
wrapped round their heads ☐

3. Wireless would get most use in meeting rooms to:

- A. Allow people to take online notes of meeting ☐

progress

B. Allow people to read their email during slow periods ☐

C. Allow people to send sneaky messages to each other ☐

D. Keep people 'abreast' of the porn revolution ☐

4. In your opinion your users would judge the throughput of the wireless network in:

A. Bytes per second ☐

B. Kilobytes per second ☐

C. Megabytes per second ☐

D. Smutty movie frames per second ☐

5. Using your knowledge of the people concerned, the mobile devices commonly used by your technical staff would most likely be:





A. PDA ☐

B. Laptop ☐





C. Webcam ☐

D. Shoecam ☐





6. An anonymous survey to determine the most-requested places to put 802.11 coverage would find most demand for:

- A. Cafeteria 
- B. Designated smoking areas 
- C. Reception 
- D. The gents' toilets 

7. After a lengthy campaign advertising coverage areas, a user complains about a massive dead spot. You know that when you get to their room you're going to find:

- A. Their PCMCIA card has popped out 
- B. Their PCMCIA aerial has broken off 
- C. They don't have, nor have they ever had, a PCMCIA card 
- D. Their desktop machine on a trolley in the corridor 

8. The security of your 802.11b solution is ensured by:

- A. WEP 
- B. Access restricted to named hardware addresses 
- C. VPN connectivity 
- D. Burying the bodies of the people who try to get around with it 

9. An annoying user repeatedly comes to complain about the poor bandwidth in his area. You:

- A.** Add another access point in an effort to double the bandwidth ☐
- B.** Move the access point closer to his area ☐
- C.** Do a site survey ☐
- D.** Do a site survey. Then install a large ungainly microwave dish precariously above his workstation. Set to DEFROST... ☐

10. The best way to encourage uptake in wireless networking at your workplace would be posters:

- A.** Noting 802.11b/g on site ☐
- B.** Advising of troubleshooting techniques ☐
- C.** Advertising best coverage areas ☐
- D.** Advertising 'Kournokova nude - only on wireless!' ☐

Find out how you score

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...

...

...

Which just isn't going to happen...

It'd seem that as well as the ability to bore the life out of a cleaner, he also has an infinite capacity to keep himself entertained by simply staring at a section of wall and waiting...

"Let's just talk to him," the PFY whispers. "How bad can it be?"

"Bad!"

"Tell him we have some urgent network work on that can't wait. That we have to go and attend to."

"Yes, and listen to him tell us about the history ethernet, the advent of UTP cabling, the performance of collision-detect media as bandwidth usage increases, how the insulation in Cat-6 cabling actually contains tiny air pockets to try and reduce the effects of crosstalk in..."

>Clunk<

"Oh!" The PFY says, lifting his head up off the floor. "I see what you mean! What about a cattle prod?"

"His hide's so thick he doesn't notice people glazing over so I'm guessing he's impervious to conventional weapons."

"oh.."

....

Some time later...

...

"What time is it?" the PFY whispers.

"3:45pm"

"It's only been fifteen minutes! I can't take much more of this!"

"Pull yourself together man!" I snap. "We need to think! Now, he's not going anywhere which means that we'll have to. Can you crawl over here without being seen?"

"No, he'll spot me between the desks."

"I've got an idea!" I say.

"What?"

"I'll crawl under this desk, swipe myself into the Computer room and leave the back way."

"How does that help me?"

"Oh. I stopped thinking about you when I realised that Dave's going to stay late and wait for us."

"So you're just going to abandon me?"

"Law of the Jungle I'm afraid."

"What?"

"Survival of the fittest!"

"That's Natural Selection!"

"Is it? Oh. What what's law of the Jungle then? OH!, That's right it's..."

>bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >creak<

"What are you two doing down there?" the Boss asks, entering from the Computer Room side of the room.

"... human sacrifice," I finish.

"What's human sacrifice?" he asks.

"Law of the jungle," the PFY says. "We were just talking about it while we finished off the... uh... network patching."

"I thought you patched networks at the Comms room."

"Ordinarily, yes," I respond, "but this is an experiment we're trying out - terminating cables at the desktop, not at the data rack."

"Yes, it's something that came up in a conversation with Dave the other day," the PFY says.

"But don't you still need to patch them..."

"You'll have to ask Dave about the ins and outs of it all," the PFY says. "He's just outside..."

. . . Some time later . . .

>Clunk<

"Right lets sneak out the back way!"

"What about the boss?"

"We'll have a minute's silence for him at the pub!"

Dangerous place, the jungle...

BOFH: When sorry seems to be the hardest word

BOFH 2004 Episode 37

Published Friday 29th October 2004 10:05 GMT

Sigh. It seems that no matter what I do nor how helpful I try to be, there's always someone who's not happy. It seems that all the PFY and I get is negative feedback. It's enough to make a man question his career in technical support. Worse still, I know the Boss has received a complaint about my most recent efforts and has made some very rash promises about how it will be made right...

The Boss tries the softly-softly approach at first so as to lull me into a false sense of security - not knowing that all calls originating in the sixth floor and terminating at his office are automatically flagged for my attention.

"So, how're things going?" he asks.

"Good."

"I see... Anything... .. going on?" he asks.

"Not really."

"No calls from, say Board members?" he hints, with a tiny tinge of annoyance.

"Board members.... Board Members.... No, can't say offhand that I... wait a minute! Yes, I got a call this morning from one. Helped him with a mailing problem!"

"Yes, he says your instructions deleted all his mail and public folders."

"Really? What was the problem again?"

"He's had errors accessing his Mail data ever since someone set his home computer up as a synchronisation server."

"And does he get errors now?"

"Obviously not!"

"So you're saying that the problem's gone away?" I respond, helpfully. "Always a pleasure to receive positive feedback!"

"Making it disappear is not solving a problem!"

"But, it's not causing problems any more!!!"

"You can't just resolve a problem by removing it!"

"Can't we?" The PFY replies, entering the conversation from the Computer room doorway.

"No!"

"So I should put the virus back onto the financials fileserver?"

"No!"

"But you just..."

"I know what I said, but if we used that approach to everything the answer to the virus-in-email problem would have been to remove the mail system!"

"Why didn't I think of that?!" the PFY blurts excitedly, grabbing a hammer. "Back in a tick!"

"STOP!" the boss commands, unsure of what the PFY would do to make a point. "Speaking of Viruses, the board member also claims that when he rang you back about his email being gone you said you thought the SureCam worm must have been unleashed on his desktop and that he should quarantine all his files in the Recycle bin!!"

What the hell!

"It's a fair cop guv!" I confess, hoping that a quick confession will get the witch hunt over and done with so I can continue my server repair.

"Wa?" the boss burbles.

"It was me. I did it, I'm not proud of it, I'll never do it again. So, I suppose it's time for a nasty memo to float down from above about us being more kind to people who don't deserve computers."

"No, nothing like that. Apparently he rang his wife and all his work is synchronised at home and he only lost a couple of email messages that came in this morning. So all he wants is an apology."

"Well I'm sure he's looking forward to your call..."

"Ah, no, he'd like an apology from you. In person and in writing."

...

"And I'd like a secure Microsoft application - but we can't always get what we want!"

"Well this has been up to the Chairman of the Board himself!" the Boss responds reverently, pointing at the ceiling. "But it's just a quiet word or two, no biggy. Just to show that we're approachable and make mistakes too..."

"I see. So he wants me to go up and tell him how sorry I am?"

"Him and the rest of the board, yes."

Perfect.

Two hours later I'm in the lift in my Sunday best. Ten minutes later, I'm back, to the visible pleasure of half the department.

"So how did they take it?" the Boss asks, stopping short of breaking out into laughter.

"Stunned silence."

"Really? I have to admit that I thought you'd rather quit than apolo..."

"No, I mean stunned, as in stunned. Did you know that the ornamental copper band around the boardroom table is a perfect conductor?"

"I..."

"And get this, the footrest at the base of the table is earthed!!!"

"What did you do?!" the Boss gasps.

"Not a thing!! One of the standalone light units fell onto the table, breaking the globe and electrocuting half the board members. The odds of it happening are astronomical!"

"It just 'happened'?" the Boss says drily.

"Yeah! I mean to engineer something like that would be.. well it would be a huge job! You'd have to place the lamp just so, overbalancing it so that the slightest touch would tip it over, remove the safety grill and glass, replace the building's residual current circuit breakers with hard fuse, um... earth the foot rests I suppose - it would take... I don't know how long!"

"23 minutes, 37 seconds - including travel time," the PFY says.

"What?!" the Boss and I both cry.

"Did it the whole time you were getting changed for your meeting," he says to me. "I mean how would it look, a computing professional apologising to a luser group!"

"RIGHT! You're not getting away with this!" the Boss snaps, storming out to call security.

"I..." I say, a bit choked up by the PFY's loyalty. "I don't know what to say! But.. I was away at least three quarters of an hou..."

My thanks are interrupted by a >Crash< >ZZZZZzert!< from the direction of the Boss's office just before the lights go out.

"Ah! So you'll be wanting a pint then?"

"Several," the PFY says, grabbing his coat.

Behold the power of positive feedback!

BOFH: A little Ray of sunshine

BOFH 2004 Episode 38

Published Friday 5th November 2004 12:58 GMT

"It's a work of art," the PFY sighs.

"Beautiful!" I concur. "You've done a fantastic job - as usual."

"Thanks," says Ray, our cabling contractor. "I'm well pleased with it myself. No problems or mods before I send the bill in?"

"No thanks - and add a little bonus in for yourself for, I dunno, design consultation."

"Thanks!"

Ray wanders off and the PFY and I just stand and appreciate the work he's done. The eight wonders of the modern world have absolutely nothing on a perfect Cat-6 install, beautifully velcroed strain relief, smooth turning radii, all terminated with care at a pristine new patch by exception rack. I could weep!

"Right, get two separately keyed high security locks on these doors - in fact, have them replaced with security doors labelled 'Danger - Radiation Hazard Inside' and alarm the area."

"Aren't you going just a **LITTLE** overboard?" the PFY asks.

"If I was able to, I'd lock a trained attack dog in there with a fixation on genitals."

"Why?"

"There's something about a new comms closet that just attracts idiots, it's like a wingnut tractor beam - they come from all over the building."

"To look?"

"No, to touch, they want to... destroy... the beauty of it. We can't have that! This is my new quiet place!"

"Your what?" the PFY cries.

"Quiet place. The place you go mentally when you need a break. Some people have ponds and some have beaches, but to me a brand new comms room - unfettered by random acts of cabling - is nirvana itself. It's beautiful ... It must be protected - Oh, and soundproofed, like an isolation chamber!"

"It'll cost!"

"I don't care what it costs, get it done - Now! When you've made the calls, bring me back a hammer and some nails - I'll stand guard meantime."

The PFY wanders off shaking his head - for all his experience he's still an amateur when it comes to the machinations of an idiot's mind. The door is duly nailed shut, and contractors scheduled to arrive within a few days.

As luck would have it, the contractors arrive the next day and I escort them personally to the comms room, opening the door to find ...

... it's exactly the way I left it. Joy of joys, saints of computing be praised!

"Now you'll be sure to vacuum up all your woodshavings, ironfilings and everything?" I ask.

"Sure," the bloke from the security company says.

"And you're not going to run **ANY** cables near those ones, just slap a dialer termination point over there and piezo sounders there and there," I say, pointing out the locations on the wall with little diagrams on them.

"Uh-huh," he responds .

Three hours later I have the keys but I wait patiently for him to leave the building before running upstairs, unlocking the doors to find...

...it's still ok. He's been as good as his word, it's a minter! And the doors require keys from both sides! I lock myself in for a mental recharge, noticing - nothing, absolute silence in fact.

Happy thoughts.

Happy thoughts.

Happy thoughts.

The phone rings. It's the Boss. He wants me to reinstall his desktop machine because his REGEDIT session didn't work out well. What the hell, I tell him I'm be down in Five!

Happy thoughts.

The Boss's machine is a tricky one because he's somehow managed to damage his filesystem in the process and wants to recover some personal documents. Normally, the tool I would use for this is a large hammer, but I'm in a good mood so I spend the three hours it takes and recover his holiday snapshots - saving him the hassle of rescanning them.

Happy thoughts.

The next day the PFY comes by with the maintenance engineer for the building supervisor who tells us that at we're going to need to run larger pipes from the rooftop chiller to our computer

room aircon units as they can't keep up with the load. It'll be costly, noisy and dusty for a couple of days. I just nod.

Happy thoughts.

A user rings and lives through the exercise.

Happy thoughts.

I get to work the next day and security ask to see my pass, like they're supposed to do every day. I show them my pass calmly and make my way up to Mission Control.

Happy thoughts.

The PFY, concerned for my mental stability, suggests that perhaps I would like an appointment with a special doctor who really cares. Shaking my head placidly, I lead him back to the source of all joy so he can appreciate...

... the two large chiller pipes running through the middle of the room. Dust everywhere. Water cutoff relay wires heavily cable tied to my data cabling. I ... A mains cable ... terminated in a patch by exception frame.

H...

H...

It's no good. I call the buildings manager and ask him to bring the aircon guy up here ASAP.

No-one ever sees them again. True, the 'Radiation Hazard' cupboard makes a lot of very dull thumping for a while, but on the one occasion someone decides to investigate they find keys broken off in the locks ...

HAPPY THOUGHTS!

BOFH: The hostage's guide to lift imprisonment

BOFH 2004 Episode 39

Published Friday 12th November 2004 11:08GMT

>BIMM<

...

>BIMM<

...

>ERRRRrrr<

"Bugger," the bloke next to me sighs as the lift stops suddenly.

"MMmmm," I say disinterestedly, unfolding my newspaper.

...

"Do you know when the lift will start again?" he asks.

"Sometime after people realise that the lifts are taking a while to turn up."

"Can we raise the alarm?"

"Go for your life," I say, gesturing at the ALARM button.

He presses it several times, to no apparent avail.

"Should we hear anything?" he asks.

"The alarm bell rings outside the lift on the ground floor," I say. "You won't hear it."

"Should I call someone?"

"Knock yourself out!" I say, moving away from the phone plate.

He presses the call button and we wait while an autodial sounds.

"At the tone, it will be 11:15 and ten seconds >beep<" the voice echoes around the lift.

"Ah, the dulcet tones of the speaking clock!" I sigh. "Nice touch."

"W..."

"At the tone, it will be 11:15 and >BASH!<"

"The autodialler seems to have been reprogrammed to call the speaking clock - instead of the 24 hour contact number," I say, putting the remains of the call plate onto the floor of the lift.

"My cellphone!" he cries reaching into his pocket. "Who should I call?"

"Five quid says there's no signal."

"uuuuhm.. no. So we're stuck here!!!" he gasps.

"Not entirely."

"No?"

"No. See this pinhole here? That's the security camera."

"So security will see us?"

"Only if internet porn goes out of fashion. No, I am prepared to wager my five pound winnings on my assistant watching us very carefully from his desk."

"Who's your assistant?"

"You don't work here then?"

"No, I'm just here for the IT Systems audit."

"Oooof course you are. That's just great!" I sigh. "So you won't know my assistant. Yet."

"Should we try and tell him we're stuck?"

"Oh I'm sure he knows that. No, the way to proceed now is to cover up >plug< the camera pinhole."

"Why?"

"So he can't see us."

"Why?"

"So he'll wonder what we're up to."

"Why?"

"So he'll think about coming to investigate."

"And get us out?"

"Unlikely."

"So why do you want him to come and investigate?"

"So we can overpower him, possibly change places with him."

"You don't appear to have a very good relationship with your assistant."

"I wouldn't say that. In a Machiavellian industry like ours it's good to have someone who appreciates the value of being a team player - on your team"

"But?"

"With Machiavellian thinking there would need to be a compelling advantage in being on my team."

"And there isn't?"

"Well, there might be a grand in cash on the premises somewhere that a one-off lift repairman might lay his hands on when I got to it..."

>CLICK< >WHIRRRR<

With a lurch, the lift starts creeping up the shaft slowly.

"So you're going to pay him a grand to let us out of the lift?!"

"No, I just wanted to know if there was a microphone in the lift as well as the camera."

>SCREECH!<

"AHAH!" I blurt, finding a radio mike glued behind the handrail. >STOMP<

"Can't you... bargain with him?"

"Now I've broken the camera and mike - no. But I wouldn't have done it anyway - it sets a bad precedent."

"So we're stuck here?"

"Yep."

"What are we going to do?"

"The lessons of the past suggest the best survival technique is to conserve body fluids ...for.... reuse."

"You've been trapped in a lift before!!!"

"No, but there's a pinhole camera, remember?"

"You watched them?!" he gasps, horrified.

"Watched them!? We made movies! It's rather difficult to make a credible case for the cost benefits of IT staff reduction when everyone in the workplace has seen you crap in your briefcase.."

"I.. It's not going to get to that is it?!"

"It could well doo-doo - so to speak."

"You don't see to be taking this very seriously!"

"Well lets face it, it's done now, isn't it? Besides, unbeknown to my assistant and in a stroke of pure luck, I'd purchased a four-pack of drinking water on the way to work this morning."

...

"Uh, you wouldn't consider selling me one would you?"

"Of course. A hundred quid!"

"What, I'm not paying 100 quid for a bottle of water!"

"Suit yourself."

...

...

...

"How big's the bottle?"

"325mls."

"100 quid for 325mls of water! That's extortion!"

"I think you'll find it's 200 quid!"

"What?! It was 100 a minute ago!"

"And it's 300 now."

"Ok, I'll take a bottle!" he gasps, realising the shocking rate of lift-based inflation.

"Money first, drink later!"

"I.. I don't have that sort of cash on me!"

"Ah, well then," I say, cracking open a bottle and drinking its contents.

"I've got >scrabble< Twe.. Ten quid!"

"For 10 quid all you'll get is a bottle of... my... urine."

"WHAT!?!"

"I said for 15 quid, all you'll get is a bottle of my urine."

Rock. Hard place. Lift Inflation. Potential Weekend wait....

"I.. I'll take it!"

"It's now 20 quid."

"I'll take it!" he gasps.

"I'd **like** you to ask nicely.."

"Please sell me a bottle of your urine for 20 quid!"

>CLICK< >WHIRR<

"Oh thank goodness!" he gasps, happy the transaction didn't have to be made after all.

"So in your report say IT spending is appallingly low and overly hampered by middle management."

"Why would I say that?" he snaps.

"If you think dropping a grogan in your briefcase is career limiting, what do you think propositioning a stranger for his bodily waste will do for you?"

"SAY CHEESE," the PFY says from the speaker grille beside the second pinhole...

BOFH: Et tu, PFY-us?

BOFH 2004 Episode 40

Published Friday 3rd December 2004 11:15 GMT

So I get back from a couple of weeks worth of holiday in foreign climes to find Mission Control... ..in much the same state as I left it. Checking the staff register, I note no-one's left the Company employ by accident and the gossip networks are uncannily calm.

Hmm.

I run some checks on systems and find them.. ..all up and running with the logs scrupulously clean of all but the lowest level of dramatic activity.

I feel a slight tinge of obsolescence...

"Morning!" the Boss cries, bursting into Mission Control happily with the sort of spring in step and smile on face that's usually accompanied by the von Trapp family.

"Hello."

"Isn't it a great day! You know, how about we have a sit down - just you, me and your assistant and have a little chat this morning - what do you say?"

"Why not!?" I respond.

"Excellent. Say 10 minutes?"

"Yuh-huh," I scoff. "How about an **hour** and 10 minutes - when the PFY gets in?"

"Oh he's in!" the Boss gasps. "He just had to pop upstairs to fix a printer problem."

"A **PRINTER** problem?!" I ask, "The only way you fix a printer problem is with a dustbin!"

"No no, he's got some doohickey which cleans the inkjets or something, makes them good as new! He's also started refilling ink and toner cartridges to save on money. Do you realise we used to spend about 1000 quid a week on them?"

"Is that all?!" I blurt.

"Savings are savings!" the Boss burbles, all but breaking into skip as he heads to the door. "So see you in my office - say seven more minutes?"

I take a moment's silence to mourn the loss of my ink and toner cartridge dealership then have a more in depth look at Mission Control. I note that it's cleaner and has 'While you were out' note pads on the desks. (!) Popping them into the bin, I notice a newly installed call queuing display

system identifying the number of waiting callers and how long they've been waiting - and wonder if it's there for business or pleasure..

While I'm wondering this the phone rings, and before I can press the call-disconnect button, an answerphone cuts in...

"Hi, this is IT Technical support. We're onsite but attending to other calls now - please leave your name, number, a brief description of your problem and its urgency and we'll get back to you within half an hour. Calls are automatically be forwarded to the nearest technician's pager to speed up resolution time."

Hmmm. It seems that during my absence the PFY has been abducted by aliens and replaced with some soulless automaton. I decide to pop down to the Boss' office a little ahead of time...

"Simon!" the Boss bubbles cheerfully. "Have a seat. You already know your assistant, and this is his.... uh.. assistant... Debbie."

"**His** assistant!?"

"Yes, we took on a temp while you were away to help with the.. day-to-day running of the operation."

"Right," I say graciously, "and now that I'm back?"

"I... Well..."

Far off in the back of my mind I hear the sound of an outdated currency falling...

"...uh.. We thought... you might.."

"I think I can help," The PFY says calmly, interrupting the Boss in order to get to the point. "They want her to stay and you to go."

"Et tu, PFY-us?" I gasp.

"Afraid so," the PFY responds, nonchalantly. "Well, it was Debbie's idea really - things are running better when you're not around!"

"We think it's better this way," Debbie says, placing her hand meaningfully on the PFY's shoulder.

Some more pennies fall...

"Ah. So a quick fling in the supply cupboard with Lady MacBeth here and your loyalty flies out the window?"

"I..... would hardly call it the Dark Side," the PFY responds, ignoring my accusation.

"But you **have** forgotten your professional duty to the hardware?" I ask.

"They're just bloody machines!" Debbie says.

"No," the PFY says to Debbie kindly. "A vacuum cleaner is a machine. A computer is an entity."

"Whatever."

Farbeit from me to be a harbinger of doom, but I do sense a small amount of trouble in the PFY's domestic paradise. As his superior and with a vested interest in his wellbeing, it's incumbent upon me to pour oil on these troubled waters...

"He's right you know. Birds don't often understand the complexities of computing."

Fuel oil, as it transpires, followed shortly thereafter by a match.

"Are you just going to let him talk to me like that?!"

"Just ignore him," the PFY says quietly. "He's just trying to word things as tactlessly as possible."

"You mean he's talking crap?!"

"I..."

And it's all downhill from there. Whilst the correct answer in circumstances like his is an unhesitating "Yes!", the PFY chooses the road less travelled by suggesting statistics might indicate that... uh...

At the five minute mark the PFY tries for a rally with a one-sided discussion of how shameful it is that women are so underrepresented in computing, at which stage the Boss and I slip out unnoticed.

"So, things back to normal by tomorrow?" I ask, as the thud of a coffee mug can be heard hitting the wall.

"I..."

"Think quickly, the PFY may be in hospital..."

"Ok," he sighs.

So it all ends happily.

Well, except for Brutus of course.

BOFH and the serial killer

BOFH 2004 Episode 41

Published Friday 10th December 2004 09:19 GMT

"It... It's completely stuffed!" the PFY says, looking at the remains of a machine on my desk.

"If you think that's bad, look at this," I say, pointing at the machine beside it.

"Agggghh!" the PFY gasps "He's even... burnt out the interface chips... You mean...?"

"Yes. We have a serial killer on our hands."

"When?"

"No one knows. These were found hidden in cupboards - there may be more! I think we're dealing with a pretty sick individual here who thinks they're a hardware tech, creeping around the building operating on machines."

"Who?"

"We don't know."

"Well how are we going to find them before they strike again?!?"

"I don't know. But I have a lead. I'd like you to go and talk to one of my worst users - a real headcase by the name of Hannon Bell, the Lecturer."

"The lecturer?!"

"Yeah, academics and beancounters are the worst for this sort of thing. Somewhere in their brain they believe that just because they **USE** a computer means they're somehow gifted in that area."

"How?"

"Well it's a bit like the people who had the first flush toilets - They thought they were somehow a plumbing specialist when in actual fact they were just crap dispensers. Anyway, I want you to go talk to the guy."

"Where?"

"Loony bin just out of town."

"A loony bin!"

"Yeah, like I said, he was a real nut job - fitted in with academics perfectly. Complete obsessive geek with it though - which made him dangerous."

"Why don't you go?"

"Nah, he knows me. I'll go with you, but you'll have to talk to him."

. . . Later that day at the dribbling academy . . .

"Ok, so this is the computer psycho ward. You'll have to leave your PDA here, though."

"Really? Why?" the PFY asks.

"Look at this >flip<" I say, flashing him a Polaroid.

"My mum in a leotard?!"

"Oh! No, not that one, this one! >flip<"

"Aghh!" the PFY cries, stepping back.

"Yes. About two years ago he told a nurse he wanted to Google some info on heart medication ... We managed to save the floppy drive ..."

I wait back while the PFY walks down the corridor past the empty cells of Gates, Stallman and Ellison, and is almost to Bell's cell when some other weirdo shouts out something I can't make out. I switch on the receiver for the PFY's lapel transmitter.

"Mr Bell?"

"Yes."

"Hi, I'm Steven, a Systems administrator and we'd like your help tracking down a machine ... reconfigurator."

"You're one of Simon's people aren't you?"

"Uh, yes."

"May I see your company swipe card?"

>flick<

"C-loser.. Hmmm. Tell me, what did Jobs say?"

"Jobs?"

"Yeah multiple Jobs down the corridor."

"He said I can smell your coffee."

"Really? I myself cannot. You eat onion bhajis, but not today, and favour Chicken Vindaloo. Now, what do you want?"

"I was hoping you'd tell me why our man wrecks machines?"

"Simple. Tell me - how do we covet?"

"What we see?"

"No! We covet one better than what we see. We see someone with a laptop - we want one, only faster. Smaller. Lighter, with a bigger hard drive."

"I see."

"So I think you'll find your man has a slow desktop machine. Quiet, doesn't get out much. Probably has personal hygiene issues. Doesn't relate to women well."

"You just described three quarters of the geeks I know."

. . . Meantime back at the office . . .

"It squirts the silicon on its heat sink or else it gets the power again."

. . . Back at Mission Control . . .

"It's all so... random!" the PFY says, looking at the machines.

"Or maybe not" I respond. If we look at these in inventory number order, we find that the one we found last was actually the earliest machine to be mutilated - judging by the hardware address records out of the router. Which means..."

"The person killed their own desktop machine first, then mutilated others to cover up for it in a classic organised/disorganised frenzied attack!!!" the PFY gasps.

"No! Look, inside the floppy drive - what do you see?"

"Nothing! Oh, actually there's some junk... Lotsa bits of paper, floppy labels, etc. get stuck in machines..."

"No, Look closer."

"I.. What is it, a moth?" the PFY asks.

"No, it's a dead weevil."

"So you're saying that the machine killer has some fixation on BUGs in computing and is actually trying to tell us something!!!!"

"No, I'm saying the killer is you, and the weevils are from that breakfast cereal you had beside that crappy old desktop I made you use when you first started!"

"Aaaaaagg!" the PFY shouts, running from the room.

Classic Blunder. He would have got away with it too, if it hadn't been for those damn kids.

BOFH gets into the Xmas spirit

BOFH 2004 Episode 42

Published Friday 17th December 2004 10:50 GMT

So I'm prancing around the office with my Santa hat on when the PFY walks in.

"Uh... err... Compliments of the Season?" he says warily, knowing my views of the orgy of capitalism that the former orgy of laziness known as Christmas has become.

"And the very best of the festive season to you my young assistant!" I cry heartily. "A Christmas mince pie?"

"I..." the PFY says, reaching out his hand tentatively then withdrawing it.

"Have no fear!" I blurt, sensing his discomfort. "These are the pure unadulterated shop-bought items, with no unexpected extras like iron filing centres or laxative icing."

"Don't mind if I do!" the PFY says, throwing caution to the wind.

At another time such abandonment might likely have been followed by an extensive period of bowel and stomach purging over a period of days, but in the season of goodwill how could I possibly subject anyone to nastiness?

"Very good," the PFY says, reaching for another then pausing.

"Again, have no fear, it's not a wheel of misfortune, they're all sound."

"So..." the PFY asks slightly concerned. "You didn't happen to have a visit from a ghost of christmas past recently?"

"Hmm? Oh! No, no, just in a very good mood!"

"A **very** good mood?" the PFY asks. "What's happened, the Head Beancounter did a Jimmy Jones?"

"No, but it's funny you should mention the beancounters," I chuckle.

"Funny haha or funny anvil-on-your-head?"

"No, Funny peculiar. Look at this."

"It's gift voucher for a restaraunt!"

"Yeah, the beancounters sent them to us in a Christmas card."

"Us?"

"Yeah, there's one on your desk too."

"I... I'm..." the PFY says, opening his card.

"Confused?"

"I was going to say.. touched."

"Yeah, you would be to believe it to be gesture of goodwill. No, this is far more entertaining."

"How so?"

"It's a trojan horse - Check this out."

I pass the PFY a photocopy of a memo recently leaked to me by security.

"They want security to give them access to our offices if we can't be contacted. So?"

"So what will we do with our restaraunt vouchers?"

"Drink them."

"And three hours into our lunch hour, they'll try and ring us - and there'll be no answer..."

"And they'll get access into here!!! But why?"

"What have we got that they covet?"

"A espresso machine?"

"No..."

"Security's pirated movie server?"

"No..."

"THE SPARES BOXES!!!!"

"Indeed. So while we're away they'll rummage through the contents of our spare parts bins and steal the new stuff to upgrade their machines. They tipped their hand last week when they asked for a stack of the 200 gig drives and a couple of the screen cards from our stock to replace the crap they're currently using."

"How do they know about the spares?"

"Where do the invoices get processed?"

"Oh. So you told them to get stuffed?"

"Course! Then they threatened to slash our spending budget next year - which the Boss overheard, so there was an impromptu shouting match and some disappointed beancounters..."

"Right. So we're just going to waste these drinks vouchers then?"

"Hell no! We're going to lunch!!!"

"When?"

"What time is it now?"

"10:35"

"Now!"

"But isn't that playing into their hands?"

"Yes, but you know what the Godfather would say: Keep your friends close, but your enemies..."

"...closer?" the PFY interjects.

"No, I was going to say 'locked in the tape safe'."

"And that's relevant because?"

"Oh I'm just rambling now, must be alcohol deprivation..."

. . . Five hours later . . .

"AND NOW, PISSED, FROM NORWICH!" the PFY slurs, swiping his access card at the entrance to the building.

"Ah sorry guys, no-one's allowed in the building," Security says, stepping up. "...and can you put the warning cones back where you found them?"

"What warning cones?" I ask slipping the top third of a cone under my shirt. "And why can't we get in the building?"

"Couple of computers exploded," Security says. "Everyone has to stay away till the Bomb Squad's been through."

"And don't you think we should cast an expert eye over the area - in case there's more machines ready to go up? Your movie server for instance?"

"I... Uh.. Well maybe a quick look!"

The PFY and I make our way up the evacuated building to Mission Control and slip the remaining exploding hard drives out of the way of prying eyes inside the tape safe and replace them with the pristine versions.

"So that's it then?" the PFY sighs, relieving himself into the planter in the Beancounters' lobby.

"Pretty much. But to show there's no hard feelings we'll send them a Christmas cake tomorrow."

"Really?"

"Yeah - We'll be back in their good books in no time."

"You think so?" the PFY slurs.

"Sure! Quicker than you can say laxative icing!"

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BOFH: Where the hell have you been?

Published Friday 14th January 2005 14:36 GMT

Episode 1 "Where the hell have you **been**?!" the Boss snaps as I open the door to Mission Control, letting the PFY in before me.

He almost sounds angry!

"Yes," I reply, turning to the PFY. "Where the hell **have** you been?"

"I'm talking to you!" the Boss adds.

"Yes," I say, still talking to the PFY. "So listen up!"

"Not him, you!" the Boss shouts.

"Me?" I ask, oozing innocence. At least I think it's innocence. Actually, it might be... No, no, it's innocence.

"Yes. Where have you been?"

"Uh... Holiday?" I suggest.

"I know you were on holiday, but why weren't you back till today?"

"Because..... I.... was.... on..... holiday.....?" I say. Look into my eyes, look into my eyes, the eyes, the eyes, not around the eyes, don't look around the eyes, look into my eyes... >click< you're under. I've been on holiday. >click< and you're back in the room.

"I know you've been on bloody holiday! But what were you doing on holiday?"

"Drinking? Resting? A bit of light engineering on the Myford? Day trips with the Mrs?"

"No, I mean WHY were you on holiday?"

"Uh.. to drink, rest, do a bit of li..."

"WHY WAS NO-ONE HERE?!"

"Uhh... My able assistant was here..."

"NO HE BLOODY WASN'T!"

"Really?" I ask.

"No!"

"So Systems and Networks were locked up like a drum?"

"YES!"

"I see. And what broke?"

"What?"

"What did you need urgently - which broke while we were away - that's annoyed you?"

"Well, nothing really."

"I see. So you're annoyed because nothing broke? I mean we can fix that in no time!"

"No! No, I'm annoyed because no-one was here!"

"And nothing broke. So instead of being pleased that we have a reliable and robust infrastructure you're going to labour the whole being-on-site point?"

"Look, I'm not going to argue with you. You were supposed to be here and you weren't. In fact according to the contract we have with you, you're supposed to give a week's notice of any absence outside of emergencies."

"Well maybe this was an emergency?" the PFY suggests.

"And what emergency would that be?"

"Death in the family," the PFY says, thinking furiously of a less-than-loved relative who could be used at short notice to substantiate this claim.

"As I thought, nothing. So I'm sorry, but I'm going to raise this as a breach of contract."

"But it's only a breach of our contract if we didn't inform you."

"You didn't."

"Of course we did. **And** you okayed it"

"No I didn't!"

"Of course you did, and I have the email to prove it. Or at least I will before you get back to your office. In fact, it's probably also in your online dairy! You may even >clickety< have even agreed to extend my holiday and allow me to telecommute for the rest of January."

"I think he said we both could >clickety<," the PFY says. "Yes, here it is... dated December the >clickety< 19th."

"HAH!" the Boss says. "BUSTED! The 19th was a Sunday! And I was at my wife's sister's birthday in Hull!"

">clickety< Well it looks like the swipe card access logs would disagree with you. You were in several times that day to talk to us. >clickety< >tap< >tap< >clickety< Our meetings are even recorded on the CCTV Surveillance system. Which reminds me, we'd best fill in our overtime for that day. How many hours did we work?"

"27," the PFY replies.

"You can't work 27 hours in one day!" the Boss snaps.

"Ordinary people can't," the PFY says. "But you're right, we must have worked >clickety< two days."

"Good grief! >clickety<," I add. "So we did - but if that's the case then we would have worked more than ten consecutive days!"

"Of course!" the PFY says. "The penalty clause."

"What penalty clause?" the Boss sighs, knowing he's about to be shafted.

"The penalty clause in the contract to prevent you working us unreasonably. Isn't it something like a week's paid leave?"

"Indeed it is."

"This is preposterous - anyway, you won't have a contract once your unnotified absence is brought to light."

"What unnotified absence?"

>clickety<

"Last week."

"But we were here last week >clickety< >tap< even the cctv cameras agree," I say, turning my monitor to show him. "See, the newspaper on the visitor's table has a headline from last week on it."

"As opposed >clickety<," the PFY adds, "to the paper on the desk when you supposedly came in last week - which is from months ago. Looks like someone has made a crude attempt to prove that you were in. I bet >clickety< there's no history of you even coming into the building - apart from this morning..."

"I..."

"Or we could just take that penalty clause week's holiday and forget the whole thing?" I suggest.

"I.."

"Excellent. See you next week then."

BOFH: Hooking the IT vending piranha

Published Friday 21st January 2005 13:20 GMT

Episode 2 So we've been dragged into Beancounter land after a change in purchasing policy means that absolutely all kit is now going to be bought by the IT Purchasing bloke in accounts to make sure that we get the absolute best deal that we POSSIBLY could ever get.

Which means: we're going to get royally screwed by the vendors.

As any IT person knows, IT vendors are some of the nastiest people ever to leave the used car sales business and are like piranha when it comes to someone like our new purchasing bloke who's so green he needs mowing.

Still, we have to put in an appearance and see what special deals he's managed to line up for us.

"We've got a fantastic price from Bruce on LCD monitors," he says, handing over a piece of paper with some prices on it.

"Isn't that just slightly more than retail?" the PFY asks.

"It's more than retail because the retail monitors are a lower quality. These ones are the 'A' model and are far superior."

"How do we know this?"

"Because the A models aren't available in the shops."

"Neither are asbestos face masks."

"What? No, these are good equipment. They're a special new line."

"New? Or does our friend Bruce just get out his Letraset kit and add an A to the model number before he ships them to you?" the PFY suggests.

"No, no, I've been assured that these are the premium quality item," he says, pointing on the page to an asterix and its accompanying footnote.

"Yes," I say. "I always feel more assured when I know a vendor has gone to the trouble of adding a footnote to their marketing information. I mean they wouldn't fake that would they?"

"They can't!" the PFY gasps.

"Ah, but this isn't marketing literature, this is in-house and not for distribution!" he says, pointing to the large watermark image in the background.

"Oh well that's fine then. When I see 'NOT FOR DISTRIBUTION' as a watermark I know I'm not being lied to. It's only the one saying 'WE'RE RIPPING YOU OFF!' that has me Worried."

"Are you suggesting that the salesman is playing me... for a fool."

"No, no, I wasn't suggesting that, I was implying it. There's a slight difference. But to be completely frank, I think he's..."

"Riding you like a pony!" the PFY says.

"Uh..."

"Taking your ass downtown!"

"I..."

"Pushing you like a pram!"

>KZZZERT!<

"I must apologize for my assistant. It's been some time since he had a reset and so he's probably had a memory leak. Oh, and judging by the floor under his chair, not JUST a memory leak. Woopsy, must turn down the voltage a touch. Now, as I was saying, to be frank I think you're being tucked."

"Beg your pardon?"

"Tucked. As is stitched. They only good thing is that you're probably getting a large number of drinks out of this, which makes up for it in a way."

"Uh.. I... I'm an alcoholic," he says. "So I don't.."

"Ah. Muy bad, as they say. Still, if you were ever to take it up again I'm sure he'd be the man to know and would be most oblig..."

>KZEERT!<

"Sorry about my supervisor," the PFY says, pulling out a screwdriver and giving my cattle prod a bit of a tweak. "Memory leak. And >sniff< possibly a brown out problem. He's right, it is set a little high. Short term effects too. Anyway, so we think he's lying to you and you're either too stupid or lazy to figure that out..."

>KZERT!<

"So, what I'd suggest is that you look at the prices we were getting from vendors before and compare them with the ones they're trying to palm off on you now."

"I did! But these are better quality items and will last longer, which means that over the long term they work out cheaper. And if they last longer they'll need less maintenance which means that the Total Cost of Ownership is..."

"TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP!? IT'S A BLOODY MONITOR. YOU PLUG IT IN AND TURN IT ON. WHEN IT BLOWS UP YOU GET ANOTHER ONE! YOU DON'T PROGRAM IT, YOU DON'T VIRUS SCAN IT, THE TOTAL COST OF OWNERSHIP IS WHAT YOU PAID FOR IT, WHICH IN THIS CASE IS TOO BLOODY MU.."

>KZERT!<

"What I believe my supervisor is trying to impart is that TCO in this instance is crap. Now, have you actually ORDERED any of this?"

"No, but I'm planning to email an order in later this morning."

"You mean WERE planning to email an order in..."

"No, we need monitors and this is the best deal we can get from the vendors. And as the IT Purchasing Officer for the company it's my duty to pick the best value for m.."

>KZERT<

"Okay," I say. "Do YOU want to send that order?"

"Yep," the PFY says, "and I won't forget to put the asterix and footnote saying: '*You have to be bloody joking*'."

"And the Watermark with '*Get Stuffed!*' on it. And then I'll have a quick chat with Bruce about that time he tried to pick up his Boss's wife at a product launch to see if that helps the price any."

"Ooooh!!! See if he has any A+ models coming in soon!" the PFY adds.

You've got to **know** how to do business...

BOFH: Driller Killer

Published Friday 28th January 2005 13:09 GMT

Episode 3 "So we'd just like you to move these data points from here to over there," the head beancounter says, pointing to a window.

"It's a window," I say.

"Yes, will that be a problem?"

"It's a glass wall.."

"Yes."

"And there's no underfloor data cabling..."

"Mmm."

"So how do the cables get across there?"

"I... Through the ceiling?"

"And from the ceiling to their machines?"

"We could just let the wire hang down?"

"Wire-S."

"Mmm?"

"WIRES. I take it you're going to need power too."

"Oh, yes. Actually, better run two of each."

"Ok, it'll be a big job, as they'll either run a small post or an ugly piece of capping down the middle of the window which the building owner will hate. So who do I charge the work to?"

"It's your area so I guess you'd be paying for it."

"Doubtful. Eighteen months ago when this floor was completely refitted we specified modular underfloor cabling in a raised floor config, utilising, I might add, oversize floor tiles for futureproofing - and your department axed that out of the budget saying it was an unnecessary expense for what is basically a static workplace area."

"Uh, that wasn't our department, that was the auditors."

"Who work?"

"Uh.. Over there," he says, pointing into a small cube farm separate from the rest of the floor.

"Oh, in YOUR department?"

"Yes, but they don't report to me, they report to the Audit Manager."

"Who reports to?"

"Well me, but that's different. It's a whole separate thing."

"And so is asking us to make changes to a budget cabling job after we'd warned you that it'd cost a fortune to change."

"Ok, I suppose we could just run long cables across the floor."

"Till the Health and Safety people notice, yes."

"Oh. So it looks like we'll have to use the ceiling space."

"I suppose so. Unless...."

"Unless?"

"Unless we use the ceiling space of the floor below, run the cables in that, get a bloke with a cement cutter and jackhammer to make some holes in the concrete floor to install some flush mounting power and data boxes onto."

"What'll it cost?"

"Oh, about a grand, fifteen hundred?"

"1500 pounds?!"

"Lets say two to be on the safe side. Course, it's about 750 if you want them to do a weekend job for cash with no insurance, tax or warranty."

"It's a hole! They're drilling a hole, that's all! How can a hole be worth two thousand pounds?"

"It's specialised equipment! They're professionals!"

"Can't **you** drill the hole?"

"What, with the IT department's little hammer drill and a masonry bit? It'd take about two hours and drive everyone barmy - and we don't have a masonry bit that long."

"I... So how... do we do the... uh.. under-the-table thing?"

"You grab a wadge of petty cash - call it pin money or something - shove it in a brown envelope and drop it off to me. I'll hand it onto them and they'll drill the hole."

"You give it to them BEFORE they do the work? You don't get a receipt or anything?"

"A. They'll be hiring equipment and will want the dosh up front and B. the whole idea of under-the-table jobs is no paper trail."

"It all seems a little... underhand to me."

"The good jobs always do.."

. . two hours later . .

"And it'll be done by the weekend?" the head beancounter says, handing over a brown envelope self-consciously like a crim caught on videotape. Which he is.

"Should do. I'll make some calls later on this afternoon and get back to you."

. . . later on that afternoon . . .

>Ring<

"Hello," the PFY says.

"Want to earn three hundred quid whilst lounging around at the pub?" I ask.

. . . That weekend . . .

"So you've propped the drill up between two chairs with a stack of phone books taped to the handle.."

"To simulate the pressure of a human arm," I add.

"..with the trigger taped on..."

"Yep, and by my calculation the first hole should be drilled in about 4.5 pints time!"

"Best get drinking then!"

. . . 4.5 hours later . . .

"Ok, that's one hole done. Now we need to drill eight more holes around it to make room for the flush box mount."

"How deep?"

"About a pint."

. . . Eight pint trips and a large amount of hammering later. . .

"F - ing magic!" the PFY slurs. "But what's that..."

....

"You didn't run the cables?" the head Beancounter whines, when we get in on Monday.

"No, there was a bit of a problem, so we didn't get a chance to start work."

"Problem?"

"Yeah, they'd done the hole when one of the newer, STUPIDER contractors thought he'd seen an obstruction and rammed the drill in the hole several times."

"Yes, and?"

"And hit the water line for the fire extinguishers."

"Was there any damage?"

"No no, just flooded the third floor. It'll need new carpets!"

"We'll sue!"

"You COULD sue, but then you'd have to fess up to the whole under-the-table thing, which would mean the Tax department would probably find out, which given your position in the company would probably mean the whole place would be audited with all the vigor of a dark night at a men's prison, it doesn't really bear thinking about..."

"I..... suppose you're right. We'll have to pay for the carpets."

"You couldn't spring for a raised floor utilising oversize floor tiles for futureproofing as well could you?"

Well, it never hurts to ask.

BOFH: When desk lamps attack

Published Friday 4th February 2005 13:23 GMT

Episode 4 "Yeah, I was just ringing because I can't install an application on my machine."

"Really?" I ask. "What application?"

"Oh that's not important, but what is important is that I don't seem to have Administrator access to my machine."

"Yes, that's right, no-one does. Well, that's not completely true, myself and my assistant do, and the support staff have 'Power User' access."

"But it's my machine!"

"No, it's the Company's machine - you're just using it."

"The company bought the machine for me!"

"For you to USE, yes. Like your desk."

"Ah, but I can install stuff on my desk!"

"Sorry?"

"I can install stuff on my desk - like a desk lamp!"

"You already have a desk lamp. A stainless steel one with the company crest. Anything else you might install could be dangerous!"

"You can't have a 'dangerous' desk lamp!"

"Yes you could. One that has the phase wire connected to the metal body instead of the earth wire would be dangerous."

"That's ridiculous, who'd make a lamp like that?!"

"My assistant, if you really annoyed him. And even then it'd be installed by a experienced systems administrator without your knowledge - like most good installations."

"You install stuff on our machines without telling us?"

"Yes, for security reasons."

"Oh you mean antivirus updates and service pack things?"

"Uh.... ok... yeah sure."

"What if **I** want to install something?"

"You mean like a piece of music playing software?"

"No, there's a jukebox player already installed, but yes."

"We don't permit that. I mean after all, it's a work machine. In fact I didn't realise that there was a jukebox application in the standard installation image. Must make a note of that."

"It's already installed, so there's nothing you can do about it!"

"Of course I can! I could even subcontract the job out to one of the more aggressive of the company's security team with a reputation for brutality and the personality of a serial killer, but that's not the way we do things around here."

"Oh," he sighs, danger averted.

"No, I'll just make a slight change to the group policy that will remove **everyone's** jukebox application, and when they ask, I'll tell them that it was you that brought it to my attention."

"I.. You wouldn't dare!"

>clickety<

"Already done!"

The next day the wheels fall off as there's a groundswell of support for the jukebox application from people like the Head of IT and the CEO who are among those inconvenienced by the removal.

Sigh.

I get the PFY to make the necessary reversals to the Group Policy then tell everyone to reboot, which causes the network to grind for a couple of hours.

Sigh.

Yet again the phone rings and I notice it's my troublemaker, so I take the call. Wouldn't you know it, he sounds a little pleased with himself..

"So ANYWAY," he smirks. "I'd like that administrative access to my machine now. Oh, and could you come and do it personally?"

"I think you're mistaking the battle for the war," I say. "We're still not permitting administrative access."

"I think you are!" he replies, pulling an ace from his sleeve. "I'd had a little meeting with the CEO and he agrees that I should be allowed to install the applications I need to do my job. Seeing as how you people seem to get confused by all those options."

Double sigh.

"Yeah... no I don't think so," I reply.

"But I insist," he chuckles. "Oh hang on, it's not **me** that's insisting, that's right, it's the **C.E.O!**"

I suppress the urge to ring the neanderthal in security and decide instead to deal with this in a much more adult manner - in keeping with my responsible image.

. . . the next day . . .

"I'm waiting..." my annoying user sighs down the phone at me

"What for, I've sorted everything out that you wanted."

"I haven't got admin rights to my machine!"

"Oh, ADMIN RIGHTS, of course!" I gasp. "I'm sorry, I must have got confused by all the options and installed a new desk lamp for you instead."

"I don't want a new desk lamp. Anyway, it's the same desk lamp!"

"Really? I thought your old desk lamp was a bit grubby. With a recently modified 'earthing' system. Sitting on the CEO's desk. Covered in your fingerprints - which, as you probably know, show up awfully well on stainless steel surfaces."

"What the hell's it doing th... I... ... You wouldn't!"

"Course not! Oh look >clickety< the lights have just gone out on the top floor. However will the CEO see what he's doing?"

"Ok, I don't need administrative rights!" he stutters, backpeddling like a madman.

"Wasting valuable CPR seconds here..."

>Clatter!<

"So did you really swap the lamps over?" the PFY asks.

"Nah, he left on a junket with his PA. But his office doorhandle's got some form of wiring problem that probably needs looki..."

A high-pitched scream punctuates the building

"Or maybe not," the PFY comments.

The BOFH guide to equal opportunities

Published Friday 11th February 2005 14:18 GMT

Episode 5 Things are looking good. It's a dull day with nothing on and I might even get to slide off home early, once I can get rid of this woman from the HR department who wants a favour...

"..and so we'd like you to help with the selection and interview process of the new Consultant for the Finance area," the HR woman drones.

"Really, what happened to what's-his-name?" I ask "He'd only been here three weeks?"

"Apparently he's been arrested under the new Anti-Terrorism laws."

"Really, what was the charge - looking swarthy?"

"I'm not sure, they wouldn't say. Meantime we need a replacement for him, so we placed some advertisements and need a little help selecting some suitable applicants."

"Ok, I'm your man!" I say, *renice 19*-ing any remorse processes I might have running for overdosing the guy's coffee with tanning tablets and making an anonymous tip-off...

"Good. I'll send you our literature on the short listing criteria, selection and interview process."

"Roger!"

Ten minutes later I'm looking through the pages and pages of crap that we're supposed to go through to put someone into a job.

"This is bloody ridiculous!" I cry.

"What is?" the Boss asks, wandering into Mission Control.

"All the crap attached to choosing someone for a job!"

"Oh yeah, apparently they tightened things up a couple of months ago," the Boss says. "But how bad can it be?"

"How bad can it be? Look: 'The company prides itself of being an Equal Opportunity Employer'. What does that **mean**?"

"It means that we we're not prejudiced in our selection techniques."

"Of course we're bloody prejudiced! We want someone who can do that job!"

"Yes, yes, but if two people came in and one of them was... er..."

"A 54-year-old black lesbian hippo with one leg who worshipped chutney," the PFY suggests.

"Er.. yes, then we would appoint the, er, them!"

"Instead of the other applicant?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Well because we're giving them an equal opportunity."

"No I think you mean *Affirmative Action*," the PFY comments. "Equal Opportunities means that they'd both be considered regardless of who they were. Affirmative Action is intended to address a perceived lack of some group in a company for PR purposes."

"It's not for P.R!"

"Right," the PFY says dubiously.

"Well this flies in the face of my Unequal Opportunities Policy!" I say.

"Your what?!?"

"Unequal Opportunities Policy. Which is basically 'if you can do the job, you're in!'. Couldn't give a crap about age, sex, race, etc. It's a simple policy, but it seems to work. Unless..."

"Unless what!?"

"Unless you're a thicko. I can't stand thickos. No offence."

"What do you mean?!"

"Thickos, you know, people who can't... well.. tie their shoelaces without assistance. No offence."

"What do you mean 'no offence'!?"

"Well you know, some people get upset when you say something like that - especially if they're a complete 'tard. No offence"

Five minutes later the Boss has company, in the form of the PR woman that'd spoken to me earlier.

"Uh.. there's some problem with our appointments policy?" she asks, oozing diplomacy.

"Well I was just saying that it's bollocks really. I mean down at our level no-one really gives a crap about the whole age/sex/colour/creed thing so long as you're good at your job. The thing we **do** have a problem with is people who are too thick for their role. No offence, No offence."

"Are you implying that we're stupid?"

"Uh... Lets see, how can I say this best? Ah! An intelligent person would not have needed to ask that question! No offence. No offence"

"I have a Masters Degree in Gender Studies!" the HR woman snaps.

"Ooooh, now **there's** a degree that's hugely marketable!" the PFY blurts sarcastically.

"I've been published several times in the Journal of Employment Diversity!!"

"And I'm sure both their readers enjoyed it," I add. "However I doubt that this means you have the wherewithal to properly administer a desktop machine."

"What's that got to do with it?"

"We're talking about the position of a desktop support person for the Finance area, someone who'll need skills in desktop support, minor administration, application installation and management, etc - all technical tasks requiring more than a little savvy when it comes to computing."

"Ah," the Boss says. "You were talking about computing intelligence! I understand now. You see, the way you worded it made it appear like you were suggesting that I - and Sheree here - were, well, stupid."

"Oh, I see what you mean," I say . "Unfortunately when you're in a position like mine you tend to see things in black and white as opposed to shades of grey. So whereas you might see yourself as in the upper 90 percents of intelligence, I might see you as in the lower 15s."

"Because of our knowledge of the spheres of computing is much less than your own!" the HR woman adds.

"Yes, that too," the PFY says.

"What do you mean?" she asks, frowning.

"Well, that, and because you're thicko," the PFY says.

And there go the wheels from the going-home-early plan.

BOFH: Danger, Falling Computing Peripherals

Published Friday 18th February 2005 13:43 GMT

Episode 6 "IT WAS JUST A BIT OF FUN!" the PFY burbles. "NO-ONE GOT HURT!"

"Someone could have got hurt," the Boss counters.

"You could get hurt logging in!" the PFY responds.

"No you couldn't!"

"You could if I found you using my username!"

The Boss sighs heavily, which is a sure sign he's run out of arguments and is going to start repeating himself.

"It was dangerous and someone could have got seriously hurt."

"But they didn't did they?" I say, entering the fray.

"That was just luck."

"No, we put signs up!"

"A sign saying Danger, Falling Computing Peripherals is just stupid."

"No, it's descriptive."

"Well what the hell were you doing on the roof anyway? Why not just take the stuff downstairs and PLACE it in the skip?"

"WHERE'S THE BLOODY FUN IN THAT!?!?"

"This is a workplace, not a fun place."

"I beg to differ! We have fun here! Remember that summer we blocked the drains and filled the basement with water to make a swimming pool."

"...And had that Hawaii party," the PFY smiles, recollecting. "And then one of the Beancounters who wasn't invited came down in the lift to get his car! Talk about laugh, I almost bought one!!!"

"I don't know what you got away with before, but this was just irresponsible. What were you thinking?"

"OK," the PFY says, getting serious. "The thoughts were vaguely this: We have an old piece of kit which stays up about as much as an Essex bird's underpants. Everyone in the company uses it, it's complete crap and countless hours of work have been lost pounding away at it."

"Are we still talking about the Essex bird?" I ask, just to keep things light hearted.

Lead Balloon.

"So we **FINALLY** get to replace the kit, which means we can rip out the box, remove all the aged terminal servers and all the terminals."

"And **PLACE** them in the bin."

"We had that option, yes. But we thought - rightly so, as it happened - that there would be people in the company who might want to express their discontent in some physical manner by dropping, hurling or in some cases screaming-wailing-gnashing-of-teeth-accompanied-punting these units off the roof into the skip. And it went down a treat"

"No it didn't! It was a complete shambles! The side street was absolutely littered with broken plastic, glass and pieces of metal"

"Yeah, it was fantastic!"

"That street is reserved managerial parking! You couldn't drive anywhere **NEAR** there with all that rubbish on the ground! Not only that, we've also been fined by the local council for littering, **AFTER** assuring them that we were having the place professionally cleaned with a magnetic sweeper! And **don't** think I didn't notice that you put the bin on top of my car park. Some of that glass was embedded in the road surface! Big chunks in some cases! It cost a fortune to tidy up!"

"Yeah Well, No-one said fun was cheap! Anyway, we made a penny or two on it."

"How?"

"We sold the kit to people. 10 quid a monitor."

"What if people wanted to take them home?"

"Ok, so you're on top of a building where you're not supposed to be in the first place, the winds in your hair you feel like king of the world and you've got a pussy old dumb terminal in your hands. Are you going to lug it downstairs, onto the tube and home, or are you going to **SEIZE VENGEANCE BY THE BALLS AND GIVE THEM A GOOD SQUEEZE!**"

"Y.. I.. How much did you make?"

"Just under a thousand quid," the PFY responds.

"We had 100 terminals?"

"No, but we started auctioning the bigger stuff. The 9 track tape unit went for 120 quid," the PFY replies.

"And the ginormous disk drive went for 150," I add.

"Yes, but that was too heavy to get any real distance from the building. It basically plummeted onto the footpath taking out that parking sign. But if it had had wheels on it like the main CPU unit it would have made the street!"

"How much did the main cpu go for?" the Boss asks, interested now.

"Oh nothing. That was a prize for the best technique."

"Technique?"

"Yeah this woman from Data Entry pool used the cables and did a sort of hammer throw which hit the extreme corner of the bin and the monitor exploded into a ball of bits. It was fantastic!"

"And did she claim her prize."

"She was going to - this morning when a couple of her mates were back at work. It's a bit of a beast to shift and you'd need a bit of a run-up on the ramp."

"What? But I had the skip moved before the cleanup, it's back to car pa..."

>CRASH!<

"Bugger me!" the PFY says to the Boss whilst staring out the window. "Right in the driver's side! A good thing you weren't in the car at the time."

"Dodged a bullet there," I say, patting him on the back. "Ooooh, it looks like he might be in shock! And how do we treat shock?"

"More shocks?" the PFY asks.

"No."

"Oh! Sit or lay them down, cover them with a blanket, give small sips of water..."

"And?"

"And... go to the pub?"

"Exactly. But first call the council - there's crap all over the road again."

BOFH: Goin' underground

Published Friday 25th February 2005 14:59 GMT

Episode 7 "Okay, so we just need you to run a cable across the street then!" the Boss says, pointing to the new set of offices across the road that the company has leased. "Do we just sling a cable across the street to them?"

Sigh.

"To run a service across the street you obtain a consent from the local council outlining what the service is for - at which time they'll tell you that they won't let you run aerial services because they 'interrupt the unbroken skyline' or something equally vague. Interestingly, it's the same skyline that's interrupted every time the local council puts up one of their street banners proclaiming us to be the cleanest capital in the world, the least congested capital in the world or some other form of general misinformation..."

"So how do we get networking over there?"

"Well, you either pay a Telco an arm and a leg or you get a consultant to draw up thrusting plans for a duct and submit a joint proposal with the contractor to identify a route and do the subsequent digging or thrusting."

"What's that cost?"

"About the same price as the rental of the property for the year."

"Ah. Could we use some sort of wireless arrangement?"

"Possibly, but we might run into some bandwidth problems..."

"So we have to run a duct?"

"Maybe. I'd like to get access to their basement for a while and do a simple survey to see if there's any pre-existing ducting - you never know, the buildings might have been linked sometime in the past."

"Really? Well, I suppose I could ask for a key."

"Excellent!"

... much later that night .

"So you're sure this is all kosher?" the PFY asks as we tow the thrusting unit into the sub-basement car park of the building across the street.

"Technically?"

"Yes."

"No."

"Ah. Will we get into trouble?"

"Not unless we hit one of those big electricity feeds to a London Underground transformer. Then it'll be a little touch and go. But very, **very** quick."

"Ah." the PFY says stepping back from the unit. "So how does it work?"

"Well I'm a little grey as to the full details, but this thing is a big drill, and this joysticky thing controls the direction of the drill. So I just aim it downwards from here for about 2 of these extension pipes, across for about 3 pipes, then up till it breaks ground."

"Riiighhht. So these pipes are.. what.. 5 metres long?"

"Yep."

"Ok so what about 2 pipes down, **two** pipes across and up, given that the road is about 8 metres wide?"

"Hmm, it's worth a crack I guess."

. . . . one hour later . . .

"What was that?!" the PFY gasps, as the machine shudders wildly and stops about halfway through the crossing process.

"Not sure," I say, comparing the distances with a services map I stole from the council. "Ah. We've either hit a sewer with a slight build-up of gas, or....."

"Or?"

"The front carriage of a Circle Line train."

"F***!" the PFY squeaks.

"Calm down," I say, putting the machine into reverse and turning it over on battery "We'll back this out and redrill it a couple of metres higher and it'll be swe.. Uh-oh."

"What?"

"It looks like the train's bent the front section of the drill pipe which is stalling the thruster engine so we can't pull it back!"

"S***!" the PFY gasps.

"Again, don't worry, we have a spare drill bit."

"Oh," he sighs.

"Yes, all **you** need to do is sneak down the tunnel and pull the bent section out of the wall. And recover the drill head."

"You're f***ing joking!" the PFY says.

One long argument, several threats and 20 minutes later, my cellphone rings.

"Yep?... . . . What? . . . You'll have to speak up... Oh it's you! Found nothing Eh? Yeah well it must have been the old sewer after all. And I think the shuddering was because it had run out of gas. Pop into a service station and grab us about four gallons of diesel will you?!"

I cut the PFY off in the middle of a particularly colourful stream of abuse and recalculate my directions. By the time the PFY arrives I've got a new plan.

"Ok change of plans! It's too near morning to redrill, so we'll pull the drill sections back and go again tomorrow."

"Right."

. . . Twenty minutes later . . .

"Ok, another change of plans. Grab that rag and stuff it in the hole when I pull the drill head out!"

"Why?"

"Uhh.... it's a secret.."

... The next day ...

"So we decided upon consideration to go the overhead route," I say to the Boss.

"But I thought you said the council wouldn't allow it?"

"They wouldn't. But as luck would have it my assistant and I happened to run into a member of the council staff charged with the installation of street banners, and after a bit of haggling we came to an arrangement where we provide him with a cable to hang his banner on. All perfectly legit."

"But I thought you preferred the underground option."

"Ordinarilly, yes, but in this case I wasn't so keen."

"Really, why?"

"I think it was the basement being ankle deep in sewerage that put me off."

"You didn't!" the Boss gasps, horrified.

"Course not, what do we look like, cowboys?"

Must make a note to have my boots cleaned....

BOFH: Your Job number is...

Published Friday 4th March 2005 14:00 GMT

Episode 8 So the helpdesk lot are being a complete pack of annoying bastards and it's starting to get on my tits. The supervisor's doing this monster push on gathering statistics to make his group seem like the heart and soul of the department in a transparent attempt to get more money for his role.

Ordinarily, I quite like the Helpdesk people in a benevolent (as opposed to malevolent) way as they do some valuable work in preventing us being inundated by every halfwit who can work a phone.

HOWEVER...

In the past week the supervisor has had them logging calls for every simple call that comes their way and injecting these calls into our queue for processing. Even my automated process for resolving calls has failed due to the number and frequency of crap coming my way.

"It's nothing personal," the Helpdesk supervisor assures me when I bring it up. "It's just we're starting to use the software more fully and in the process we realise that we can use the statistics it produces to judge the impact on the company!"

"How so?" I ask, realising that this might be a foolish question with a long and tedious answer.

"Well, take the email outage the other day."

"What email outage?"

"When people said that their mail wasn't working?"

"You mean when we'd published an outage notification for 15 minutes so we could swap in a new MX handler?"

"Yeah, I don't know, it might have been that. But anyway, that outage affected 63 people resulting in 61 logged calls and from that we were able to work out that the company actually lost around 15 hours of peoples' time."

"Not to mention the amount of time your helpdesk people spent logging those calls."

"True, I forgot to add that in."

"And don't forget to add in the time that myself and my assistant wasted resolving all those calls with the text: 'This was a notified shutdown which couldn't be avoided'."

"Oh, yes, I should add that as well."

"So, what you should do is take the 15 hours of time for people who can't read an outage notification and call that number **A**..."

"Yes."

"And take the time wasted by both your team and my team in logging the fact that they can't read and call it number **B**."

"Yes."

"And stick them where the sun doesn't shine."

"The company needs to know this sort of thing!" The Boss says, walking in.

"Yes, they do. They need to know that the impact of not reading a well publicised outage notification cost the company **A** times the average salary and that the Helldesk staff not telling people to sod off cost the company **B** times the above average salary."

"I..." The Helldesk supervisor burbles.

"Which, if you take into account that the majority of time **A** would have been spent talking to your people, means that you and your people are a liability of $A+B$ x the average salary. For a 15 minute outage."

"Someone needs to record the stats," the Boss sighs. "It's important!"

"Ok, you've convinced me, I'll say no more about it."

. . The next day . .

"Excellent day isn't it?" the Boss blurts, entering Mission Control on a natural high.

"Your Job number is..... >clickety< 273108B for Bravo," I say.

"What?"

"Your job number for getting my opinion of the day, it's 273108B. I'll add the 'what?' question as a sub job of this job. I'll get someone to get back to you with an opinion of the day within 15 minutes."

"Is this some sort of joke?"

"Joke.... Joke..." the PFY says thoughtfully. "I think we have something about Joke in our knowledge base." >clickety< "Yes, here it is Jon 183977C. Ends with 'Don't call me wooden eye'. Was that what you were asking about?"

"No."

"Ok, so this is a new job. >Clickety< Number 273108A for Alpha... >clickety< Is... this >click< some kind >clickety< of joke? I'll have someone get back to you tomorrow."

"What's going on?"

"I'll take this one," I say to the PFY. "Job 273109B - What operating system are you running?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"My query there I think!" the PFY says. >clickety< "Job 273109A... And what was your username and password..."

"Look, would you stop this crap and just tell me what's going on?!"

"That question is a subjob of 109A I think," the PFY says, "and...."

>RING<

"...and I'll have to take this call. >clickety<.... Yes, sure. Your job number is 273110A... Who.. am.. I >clickety< talking to? I'll have someone get back to you on that one inside a quarter hour. Another question? I'm sorry, you'll have to ring back if you want to log another call..."

"Can't it be logged as a subjob?" I ask. "We wouldn't want to mix up the stats!"

...

Isn't it funny how quickly a policy can be reversed once upper management have time to think about it?

But for now we'll log that as Job 273110B...

BOFH: Critical Mass of Geeks

Published Friday 11th March 2005 14:55 GMT

Episode 9 So I'm having a quiet lager at a downtown pub whilst waiting for a presentation on wireless networking to start when I notice a brace of Windows geeks all jabbering away to each other. (You know the sort of thing - "I ported Server 2003 to my cellphone in Java in two days - want to browse my file share?" war stories, etc.)

I make a special effort not to meet any of their eyes just in case they try to draw me into their unholy circle with their outrageous claims (i.e. the location of the Steve Jobs glove puppet) whilst simultaneously trying to take on the colour and texture of the wall behind me. The PFY is miles ahead of me and is almost transparent to the technical eye.

As I'm arranging myself to look like furniture I notice something which disturbs me further - if indeed someone with my Machiavellian and sadistic tendencies towards users could become **more** disturbed - the arrival of a contingent of furry teeth from the Linux Geek bat cave.

"Hmmm," I murmur.

"What?" the PFY asks, the background shimmering slightly like a poor rendition of Predator.

"Critical Mass," I say.

"Hmm?"

"Critical Mass of geeks."

"What?!"

">Sigh< As any Nuclear Physicist will tell you if you feed him enough lagers, bringing two masses of radioactive substances into close to each other is not a good thing. In this case, bringing two bunches of furry teethes into close proximity is similarly not a good thing..."

"I hardly think that's worth worrying about..."

"Not really, but all we need is..."

I halt abruptly with arrival of the entire global OS2 fan club (both of them) dressed in "The one true OS" t-shirts. Size XXXXL if I'm not mistaken.

Luckily they're more like carbon rods in a situation like this and the atmosphere of the pub improves ever so slightly.

It's the Mac geeks sliding in the back way that introduce the cold hand of fear to my internal organs.

Armageddon is upon us!

Slowly, so as not to draw any attention to ourselves, the PFY and I make my way towards the door posing as a German tourists mit eine swartzkopf emergency, but before we get there the PFY stops.

"There doesn't **seem** to be any trouble," he says, gesturing at the assembled geeks clustered in their groups.

"No, not **now**. In their natural state fusion won't occur because the elements are too far apart to interact. "

"So we've got time for another lager!"

"It's hard to say."

"Why!" the PFY asks impatiently.

"Generally considerable energy must be expended to bring elements together, however I note that the bar has a happy hour in about 12 minutes."

"Ah."

"Which means they'll be all over the bar like a rash in about nine minutes."

"Geeks and free things," the PFY sighs.

"Ah yes. Oooh, but look - a few of them are going to the bar for an interim drink - or what we in the chemistry trade call a Catalyst."

"Huh?"

"Something which helps facilitate a reaction."

"Ah. And so it's all on then?"

"Not exactly," I say, entering my closet-Einstein persona "The OS2 people are defusing the situation a little because the groups are concentrating their ridicule at them instead of each other - which is stalling the reaction. Add to that the length of the bar which is sufficient to ensure the elements don't get too close together. True, a lesser reaction might occur at another place - the bogs, the door, but nothing with the potential for raw energy as what could happen in this room, if..."

"If...?"

...

"Who'd have thought," I say, expelling a meaningless sentence fragment - a tactic which has all the pull of the Death Star's tractor beam in drawing a geek into conversation.

"Beg Pardon?" the Windows geek beside me says.

Told you so.

"I was just saying, who'd have though that Linus Torvalds was Bill Gates' love child? It's so ironic."

"That's ridiculous!"

"That's what I said, but that Linux bloke over there says he's got the DNA match and a 16mm film of the conception. Quite graphic apparently."

. . . Meantime on the other side of the room . . .

"...and **he** said that Steve Jobs was working for Microsoft THE WHOLE TIME!" the PFY says.

. . . Seconds later at the other end of the bar . . .

"Is it true what those Mac guys said about the Mac moving to Windows OS because Linux performance is so crap?" I ask.

. . . and in the middle of the bar . . .

"Two shandies and 14 packets of crisps." one of the OS2 geeks says.

. . .

"Nothing's happened!" the PFY snuffles. "What a load of crap!"

"Be patient." I murmur "Like most reactions you just need to wait for the elements to come together.. See, there goes a Mac geek to ask about the whole Steve-Jobs-was-a-Microsoft-Spy thing. And there's a Windows geek off to defend Bill's honour by saying that Linus must be a basta..."

>slap<

"AND IT'S ALL ON!" I say, ducking down behind a table. "BITCH FIGHT AT THE OK SNUG BAR!"

Ten minutes and several hundred slaps later, the place is in silence, save for isolated pockets of snuffles and the crunching of the OS2 guys at their crisps.

"Ten minutes till the presentation," I say to the PFY. "We could fit another pint in."

"Or I could tell one of those OS2 guys that the other one has a windows cluster at home.."

"And I'll get the pints in!" I say the the PFY, giving him the nod.

Well, it's God's work, isn't it?

BOFH and the hydrogen-based explosive device

Published Friday 18th March 2005 14:19 GMT

Episode 10 "...and so I need another battery for my laptop," the PR geek whines, thus ending a 15-minute monologue on how important his work is, what he does, where he goes, who he talks to, what his presentation is like, how it's delivered, how long it take TO deliver, how he processes customer's queries, what he does on his holidays, where he GOES on his holidays, how he packs his laptop to take with him on holidays, how important his work is (again), why he really needs a battery with the capacity of a small geothermal power station, and what he could cope with in the meantime.

"Ah well," the PFY responds, not so much playing the empathy card as putting it into the shredder.

"Well you have to get me one. I need it!"

"But even with a new battery you'll only get.. maybe eight hours tops out of both batteries - IF they're at full charge?" I say reasonably.

"Not necessarily," the geek responds smugly - which can only mean I've stepping into his well laid trap. "Not if I get the 1600QV battery!"

"The 1600QV?" I ask.

"Yes!" he chirps happily. "It's a Swiss-made battery which fits inside the same space as a normal battery and has three times the capacity."

"And 10 times the cost?" the PFY asks.

"I.. " he says, fumbling with a brochure. "Well, it's in US dollars, not pounds."

"The only way that figure would look good is in Turkish lire!"

"It's been okayed!" he said.

"Who the hell would okay an extravaga..." I start, penny dropping. "The Head of IT, yes?"

"Yes, he thought it was a good idea. He said you have a miscellaneous items budget for this sort of thing."

"That, copper bracelets for arthritis, earthing straps for underwear to reduce static damage and rubbing cabbage leaves on your head to cure baldness."

"It's a good battery!"

"And it probably weighs about twice as much as your laptop!"

"But I need to be able to be on the move!"

Despite our sage advice the deal is done and the order is placed. An hour or two after receiving it our user gives us a call.

"My new battery won't work!" he blurts.

"Why?"

"The support website says I probably need to buy a special high capacity charger..."

"Well I think that you should probably consider..." I respond.

"..and it's been approved, so can you organise that, ASAP?"

Nggggggggggg

I find the charger costs about twice as much as the battery which pretty much means that a single laptop has accounted for a month's worth of my miscellaneous budget - so I'm not at all happy.

Less happy a day later when the geek calls back **again**.

"The thing weighs a ton!!" he snaps.

"We told you that before you bought it!"

"No, not the battery - although that's heavy too - the charger. It's heavier than my carry-on allowance! And it doesn't use US power - and I'm going there next week!!!!"

Nggg

"WE TOLD YOU IT WAS GOING TO BE HEAVY!"

"Yes but it's too heavy. What about a fuel cell?"

"A FUEL CELL!?"

"Yes, I've been reading about them, they're small, easily rechargeable and reasonably light."

"Where the hell would we get money for a fuel cell battery?"

"Your boss says that you have money for R&D. This is an ideal R&D project - you could make an existing fuel cell fit in the battery compartment for me."

"I..."

...

There's no point in arguing any further so the PFY and I put our minds to work and three days later have a working prototype.

"Is that it?" our geek asks. "What's all the strange writing all over it?"

"One bit's Arabic and the other bit Greek. It's a fuel cell from a GPS system we paid an extortionate amount for on eBay."

"And it'll work?"

"Only one way to find out!" the PFY replies, suppressing his pride.

He plugs it in with a due sense of trepidation and pushes the power button while the Boss braces himself for the inevitable explosion.

..which doesn't happen...

"It works!" he cries.

"Of course it does! And there was some space left over in the cell so we slapped a small NiCad pack in there so that you can get about 15 mins of runtime when the fuel cell's expended," the PFY adds.

...

10 minutes later when they're gone.

"So when do you think that he'll learn that it's just a NiMh battery?" the PFY asks.

"Oh, probably when he's landed in the States and going through customs."

"How?"

"I think US customs will let him know once that anonymous phone call about the guy carrying an unlicensed hydrogen-based explosive device has been received."

"I hardly think that..."

"And after the Arabic translator picks out the words 'Death to Yankee Warmongers' from the side of the battery I'm guessing things will go downhill quite fast..."

"Oh..." the PFY says, the shekle dropping. "If only our powers were used for good."

If only...

BOFH: Identity theft

Published Thursday 24th March 2005 12:49 GMT

Episode 11 So the PFY and I have bowled up to a half-day presentation on identity theft which I'd been invited to after the recent security conference. (Well, technically, the boss had been invited to, but the invite was just *sitting* in his inbox.)

After a little spade work, a phone call and some briefcase enhancements we're all set to go.

As usual it's absolute hell to get a car park around any major hotel for these sort of presentations so I'm almost bound to be given a ticket, have my car clamped or towed. (Well, technically the boss's car – but it was just *sitting* in the basement unused.)

We get there fairly late as parking on the roundabout wasn't as easy as I'd thought and as bad luck would have it the presentation's already underway. We slink in quietly and go to the registration desk.

"Your name?" the woman behind the desk whispers.

I quickly scan the list, skip my name and just pick one at random.

"Steve Curtis."

"The security advisor for the American Embassy?" she asks dubiously.

YOU LITTLE BLOODY DANCER!!!

"Yes Mam!" I respond, cranking the Texan Accent knob around to 11.

She passes the badge over, not wanting to make a fuss.

The PFY rocks in, checks the name tag and greets me like an old mate.

"Steve!" he blurts. "What the hell are you doing here?!"

"I work in this country, old bean!" I cry, doing the typically shocking American impersonation of a Briton while shaking his hand.

"Still in computing then?" he asks, reinforcing the lie.

"Hell Yeah, Security adviser at them Embassy now, and you?"

"IT Manager at a company in town," he responds giving his name at the desk. (Well, technically the boss's name, but he's just sitting in his office not using it.)

We grab seats at the back of the audience where the PFY fires up his cellular network connection, downloads some appropriate graphics from a US website and prints me some "business cards" on his portable card printer.

SORTED!

As expected, the presentation is as contradictory, confusing and uninformative as a Microsoft Security warning which leaves everyone a little fidgety at morning tea.

"Does anyone else wonder what the hell that was all about?" I drawl loudly. "I mean, it **was** a little content free."

"What do you mean?" one of the presenters asks, offended at the implication that his life's work is up there significance-wise with the guy who eats bicycles.

"Well, it was interesting to watch, but not all useful. You basically said 'Protect your credit cards, shred your rubbish, don't say anything over the web that you don't have to and never allow companies to share your information.' I mean it's **HARDLY** rocket science – and I should know, I worked at NASA for five years!"

The PFY leaps in on schedule and takes the fore.

"Which is why we've been so interested in your progress," he comments.

"We?" I ask.

"The Campaign for.. Information Validation and Protection."

"You're from CIVP!" I adlib, realizing the prerehearsed Amnesty International cover story has been ditched for something better.

"Yes, and we're well aware of your operation!"

"Operation?" a crusty from a banking company next to me asks.

"Yes, operation. They submit the biometric data of leaders of business to various agencies, labeling them people who might present security threats so that they'll be stopped at airports, etc."

"You're joking," the crusty gasps. "Why?"

"To introduce an identity vacuum which can be used by secret service operatives as cover."

"Sorry?" the crusty asks.

"It's simple. Say you bowl into a country and someone questions your identity. How can you **prove** who you say you are?"

"I..."

"Exactly, you can't. So you might be who you say you are, or you might have an endless holiday in Guantanamo Bay to look forward to while some operative lives it up at your expense in southern Hungary. Which is why MY company has decided to provide all this information on a simple card that you carry with you."

"Really. What sort of information?"

"Biometrics, thumbprint, Iris Scan, Passport, bankcard, personal details – all electronically recorded on a chip in one card."

"And that would be safe?"

"Safer than your current passport which is so bulky it ends up in a hotel safe half the time."

I see PFY's tack and jump in with corroborating evidence...

"Yes, yes, well maybe we **have** done that in the past, but there's no reason to think that we might do that in the future. Third party IDs like this will only confuse matters!" I bluster. "We'll take legal action!"

After an endorsement like that the PFY is instantly inundated with people wanting to pay the 20 quid to get their personal information 'secured' onto a plastic card and corresponding database.

It's like shooting fish, honestly. It's not even sporting!

I mull over the dire legal consequences that'll inevitably befall someone who uses the information the PFY's obtaining for their own personal gain. Not to mention the quasi-legal consequences of undermining the security of biometric information.

He could end up in prison for years!

Well, technically the boss will be in prison for years, but he's just sitting in his office...

BOFH: I declare this junket season...

Published Friday 15th April 2005 12:16 GMT

Episode 12 "I officially declare this junket season... open!" the PFY slurs, leaning out the pub window and releasing the bottle of lager tied to our office window across the road.

>smash<

"Sh*t, the string was too long!" he slobbers as we watch the glass and lager slide down the side of the Boss's car.

Junket season is a fantastic time of year - a time filled with joy, happiness and goodwill to all.

"I've highlighted all the security conferences," I explain to the pair of geeky helldesk types who are drinking with us. (Told you it was a season of goodwill.) "I think I can back-to-back one in the States, then Aberdeen, then Dubai."

"Three conferences in a row!" one of the geeks says. "How will you concentrate?!"

"I think you're missing the JUNKET point a little," the PFY says. "The Aberdeen one's just a Takedown Session."

"Takedown Session?"

"As in the book," I prompt.

"The... Uh... Shimomura book!?" the helldesk geeks asks.

"Yeah. Looks interesting, but is actually very, very dull."

"I quite liked it!" the geek says.

"Which bit - the bit about his hobbies, love interest and how great he is or the tiny section which was actually about Mitnick?"

"I..."

"So I'm using Aberdeen -and the book - to sleep and adjust my clock to Dubai time," I continue.

"But surely you'll need to go to something to do your report on the Aberdeen conference?"

"You're not really up to speed on the whole junket thing are you?" the PFY asks.

"I..."

Sigh.

"Ok, lets start with the basics," I say "Selection. You choose a junket based on..?"

"Speakers?" the geek says.

"NO! You choose a junket based on LOCATION, SIZE, ACCOMODATION, then speakers."

"Why?"

"Location for holiday potential, Size for the number of vendors and amount of money they'll waste, and accomodation because of the potential of the minibar."

"But if you're going to nothing in Aberdeen, why..."

"Aberdeen is a rest stop," the PFY says. "All you need to do it prove you went there."

"How?"

"Grab the show bag, the documents and the CDs then scatter them around your desk liberally when you get back."

"But surely the Boss will..."

"...do nothing because we'll have already made a pre-emptive strike!" the PFY interjects.

"How?"

"Easy," I respond. "I pick the two largest and most incomprehensible documents, shove a couple of post-its in the really geeky parts saying '*Ideal solution for our needs*' and slap them on the Boss's desk for his perusal."

"And what will that..."

"The Boss is as likely to read a large technical document as OS2 is to stage a comeback. As all roads lead to Rome so will all questions will lead back to those technical documents that he hasn't read. The boss won't bring it up and we won't give him reason to. The geeky documents will slip to the bottom of the pile on his desk until ultimately he will 'accidentally' shred them."

"But surely he'll notice the cost of it all!"

"Ordinarily, yes. However, we jiggered our accountancy system to report the 'annual' training budget with period of three months. So within twelve weeks it looks like we've done no training at all this year."

"In time for the next junket 'season'," the PFY adds.

"But the Boss will remember won't he?"

"Not when he travels TWA."

"TWA? I thought they were sold years ago?"

"No, I meant Tragic Workplace Accident. By the time the 12 weeks is up the Boss is likely to have tripped down a stairwell, experimented with lethal voltages or had a mental breakdown."

"My favourite," the PFY chirps happily, raising a glass to some of his fondest memories.

"But surely someone would ask..."

"And risk opening Pandora's box of retribution?" the PFY says. "Never!"

"I... Oh. So how do we get.. uh.. training?"

"Let's not be coy, it's called a junket. You get it by establishing a 'training' precedent."

"?"

"You go on some training this year, a bit more next year, more the year after, until junkets just become the norm."

"So by 'next year' you mean in three months?"

"In our case, yes, but in your case by 'year' I mean every four years"

"But didn't you..."

"There's a limit to how much money you can get your hands on in one fiscal year. So we have to 'borrow' it from other cost centre's annual budget on a quarterly basis."

"Like the Helpdesk training budget..." the PFY adds helpfully.

"So we can't do any training because you've stolen our training budget?"

"Yes, that about sums it up."

"But why even bother giving us a budget every 4 years then?"

"Ah well, fair's fair. Besides, by that time we've racked up so much contractor's holiday allowance it starts to get a bit embarrassing."

"And you're not worried that we'll tell someone about this?"

"No more that you should be about stairwells, voltages or mental illness," the PFY says, winking. "And get us a couple of pints will you, before the Boss finds out who chucked a beer at his car."

"But you... I..."

Ah well, looks like the goodwill season is over. Still, it was good while it lasted and probably did a lot for morale...

The Boss is dead - long live The Boss

Published Friday 22nd April 2005 16:22 GMT

Episode 13 So the Boss has resigned (which in itself isn't a great occurrence) except that neither the PFY nor I had a hand in it (which is). It seems he was made an offer he couldn't refuse which didn't involve horses or handguns but instead a large amount of money.

The first thing we knew of it was the abusive leaving message taped to his desktop machine when he failed to turn up after the weekend.

So the Head of IT is calling the usual slave traders in an attempt to track down a replacement - only they seem to be a little thin on the ground as a result of the buoyant market in the field this week. The life expectancy of bosses may have something to do with it, but I'm not too sure.

Some form of plan has to be made so as to give the using classes the assurance they need that the health and welfare of our systems and networks are running well. Or, in other words, they need to know that someone will lose their job if we're ever caught reading the contents of their email. I could digress to discuss our plug-in to the modulated output of the package scanner, allowing us to "read" some parts of snail mail as well - but I won't.

The Head of IT is pacing which can only mean one thing. Well, two things if dumplings were on the menu at lunchtime - but for today we're in the clear - he's thinking.

The majority of the IQ not devoted to walking and scratching his genitals is now concentrating on the problem at hand. The PFY and I look up as a noisy gust of foul-smelling air from his nether regions signals a conclusion has been reached - much like smoke from a Vatican chimney.

"How about you take the job on - till we can find a replacement?" he suggests.

"I'd love to, but as you know I have a position here."

"You could do both - it's only an interim measure - all you need do is answer a few calls, attend the odd meeting..."

"And supervise...?"

"Well yes, there's an element of supervision to the role - you two, the helpdesk supervisor and the Technician guy. Come to think of it, where is the Technician guy?"

"Dave?"

"Hmm?"

"Dave, the Hardware Technician?"

"Yes, that's him!"

"Retired a year ago."

"Really? Oh well, I suppose that's one less person you'll need to supervise then!"

"I think you'll find that I'm more use in a technical role as opposed to Management."

"Nonsense! A fool could do it!"

"Yes, a fool generally does."

"Wha..?"

"Anyway, there'd be a conflict of interest. I'd be supervising myself for a start!"

"I'd be your supervisor!"

"In the Management role, but as a manager I'd be managing myself in the rest of my technical role. There could be ethical issues."

"I think we'll take that risk - meantime if you could hold the fort for six weeks till we can find someone new..."

"Like I said I..."

"Okay there's a couple of grand in it."

...

So this management lark is a piece of the proverbial! There's three projects which need extensive handholding to keep moving, some budgetary palaver to sort out and some contracts to be signed.

All in all the annual contract negotiation process for the PFY and myself go incredibly well, with management accepting the 25 per cent pay increase without question. The two grand signing bonus was just icing on the cake - I'm just a pleasure for contractors to work with!

With one task down I attack the budget and purchasing problem with the help of a little initiative and several hours on a popular web-based auction system.... The replacement user desktop computers were a reasonable spec, fantastically cheap and we didn't have to deal with disposing of all the packaging. True, we had to pay in cash, take delivery late at night and scrape the asset labels of another company off them, but that's just the new world of electronic business for you.

With the cash left in the kitty I managed to also acquire something truly meaningful to improve staff morale - a ginormous plasma telly for the staff lunchroom. ***Bonus***

The only fly in the ointment is the project stuff which is so onerous it would ordinarily have had me eating my desk blotter with frustration. Still, I've devised a plan so cunning it'd qualify for a research grant to obscure the fact that I'm not contributing in any meaningful way.

"So how does it work?" the PFY asks, peering over my shoulder at the email I'm about to send.

"Simple. I send an email to each member of each project team asking them how the project is going and if they have any questions. That'll buy me about a week."

"And?"

"And then in a week, I'll send the question asked to every OTHER person in the team for their comments."

"And?"

"I quietly feedback the comments expressed in the worst possible light to each team member whilst implying that the team thinks that they're the weakest link."

"Ah, and so the teams implode before you have to devote any time to managing the projects."

"Precisely!"

"Sneaky. But you realise you'll end up in your systems engineer role having to support all these half-arsed projects when they come back to haunt us?"

"Yes well, ordinarily I would, but I fired myself this morning."

"What!?"

"Yes. I saw myself working in the computer room without hearing protection and dismissed myself."

"But that's not grounds for dismissal!"

"EXACTLY what I'll be saying in my personal grievance claim!"

One could really get used to this Management stuff!

BOFH: Let the games begin

Published Friday 29th April 2005 10:58 GMT

Episode 14 So it turns out that one of the company's financial traders was spending a little too much time (i.e. 100 per cent) playing minesweeper and not enough time (0 per cent) taking up some important share options that the company was counting on - resulting in a teensy bit of financial loss. Nothing that the company couldn't recover from now that they've outsourced the entire trading department of course, but as a result there's been a little bit of discussion at upper levels about what people should and shouldn't be doing during their working day and a hastily crafted memo has been distributed threatening instant dismissal for any staff member - no matter who - caught playing games.

To complete the knee-jerk reaction, the Head of IT's been called in to assure the board that we'll leave no stone unturned in the search for an early scapegoat as an example to ensure staff compliance...

As there's a high probability that someone will get upset the Head's passing the job down the chain - me being next in line....

"A.... uh.. word if I may," he smarms, sidling into Mission Control.

"Mmmmm?"

"I'd like you to find out who in the office plays games and how much time they spend doing it."

"Are there games on the computer?!" the PFY asks, failing miserably in his attempt to sound sincere.

"What are you after precisely?" I ask, using the PFY's interruption to hide Solitaire.

"There's been a bit of a stink from the top floor," the Head lies. "Apparently someone made a suggestion that we could increase productivity by up to 50 per cent by removing games from the desktops of our users. I'd already mentioned this to your previous manager before the whole issue exploded but he suggested that he didn't think he'd have much joy in getting you to action this for him. But now that you're in his role... perhaps you'd have more success in..."

"Convincing myself that we should track down game players to increase company productivity?"

"Yes."

"It's ridiculous!" the PFY states, full of bravado now his gaming keypad is out of sight.

"Yeah," I add. "You'd only get about 15 per cent from games."

"Really?"

"Sure. You'd pick up another 15 per cent from blocking porn, maybe 10 per cent blocking internet email services, another 10-15 from online auction sites, 10 per cent from banking and other personal finance and 15 or so from online newspaper and movie preview sites."

"I... How much time does that work out to?"

"About 75-80 per cent."

"I hardly think it's that bad! Nothing would get done!"

"I beg to differ. When that roading crew severed our internet fibre the place was like a ghost town!"

"And the pub across the road ran out of lager," the PFY adds.

"Ah, I.. err.. I'd still like to know who's running games."

"Well, I suppose we could run some remote desktop stats, see what's running and what percentage they're running."

"Excellent."

...

"Smooth Boss-Keying," the PFY says once the Head of IT has departed.

"Actually a KVM switch. Press F12 and it switches to or from my Linux box."

"Useful," the PFY nods.

"Unless I've been perusing a PHO-TO-GRAPHIC site on the Linux machine and forgotten to exit the browser."

"Ah!" the PFY says. "I just configure my browser's home page to the OS2 discussion blog site," the PFY counters.

"Yeah, I think I'd rather be caught with the porn," I sigh.

... Later that day ...

"So have you found the game players yet?" the Head asks, looking a little bit harassed.

"Not really - we haven't connected to people's desktops remotely yet because it might be construed by some to be some sort of invasion of privacy."

"Nonsense! They're company machines and the company has access to the data on them. Anyway private data should be on home machines, not work ones!"

"So we've got your permission to connect to people's machines?"

"Certainly! And can you put a rush on it - I've got a meeting in half an hour to show a few of the Directors."

"Show them what?"

"The... ah.. statistics."

"Oh right," I say dubiously. "You want the statistics, not a list of game players for you and the Directors to creep up on till you find one poor bastard bending the rules?"

"It's not like they weren't warned! We have to be seen to be fair and determined, no exceptions."

"They won't do it," the PFY says. "They're all P&V."

"P&V?"

"Piss and Vinegar," I explain.

"Like the crisps," the PFY adds. "They won't do anything."

"I... u.. They will!" the Head of IT says. "It's company policy now!"

"So if the list happened to have my assistant's name on it you'd have no hesitation in firing him?"

"What?!" the PFY gasps.

"If he were caught playing games it would be out of my hands," the Head sighs.

"So you're basically making us company axe men?"

"Oh for Pete's sake, it's only one person. There must be someone in the department you don't like who plays games!"

"Ok, we'll have a look."

...

The world of executive promotion is a funny business. Within the hour I'm a stand-in Head of IT as well as a stand-in Boss as well as a Systems admin. Course the Head of IT did claim that he didn't play games, but the game of Spider running on his desktop (uncannily similar to the one running on the PFY's screen) when the Directors arrived was fairly damning. The porn they discovered when the boss closed that was pretty much the last nail in the coffin. They didn't even make it to the OS2 blog...

Course, explaining the game of Wolfenstein Enemy Territory they'll all be running Monday week will be another matter.... It would seem that only thing that can break this upward climb would seem to be Birnam wood and a test tube baby...

BOFH: You can't outbastard the bastard

Published Monday 16th May 2005 09:26 GMT

Episode 15 Life as the Acting Head of IT, Acting Manager of Systems and Networks **as well** as my normal role as Systems Administrator has its ups and downs, and as such I'm starting to appreciate the complexity of the roles which I've disparaged so greatly in the past.

At one time I may have heaped scorn on my seniors, but now that I'm in an "acting" capacity for both roles I'm forced to admit that I now appreciate the intricacies involved in the day to day running of the department and the important decisions that are required of one...

"..Just ONE!" I snap, in answer to the first important question of the day, "and I don't care what my predecessor thought was appropriate. One sugar in my coffee is more than enough!"

"Be back in a jiffy," Michael replies, bless him.

Having ones own PA does have its benefits and I'd be remiss in not commending Michael for his devotion to the tasks at hand. Whether it's filing important yet damning reports in the shredder, block booking meeting rooms so that the only possible venue is the pub across the road or simply stopping a bullet for me when a vendor calls, Michael has proved himself invaluable. It's almost a shame to destroy him.

Still, he does know too much - and trying to outbastard a bastard can be rather career limiting.

My suspicions were aroused when I noticed that his handling of the 100+ page report into "questionable" content on file servers (commissioned secretly by one of my predecessors) didn't seem to result in a change in the level of shredded paper in the rubbish bag as I'd expected. A later test document printed on colour paper didn't result in the appearance of coloured paper in the bag either, so I'm treating the issue as low-grade mutiny. A quick rifle through his desk while he was out reveals that he's logging my arrival and departure times with the obvious intention of presenting it as evidence in a review of my performance.

Sigh.

That said I may as well drink deeply of the cup set in front of me before the inevitable workplace accident, so I set about giving him the tasks that any manager gives any staff member who shows signs of having initiative.

"What sort of tasks are you talking about?" the PFY asks, when I fill him on the treachery.

"Overseeing the recording - in quarter hour intervals - of the time spent by each employee on their various projects," I reply.

"Ooh, I hate that!" he responds. "It just ends up being a greater work of fiction than the timesheets. What else?"

"I'm getting him to implement pointless security initiatives."

"Long passwords and password complexity?"

"Partly that, yes, but also the typical inane suggestions that managers want people to implement because they read about it somewhere."

"Not..."

"Yes! Paper recording of root/administrator access, one time password pads stored in a special safe. No suggestion is considered too stupid!"

"Nasty," the PFY says, shaking his head. "But won't that just affect us?"

"No. And yes! I plan on putting Michael in charge of the safe combo, then changing it when he's not looking - which should be exciting."

"Smooth," the PFY concurs. "Is that it?"

"Well to pass the time I am doing the all-time hated occupation of new managers..."

"Incompetently commissioning reports on topics that no one gives a rat's arse about!" the PFY replies.

"Yes, but also...?"

"Repeatedly widening the scope when they're almost complete?! You bastard!"

"Yes. My plan is to drive him nuts before he can gather enough evidence to have me fired or imprisoned. And if that doesn't wo..."

>tap tap<

"Sorry to interrupt," Michael chirps. "Here's that report you wanted on people who use their middle names as passwords."

"Their middle names, or their wife's middle names?" the PFY asks helpfully.

"Good point!" I say "Best do their wives as well."

"I'm sure no-one would us..."

"Never Assume," I say sagely. "That just makes an ASS out of U."

"And ME," Michael adds.

"I thought we just mentioned you?"

"I..."

"Thought so. ACTUALLY, here's a thought, why not make it first names as well as middle names!

"Shouldn't that be a separate report?" the PFY asks.

"No I was thinking that INITIALS would be a separate report, because it's not names as such. And Phone numbers."

"How about we just combine all the reports into one?" Michael suggests.

"It's a good idea in theory, but there are so many variables, you know - like floor wax."

"Floor wax?"

"Yes, I was reading in a magazine where floor wax can reduce the build-up of static electricity - or was it increase? - and I was thinking perhaps you could wax the tiles in the computer room with various waxes and produce a report on which is least likely to cause static electricity - but that doesn't really fit into the passwords report."

"Isn't static caused by a combination of man-made fibres and movement?"

"They'd like you to think that, but secretly it's probably just floor wax."

"Although that idea about man made fibres would make interesting reading," the PFY prompts.

...

"...and he came at me with a stapler!" the PFY blurts later to security. "But luckily I happened to have one of those tazer guns which I was.... uh.. repairing for a friend.. uh.. in the security business.. and I can see why it needed repair - I think it scrambled his brains a little."

"Perfectly justifiable force in the light of the situation though," our security bloke concurs. "I'll have him and his stuff chucked out onto the pavement."

"Unfortunately he may have some confidential information in with his personal items," I say, as Michael comes around.

"So we should check it?" Security asks.

"Nah, just take it all up onto the roof and torch it."

"!" Michael sobs.

What a pity. Now I'm going to have to get my own coffee - unless...

"Do us a favour will you?"

"Get stuffed," the PFY says.

Well, it was worth a crack.

BOFH: Lucky in computing...

Published Friday 20th May 2005 12:01 GMT

Episode 16 It may be true what they say about being lucky in computing and unlucky in love.

Sigh.

Of course it might just be me saying that but still there's the odd shred of evidence to support it. Take the PFY for instance, who's as lucky in love as Grace Kelly is at cornering. Sure, he can semi-regularly win Spider with four suits but he still can't manage to hold onto a woman between pay cheques.

It can all be a bit depressing for the lad and as both a bystander and a friend I feel obliged to help him out in his time of misery.

"GET HARD YA BIG JESSIE!" I shout, playing the tough love card. "You don't see me moping around the place like a Mac geek at a TechNet gathering!"

"That would be because you and your missus are still seeing each other," the PFY whines pathetically.

"Now, now, you have no proof that the break-up was anything but an ordinary relationship that had simply run its course. Sure, she does spend a bit of her free time with her supervisor, but there's no reason to put two and two together and come up with 69. There may be a perfectly logical explanation for her absences."

"Sure," the PFY says, not believing a word of it.

"Look, you're just being paranoid!" I say. "There's a bound to be some perfectly innocent reason for her spending time in her boss' company."

"Oh yeah, and what's that?"

"I'm putting my money on it being work hours - when she's supposed to be at work?"

"Yeah, it's all a little too bloody convenient!" he snaps.

I can see that I'm going to get nowhere with the PFY and that this is some deeply ingrained upset that may need some special handling.

"Ok, before you get a little too off tangent have you done all the normal post-mortem relationship things?"

"What do you mean?"

"Run conversations back through your mind looking for warning signs, replayed old arguments looking for the straw that broke the camel's back or rifled through her email looking for the confirmation of a hotel reservation - by the hour?"

"I..."

"Right, so you've done all that - and there's no actual evidence?"

"No, but that doesn't mean..."

"Doesn't mean you're not being a little paranoid. Tell you what, why don't we get an expert opinion?"

"Who?"

"The other half - she's bound to know what's been going on."

. . . A couple of calls later . . .

"Ok, so the PFY's got a little problem in love and he'd like you to diagnose what may have caused the problem, and whether his ex is actually seeing someone else."

"Uh-huh," Karen says. "So what happened?"

"She just said she didn't think it was working out."

"When?"

"Monday morning."

"And you didn't talk about it the night before?"

"No, I was playing on the PS2."

"Ok, but what about in the weekend"

"I was at the Robot Destroyer challenge most of Saturday, and Sunday I was helping cleanup after the Robot Destroyer challenge."

"Ok, when was the last time you talked to her?"

"Thursday night."

"And what did you talk about?"

"What she should pick me up at the curry house on the way home."

"And you didn't talk when she got home?"

"I WAS EATING A CURRY!"

"What about after the curry?"

"I'm not sure; I was trolleyed by then because I'd had 10 beers to get the vindaloo down."

"Right. Okay, what about the night before that?"

"Had a Phal - and 12 lagers. And some ice."

"And the night before that?"

"She had some birds' night out and I had a Rogan Josh. And five lagers."

"Okay, well don't take this the wrong way, but I think I know what your problem is."

"Mmm?"

"You're not getting enough Naan bread," I say, interrupting with the solution. "More Naan, less heat, then you can save the beers for afters."

"Oh yeah!" the PFY smiles.

"I WAS GOING TO SAY," Karen interrupts, "that perhaps the problem is that weren't spending any QUALITY time with your ex, and any time you did spend with her you were drunk or asleep - neither of which are attractive in a partner!"

"I..." the PFY says in his defence.

"She has a point," I say. "So what I think you should do, is send her some flowers."

"Uh-huh," Karen agrees.

"Apologise in person the next day..."

"Mmmm."

"Say you've been a fool and perhaps you should start things on a clean slate..."

"Yes..." Karen adds

"And if she stoops to allow you a second chance you should shower her with gifts, attention and quality time so that she realises that you're a diamond in the rough and that she really is lucky to be with the new you."

"YES!" Karen nods approvingly.

"Then you dump her like the Boss-shagging piece of trash that she is!"

So it IS true what they say about being lucky in computing but unlucky in love. Something my testicles will be reminding me of until well after Karen's cleared her stuff out of my gaff then trashed the place - as an example to others...

Sigh.

BOFH: Defence of the Realm

Published Friday 27th May 2005 13:12 GMT

Episode 17 So the new Boss isn't happy. It seems in his first week he's detected that someone is intercepting his email!!! The PFY and I are, of course, morally outraged at the thought of all this and assure him we'll leave no stone unturned in ensuring it doesn't happen again.

We'll be much more careful next time, for a start.

Unfortunately our heartfelt assurances are not enough to appease him, and he's called in some ex-colleague to trace the source of the spying - and he wants us to cooperate fully, or else!

"But how did he know?" the PFY asks when we're back at Mission Control deleting log files and erasing backup tapes.

"You've got me," I respond, "but I did notice he's got a USB key with more fruit on it than a pile-sufferer's bum!

"Yes, I saw that too," the PFY replies. "Wouldn't look too out of place plugged into the Tardis."

"Hmm. So we'll need to take a quick shufti at it."

"Doubtful - he takes it with him wherever he goes and his machine locks when it's not plugged in..."

"Right, so we'd need to create a situation where he has no time to think..."

"Like a small building fire?" the PFY says.

"I was thinking more along the lines of sorting him out a dodgy curry and breaking all the toilets on this floor - but fire's a good idea too."

... The next afternoon, after a large vindaloo, a castor oil mango lassi and small bin fire ...

"So what is it?"

"No idea," I respond. "But it's very advanced. I plug it into this machine and it does nothing - yet the coil indicates a mass of electronic activity inside it, which suggests that it requires network connectivity or some other activator. All other tests I've performed on it electronically imply that it's a passive device."

"But it's not?" the PFY says.

"Doubtful. Tell you what, I'll check the wireless bandwidth for anomalies while you give it a sturdy bang with this hammer... Ok?"

>BASH!<

"Well?" the PFY asks.

"Well what?"

"Was there any change in network bandwidth?"

"No, I just said that to get out of the way when you hit it in case it had some form of self-destruct device."

"You B..."

...

Strangely, the disappearance of the Boss' key causes no outcry although I notice it is replaced the next morning by one on an elastic cord affixed to the Boss' belt.

Not only that but the ex-colleague of the Boss has shown up as well, and he's what we in the trade refer to as an odd one. (And coming from someone in the computing trade that's fairly damning).

Not mincing words he gets straight down to business: "So I'd like to get access to all your sendmail and Exchange logs, audit records for computers and administrative access to your domain."

"I don't know that that's possible - nor wise," I start, playing the bluff card first. "Besides, are you even sure that his email was seen - or is it just paranoia?"

"Oh I'm sure," he responds. "The device plugged into the USB port is an implementation of an extremely advanced form of encryption that we're working on."

"Really? And you'd be?"

"I'd rather not say"

"And the advanced form of encryption you're talking about is...?"

"I'd rather not say."

"So it's Quantum Computing?"

"I never said that!"

"And you work for the Government - and probably not ours?" I ask, the Boss' expression telling me everything I need to know.

"I never said that either."

"And you're some advanced form of geek for the project?"

"I..."

"So to go off on a tangent - you'd appreciate an extremely advanced form of one-time-pad encryption if someone just handed it over to you?"

"I... What are you suggesting?"

"Say for instance someone gave you an advanced form of encryption - for all intents and purposes unbreakable, with a potentially huge key length."

"I... I'm listening," our friendly spook says.

"Ok, How about this for a one-time pad - your DNA?"

"My DNA?"

"Yeah, it's a huge key, one time thing, excellent for encryption. Toss away all the predictable parts, keeping the remaining elements."

"But why mine?"

"Doesn't have to be yours, it could be anyone," I say, nodding at the Boss.

The Boss smiles appreciatively at the thought of being a mainstay of a country's security.

"And what happens when a third party gets hold of his DNA?"

"Depends on the start vector and traversal method you use. Besides, you'd just have him killed."

"What?!" Casper asks.

"Well, he already knows too much... Or you could just keep him locked away somewhere - like a loony asylum."

"This is ridiculous!" the Boss blurts.

"It's a National Security issue!" I respond. "Then there's your parents..."

"My Parents!?"

"Yeah, well, why take the risk - I mean they're the two large probable-prime factors of the large probable-prime product that is you. "

"I..."

"Admittedly you're one possible outcome of your parents, so you might want to keep them on ice somewhere as well for when you need a new key. And it'd be a breakthrough in public key encryption - you just need two people to have a quick shag to ensure private communications."

"You're proposing that you use people to produce PKI vectors!!!" Casper gasps.

"Ok, you could do it with animals I suppose, but I still think you'd find that the Boss here would be invaluable to your research. And with a modest royalty system for my assistant and myself to ensure complete secrecy you could perfect the science while the rest of the world is in the starting blocks."

"Uh..." Casper mumbles, thinking.

"You'd have to take him away now of course," the PFY adds, nodding at the boss.

"I..."

"And probably remove any record of his existence," the PFY adds. "I'd torch his house and office to be on the safe side."

"I... don't think that would be a good idea," the spook says, fingering his cellphone and rolling his eyes at the Boss.

... Later that afternoon after a small office fire ...

"Has anyone seen the new bloke?" the Secretary asks, wandering in to Mission Control.

"What new bloke?"

"Your new manager!"

"We haven't got a new manager!"

"I... Didn't... I thought..."

Mum's the word...

BOFH: Blocking the chutney ferret

Published Friday 3rd June 2005 09:51 GMT

Episode 18 There's a bit of a flap on! I know because the Boss, the new Head of IT and the CEO have been speaking earnestly behind closed doors for some time...

No sooner have I alerted the PFY to the situation than the phone rings.

"Dreamytime Escorts!" I answer.

"Sorr.. I... What?"

"Systems and Networks."

"Oh.. I.... Could you come into the meeting room for a moment please - no need to make a fuss."

"Sure."

With a summons like that one almost feels obliged to attend.

"We need you to go back through some mail and check that it was sent!" the CEO asks "Is that possible?"

"Sorry, are you suggesting you want us to... ..intrude on someone's privacy and read the contents of their Sent Items folder?" I ask, horrified.

"They don't work here any more so I'm sure it's ok," the Boss adds.

"Still, don't you think it might be a little... wrong?" I say, possibly overdoing it a little.

"It's important. It seems that one of our people might have said something which may, if interpreted in the wrong way, have an impact on the company's standing."

"Insider trading?" I ask hopefully, mentally kicking myself for not paying more attention to the dullards in trading...

"What? No, no, nothing like that."

"Then what?"

"I'd rather not say."

"I'm going to need to know what to look for..."

A brief series of non-verbal communications later it's decided to let me in on the secret.

"It's... a... delicate matter which must remain confidential."

"You can trust me," I respond caringly. "Mother is the word."

"Well it seems that in an unguarded moment one of our ex-board members may have used the company email system to allude to the sexual preferences of a board member of another company, resulting in the threat of legal action."

"Oh, is that it?" I ask disappointedly. "Just deny the message was ever sent."

"They have a copy of it which they forwarded to us," the CEO replies tersely, handing over a printout.

"No, they have an electronic representation of some text which may or may not have been sent through our mail system. In fact, I'm almost certain this message ID will turn out to be that of a message sent to me at my home address."

"Really?!"

"In ten minutes it will be."

"Oh. So there's nothing to worry about?"

"Well there'll be a bit of name calling, but it'll be their word against ours."

"Oh good," the CEO burbles. "But I think we should take steps to make sure this doesn't happen again."

"Hear hear!" the Head of IT blurts, getting in some good anal-nasal interfacing while the Boss nods vacantly.

"What are you proposing?" I ask. "Putting a breathalyser on keyboards which can detect when someone's a little... uh... 'tired and emotional'?"

"No, I mean blocking messages with anything offensive in them," the CEO says.

"Offensive?"

"Yes, anything that might be construed as offensive, harassing or libellous."

"So... uh 'rude' words?"

"Yes - stop them getting in or out for a start!"

"What about colloquialisms which might be construed offensive?"

"Sorry?" the CEO asks.

"Things like 'Queer as a lemonade sandwich'," the PFY says helpfully.

"I... Uh... Suppose so."

"What about chutney ferret?" the PFY asks.

"I..."

"Crafty Butcher?"

"I..."

"What about..."

"LOOK, I'm not going to vet expressions!" the CEO snaps, interrupting the PFY's recall of the more homophobic portions of Roger's Profanisaurus.

"So what you want is for us to install something like Mail Marshal to restrict the content of email, etc?" I ask.

"Yes."

"Or we could just save a bit of cash and write one ourselves - because I don't know that we could trust third party software to recognise the subtleties of the Queen's English," the PFY suggests, pointing to a section of the offending email which may or may not be alluding to an odd use of a domestic appliance.

"I see what you mean. Well, use your best judgement."

With those words in a parallel universe a locker bearing the name "Pandora" creaks open...

. . . One day later . . .

"TURN IT OFF!" the Boss shouts.

"But it's working!" the PFY snaps.

"It's bloody not, it's blocking everything!"

"Everything offensive," asserts the PFY. "It uses Bayesian filtering and learning to build up blacklists of words - it's very advanced!"

"I can't send anything to anyone! ALL my messages are getting rejected."

"Because the filter recognises your address as one which has offended a number of people."

"Who? HOW?"

"Well let's see." >clickety< "Ah-ha! Your first hit was in a message to me, using the word 'bloody' which has a score of five. That in itself isn't offensive, until you used the word 'shit', which is 80 and meant an instant rejection."

"Where?" the Boss asks, as the PFY brings up the message concerned.

"I didn't say shit, I said 'finish **it**'."

"Sneaky, but we noticed it anyway."

"Are you suggesting I did it on purpose!?"

"Of course. I was dubious till the filter highlighted the word serving, its dictionary meaning, the links to subservience, the link from that to submissive and from there to leather gags and male bondage."

"What? Are you serious?"

"Not as serious as the people in personnel."

"YOU COMPLAINED ABOUT ME TO PERSONNEL!"

"Of course. I don't see why I have to take that deliberate abuse."

"You slimy little basta..."

In the parallel universe the sound of Pandora's locker slamming shut is simultaneous with the sound of a rather nasty slap being landed on the PFY's mush and the shout of the HR bloke who's just walked in to tell him not to be such a git.

Now THAT is timing... You can't just plan it like that.

BOFH and the Chemistry Lesson

Published Monday 20th June 2005 23:00 GMT

Episode 19 "OK," The PFY says looking over the inside of The Boss's machine. "I'll take a quick look at it, but at this stage I'm fairly certain that it'll just need a new seal and a smoke recharge and be back up and running in no time."

"Sorry, did you say smoke recharge?"

"Yeah?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, obviously the smoke seal's gone which is why you saw it. If we replace the seal and recharge the smoke it'll probably be as good as new."

"What are you talking about?!"

"Your machine."

"I know you're talking about my machine but what's all this crap about smoke recharges!?" The Boss snaps irately.

"Okay, your machine gave out a bit of smoke and died - yes?"

"Yes."

"Which is why I suspect the smoke seal on one of the chips has gone, letting out the smoke and causing the machine to fail."

"Which smoke seal?"

"I don't know yet, I'll have to test the chips."

"Test them for what?!"

"To see if the smoke's got out."

"What the hell are you talking about, there's no smoke in chips!"

"What?" The PFY asks in just the right tone to imply doubts as to The Boss' sanity.

"Computer chips - they don't have smoke in them!"

"Ah" I weigh in. "I think you might be a little mistaken - most microelectronic devices have smoke in them."

"Rubbish!"

"Course they do!"

"Ridiculous!"

"Well how do you think electronic devices work then?"

"They're collections of transistors.."

"And how do transistors work?"

"Silicon junctions?" The Boss responds, slightly unsettling me with his in-depth knowledge.

"Some are silicon, some are germanium. But they're not pure silicon, because it's not actually conductive."

"nyeeess" The Boss says slowly, indicating that we're (thankfully) at the outer regions of his knowledge.

"So an impurity is introduced to the silicon to make it a partial conductor."

"Mmmm," The Boss says, verging on the mental depletion zone we call Dummy mode. All I need now is a little gate voltage to his mental mosfet and...

"And the addition of an impurity is called doping and the dope we're talking about in this case is managerium, a very very dopey compound"

*** DUMMY MODE ON! ***

"Managerium?" The Boss repeats doubtfully. "I've never heard of it."

"I'm not surprised," I respond, pullstarting the bullshit generator "Whilst it's extremely commonplace extraction of pure managerium is extremely rare. It is one of the last elements in the periodic table and with an atomic weight of 347, it's extremely dense."

"Uhh... huh..." The Boss mumbles, indicating that his mental "bag full" light is on, only I can't stop because I'm on a roll.

"So the silicon is doped with Managerium in a process known as superdoping to make the basic junctions required for microelectronics. Superdoping involves the fusion of managerium particles onto a silicon wafer in microscopic amounts."

"YES YES, I SEE, BUT WHAT THE HELL'S THIS GOT TO DO WITH SMOKE!?!!"

"AS I WAS ABOUT TO SAY," I continue. "The microscopic amounts are achieved by superheating managerium so that it changes from a solid directly into a gas - a process known as sublimation."

"Managerium being well known as a subliminal material," The PFY adds, stealing my in-joke.

"Yes."

"And so when the smoke seal in a chip breaks the Managerium is free to break it's covalent bond, resulting in a gas which looks - because of Managerium's denseness - like smoke."

"So when a computer has smoke coming out of it, it's really Managerium escaping?!" The Boss asks

"Exactly?"

"Is the gas harmful?!" The Boss gasps.

"Uhhh...." I say, haltingly.

"What is it?" he gasps again. "I may have inhaled some - I certainly smelt something!!!"

"Well the good news is that if you're affected by it you'd never know as it affects the mental system - although it IS a cumulative poison."

"Well what are the symptoms if it's bad?"

"I... I'm not sure. I know you get headaches."

"Headaches?!" The Boss blurts, grabbing his forehead.

"Increasing amounts of Amnesia is another symptom. It starts out with small things and just gets worse and worse." The PFY adds.

"How much worse?!!!!"

"Well, advanced cases forget everyday things like the names of people they just met, license plates of cars they used to own, their dreams, the last thing they read before they put a book down at night - that sort of thing - but I mean that's only the *really* bad cases."

"Bloody Hell," The Boss gasps, rushing from the room gripping his head tightly.

The ambulance was overdoing it a little, but he did insist after I "remembered" that inability to concentrate was an indication of a near fatal dose of the material that had an atomic weight of 347 which was actually almost same as a combination of Uranium and Silver both noted for their relative paucity in conjunction with quartz deposits in the African subcon.....

"So do you think we should replace the faulty power supply?" The PFY asks, pointing past the fan to the huge scorch mark where a capacitor used to be

"Nah, chuck it in the bin. And if he asks - we never had this conversation and he never brought his machine in..."

BOFH: Resurrection

Published Monday 4th July 2005 15:12 GMT

Episode 20 Bright white light surrounds me and ahead I see a lift with the UP button greyed out. Entering the lift, I press the only option available, 'B', and go down.

The air gets appreciably warmer.

Exiting the lift, I see nine rooms. The one immediately in front of me has an endless pile of service packs which have to be applied to an endless line of Windows desktop machines.

The room next to it has a sign which says: "Discussion: Linux v Windows v MacOSX".

Far off in the distance in the last room I see a figure encased in ice.

Things become clearer.

I rush back to the lift, press the 'G' button noting the 'I' button is still greyed out. And after all my selfless works, too.

The lift doors open and I head immediately for the light...

"We've got a pulse!" a paramedic yells as I regain a bit of my former consciousness. I notice the PFY halfway across the room in a similar state of recovery and the Boss in a corner with a couple of meds working on him. I catch a brief murmur of brain damage and manage to spit out something about it being his normal operating mode...

"What happened?" the PFY gasps once the pushing and shoving has stopped.

"I..." the Boss blubs, before lapsing into shocked silence.

"I..." I say, coming to a halt when I realise I have no recollection of what's transpired.

or... It might be a dream but I seem to remember...

...

"IT'S NOT THE BLOODY SAME!" I shout, annoyed. "I ordered a PARTICULAR machine in a PARTICULAR configuration so that it can perform a PARTICULAR task!"

"But this machine is the same," the Boss responds, calmly. "See, everything in the same amounts. It's a perfectly good substitute."

"You can't substitute a machine with a fast processor for a crap machine with two much slower processors! When I order a machine with two hard drives I don't want a machine with one LARGE hard drive!!!"

"If I may," the PFY says, interjecting. "I think I see the root of the problem."

"Mmm?" the Boss and I say almost simultaneously.

"You think the systems are basically the same."

"They are," the Boss says.

"Only you're not paid to think. If you were you'd be getting paid a lot less."

FIGHTING TALK FROM THE PFY!!!!

"I beg your pardon?!!"

"As well you should - this isn't the first time. Last week I ordered a couple of replacement mice for the console system and instead of the five button optical jobbies I ordered I got a FOUR button trackball - one with a ball which isn't even bloody spherical."

"But the ones you specified were 30 quid each. The alternatives cost us a tenth of that!!!"

"THEY DON'T BLOODY WORK PROPERLY!"

"But they've saved money!" the Boss bleats.

"YOU DON'T SAVE MONEY IF IT'S DODGY!" the PFY snaps. "And then this morning I receive this..."

"It's a keyboard."

"Yes it is. A PC keyboard with a Dec-VT220 configuration. NO-ONE USES THEM ANY MORE!"

"But it was only five quid!"

"BECAUSE IT'S CRAP!"

"Has this been happening with all our orders?" I ask, looking suspiciously at the recently delivered, yet still unopened package on my desktop.

"Uh... We have an agreement with stores that if we can find an equivalent for less or a better item for the same price we should do that. And the stuff they get is perfectly reputable and not at all... dodgy."

"And the person who's deciding what an equivalent product is the same person who picks his nose and eats it to save on lunch money?"

"He's saved us thousands already!"

"So it HAS been happening with all our orders?"

BOFH: Chuck it and leg it

Published Friday 22nd July 2005 11:25 GMT

Episode 21 "What the hell's he saying?!" I ask the PFY as he tries to interpret what my counterpart is saying.

"I'm not sure - East European languages aren't my speciality - but I **think** he's saying what you just did is illegal in his country," the PFY replies, raising a questioning eyebrow.

"Ah! In that case tell him not to worry - it's illegal in this country too," I say, handing my helper the 50 quid he'd been promised before he dashes out the pub door.

"What the hell did you do?"

"Oh Nothing. He just helped me dump a bit of rubbish."

"The new auditor guy!!" The PFY gasps. "I thought he **was** sniffing around the place a bit too much for his own good..."

"What?! No! No, it was just some old laser printers from the clutter in Mission Control. The environmentally-friendly disposal crowd have upped their prices again so that it's getting cheaper to **buy** a printer than dispose of one!"

"You didn't stuff them into the roadside bins again!" the PFY sighs. "It's a 50 quid fine!"

"They way things are going it'll soon be the cheaper option - but no. We just chucked them off Waterloo Bridge."

"What?! How'd you get them there?"

"Borrowed the Boss' car. Admittedly I did feed him a few too many drinks in the afterwork celebrations."

"What celebrations?"

"Celebrating getting rid of 10 printers without paying for their disposal."

"How the hell did you get 10 printers into an MG?!?"

"Obviously we had to make two trips..."

"Obviously," the PFY says dubiously. "And so it all went well?"

"Yeah, pretty much. Hitting the party barge was a bit of a low point and seemed to upset the punters, but by that stage we were in the car with the foot down."

"And there'll be no.... complications?"

"Nope!"

. . . The next day . . .

"Ah... Uhhh... Simon. Was wondering if you had time for a little chat?" the Boss asks.

"Sure gimme five minutes - I've almost got spider beat!"

"Ahhmmmm, it's a little more urgent than that," he mumbles, looking a little distressed.

. . . two minutes later in a quiet meeting room . . .

"Right. Well. It seems that Miss Watson here..." the Boss says, indicating a woman in the room with us.

"Ms," Ms Watson corrects.

"Ms?" the Boss confirms.

"Short for Misery?" I ask, lightening the situation a touch... Or not, as seems apparent. Ah well.

"**Ms** Watson is a legal representative of an ecological group - 'Friends of the Thames'."

"Ah yes, The Thames Freighter, a king among vans!"

"No," Ms Watson snips.

"Really? You're friends of the Television company then?"

"No."

"The Tunnel! A tribute to Brunel!"

"No, the Thames river!" she snaps.

"Oh, of course. And?"

"And Ms Watson believes that a number of our company's older computing assets found their way into the Thames last night."

"Really? By themselves?"

"I think we can dispense with the innocent act," Ms Watson says, placing a photograph on the table. "Amazing the clarity of these pictures, don't you think? I think the courts would have no problem at all in prosecuting you on this evidence alone."

"**THIS** 'evidence' alone?" I ask.

"One of the machines had a company inventory sticker on it," the Boss sighs.

"Which led me here.. to you" Ms Watson says.

"It's true", I admit grudgingly. "While taking the machines for... servicing.. the car .. broke down on the bridge, at which time a man appeared from nowhere and started tossing them into the Thames. Some form of Luddite, I shouldn't wonder!"

"You're suggesting you weren't a knowing party to this?"

"Of course not. Your photos clearly show me attempting to rescue the printer from him - and I defy you to prove otherwise."

"We have several similar photos from two separate occasions last night."

"He's obviously a serial offender," I suggest.

"And you're also suggesting that your car just HAPPENED to break down at the same place twice in the same night."

"Classic cars **are** notoriously unreliable."

"And so you're saying that you weren't intentionally dumping your old equipment into a public waterway."

"We're the VICTIM here!" I blurt, not altogether convincingly.

"And you don't mind telling me how you **do** dispose of your equipment?"

"We work on a 30-month life cycle."

"Don't you mean 36 month in line with the normal three year warranty?"

"No, 30 month. At that point we remove the theft prevention device and inventory stickers and redeploy them closer to the car park. Things seem to sort themselves out there because people can't resist the opportunity."

"So it's your contention that you have no inventory disposal problems?"

"None."

. . . twenty minutes later. . .

"Well thank you for coming to share your concerns," the Boss blurts, showing Ms Watson to the door.

. . .

"I thought we were for it then!" he gasps when he returns moments later. "I think you'd best let your offside know that we'd rather pay the disposal fees than risk public exposure for dumping equipment - especially the stuff we've yet to dispose of."

"No, no, there's nothing left."

"What about the two machines on the floor of your room."

"Should be leaving the building in the boot of Ms Watson's car any time now."

"I..."

"Which reminds me - when she comes back to complain let me know as we've got a bootload of dud toner cartridges in the basement looking for a home...."

"I..."

"...think we're doing a splendid job and deserve an afternoon in the pub. FANTASTIC."

>click< >click< >Slam!<

BOFH: A white van man called Algernon

Published Friday 29th July 2005 10:59 GMT

Episode 22 "Is your.. uh... assistant in?" the Boss asks, ducking into Mission Control and breaking the monotonous boredom.

"The PFY? No, I've not seen him all day. Or yesterday for that matter."

"Is he sick?"

"I doubt it. When you're a contractor you don't waste good contract money being ill at home. No, I'm not sure where he is. Hang on..."

I bash the PFY's mobile number into the desk phone.

"Hmm, phone's off or outside a service area. I'll try his home phone."

I bash another number in.

"... Nope, his phone just rings. Which is strange, because I know he has an answerphone with the same message as the Lithuanian embassy."

"I.. Why?"

"I don't know, maybe they need a backup."

"Well anyway, I just popped in to see if he'd helped my mate Algy out."

"Algy," I ask, suddenly interested. "As in Algernon?"

"Yes, why?"

"It's probably nothing."

"What?"

"Do you know about the Echelon Project?"

"Oh - the one where we're putting a new plasma screen in the boardroom for company presentations?"

"No the SIGINT project run by the NSA to capture the world's communications."

"Oh yes, I have heard something about that."

"Well a couple of years ago a bloke put a post onto the web identifying Algernon - not Algy - as the first of the three words in the '*find-me*' code."

"Find me?"

"Yeah. So you're a modern day James Bond and get caught. All you need to do is get to a phone, ring any non-local number - but by preference an international call to a country of particular current interest. As soon as the call is made you say the three word phrase and then hang up. Echelon will find the phrase, send up a rocket to say someone's in trouble and before you know it you're surrounded by white vans."

"White Vans?"

"Windowless white vans to be precise."

"?"

"White vans are the black helicopters of urbanity."

"?"

"They're everywhere and no-one sees them."

"Well that's not entirely true - everyone sees them. There was even one in my parking space a few days ag.."

"I see," I nod.

"But they were delivering office supplies! I saw the paper!!!"

"So when you say 'they' you mean more than one? Why would it take more than one person to deliver office supplies?"

"I... But why would *they* be interested in your assistant?"

"They're probably not - but they're most certainly interested in how he came by the find me codes."

"Didn't you say they were posted on the web?"

"No, the guy was going to post them one day at a time to avoid detection but he never posted the next one!"

"You mean.... they... got to him?!!!"

"Who knows. He might be at the Guantanamo 'holiday resort' or he might have just got bored."

"But you're suggesting that somehow your assistant may have inadvertently set this thing in motion by talking to my friend."

"Or by mentioning it in a phone conversation along with the other two words of the find me phrase."

"Do you know what the other two words might be?"

"I'd can only guess that they'd be uncommon words - words that wouldn't ordinarily appear in normal conversation. Like Strom Thurmond, for instance."

"Huh?"

"A joke. No, it'll be words which could be used together but ordinarily wouldn't."

"Like 'Fix Algernon's Computer'?!?!?" the Boss gasps.

"No, that would be too common and it would need to be more obscure than his machine."

"Well it's not his computer, it's his god-daughter's."

"NOW we're getting warm! Algernon, god-daughter and I'm guessing something to do with computers."

"Yes but what?!" the Boss asks.

"Who knows, it could be anything. Why are you so keen to know?"

"Well what if I've said accidentally said it too?!!"

"Trust me, if you'd said it you'd already be in a dark room wrapped in carpet with a hose up your bum."

"WHAT!?"

"If **you'd** said it, you'd be gone already. The only thing you've got to worry about is if the PFY doesn't talk and they start running phone calls from the building back through Echelon. You used a payphone to talk to him didn't you?"

"WHY THE BLOODY HELL WOULD I USE A PAYPHONE TO TALK TO A MATE ABOUT A DODGY COMPUTER!?"

"Yes I think that's your best approach, because sooner or later the PFY's bound to finger you - figuratively of course."

"WHAT!?"

"Well, it's only a matter of time till he cracks. I mean you could take the chicken's way out and hide in your office and hope that they'll lose interest, but we all know you're made of stronger stu..."

>SLAM!<

. . . Two minutes later . . .

"Ey up!" the PFY says, dropping the 10 pack of lager and the takeaway curries onto a convenient desk. "No Chilli Bhajis today sorry, so I got you a chicken Phal and same Aloo Partha instead."

"Ta!" I say, cracking a lager.

"Anything happen while I was out?"

"Nah! You remembered to park the van behind the Boss' car?"

"Yeah, why?"

"No reason."

The name's BOFH - James BOFH

Published Friday 12th August 2005 13:02 GMT

Episode 23 "What do you two know about business intelligence?" the Boss asks the PFY and I after we answer the call for a quick chat at his request...

"A novel idea but I don't think it'll catch on," the PFY responds.

"Sorry?" The boss burbles, missing the PFY's point.

"Business & Intelligence - bit of a misnomer," the PFY replies helpfully.

"No, I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about obtaining information about our competitors."

"Oh, you mean **spying**," I reply.

"Well not **spying** exactly, I just mean obtaining information from their systems."

"Yes we call that **spying**. Corporate Espionage if you want to give it a flashy name."

"Uh... Be that as it may," the boss chirps, tapping a pencil on his desk impatiently, "I'd like to know what **you** know about it."

"Well you've come to the right place," I cry, "as my assistant here used to work for MI5."

"No I didn't!" the PFY sighs dryly.

"Well he's bound to say that isn't he?" I say, nodding knowingly at the boss, "it's all part of the training."

"No it's not!"

"Ah, so you **do** know what the training is then??" I ask, turning back to the Boss. "But seriously, he was. His code number was double-oh F."

"00F?"

"Yeah, they switched to Hexadecimal when the digits ran out."

"Ridiculous!" the PFY snaps.

"No, ridiculous was the first attempt using Dewey Decimal. By the time you'd finished warning them that you were '*secret agent double-oh 327.IPFY*' they'd have already lowered you into the vat of acid and organised dinner for two followed by dancing with Moneypenny."

"I... Look, I'm not talking about that!!" The Boss interrupts. "What I'm wanting to know is IF we happened to come by the laptop of a staff member of another company would you be able to access any information from it?"

"And by *IF* you mean you already have?"

"Uh... Well we had a couple of drinks to celebrate a successful end to some legal action between our two companies and he inadvertently left his laptop behind at the pub..."

"And by *access any information* you actually mean find out the name and address of the owner so that you can return it to him?"

"I..."

"Because to do otherwise would be wrong."

"And possibly illegal," the PFY adds.

"Oh. I see."

"Of course if, in the process of obtaining the name and address information we *happened* to encounter some information that pertained to some business activity..."

"Yes?"

"We'd be obliged to keep the confidence of the party concerned."

"Oh," the Boss sighs unhappily.

"Of course, I'm not much of a poker player and I might let slip something I'd seen if you were discussing something that I had knowledge of."

"Not much of a poker player..." the boss repeats slowly.

"Especially when he's been drinking," the PFY chips in.

"So if we buy you drinks you'll break into the machine?"

"By George, I think he's got it!!!"

"Ok then. How do you plan to do it?"

"I'm not - I'll get the PFY to do it - he can sniff a breast out of a hard drive at thirty paces."

"I don't want porn, I want the business info!"

"Yes, yes, but the PFY will break into the machine to get the porn and we can get the other stuff."

"What if he hasn't got porn on his machine?"

"Puleese. Even blind people look at porn. That's why they make the braille keyboards washable!"

"I..! Well **I've** never browsed porn!" the Boss gasps, offended.

"Yuh-huh. Yeah, you and Ghandi - because he's dead."

"I don't."

"Really well just to be on the safe side, do you want the PFY to check your machine? Even deleted files! He can suck a thumbnail out of a two-month-old deleted zip file..."

"I don't think that will be necessary," the boss counters hastily. "So what sort of software does he use?"

"Software?!" the PFY asks "Oh! Yes... uh... software."

"You don't use software?"

"It's like a sixth sense" I explain to the Boss. "Someone a couple of rooms away visits www.DirtyNunHosemonsters.com and he's straight into the webcache to grab copies"

"Really?!"

"Oh yeah. But he's got some quality control problems. He can detect porn but he can't detect what **kind** of porn - which can be a little disturbing at times. For instance last week when one of our part timers discovered a fetish for geriatrics."

"I'll never look at a rumpled mattress the same way again," the PFY whimpers.

"He'll probably need counselling," I whisper to the Boss. "But meantime, that's not getting us into the box. Where is it?"

"Uh.. here" the Boss says, removing the aforementioned machine from his briefcase guiltily.

"Ooooh!" the PFY says. "I sense a stirring in the force!"

"So long as it's just the force," I warn.

"Can I..." the PFY asks, reaching for the machine eagerly.

The Boss hands the machine over to the PFY and he takes off like a shot.

"So how long do you think it will take?" the boss asks ten minutes later, tapping his foot anxiously. "Because sooner or later I'm going to get a call from the owner."

"Well it's a complex thing, bypassing Windows security. I mean you'll have to boot from a CD..."

"Yes, and then?"

"That's pretty much it."

"So he'll have got into the machine?"

"I'm not too sur..."

"Got it!" the PFY says, popping back into the room cheerfully with a pack of smokes in his hand.

"Excellent! Are there any financial documents?"

"Oh right, you wanted the work stuff!" he says, popping back out again...

Something tells me it's going to be a long day...

BOFH: Drunk gravity

Published Friday 19th August 2005 12:02 GMT

Episode 24 "So will the games embargo affect our drunken-ET tournament tonight?" the PFY asks.

"Drunken ET?" a helldesker asks, sniffing out a game discussion (as they tend to do) from across the building.

"Yeah, you know, 10 pints in two hours followed by a long and involved campaign in Wolfenstein Enemy Territory"

"Two hours? So you start play at 7pm?"

"Yes that's right, 5pm"

"Fiv... Oh. Are you in a clan?"

"Clans are for people without lives," I blurt without thinking.

"Or handbrakes," the PFY adds.

"Handbrakes?"

"Social handbrakes - the little woman. You know - well you probably don't - but the person that stops you from playing shoot-em-ups over the net till three in the morning."

"I... So can anyone join in one of these games?"

"Anyone still standing at five after 10 pints!" the PFY responds magnanimously.

"I think I'd like to give it a crack!" the helldesker blurts.

"Of course you would!" the PFY says, smiling happily.

. . . 5pm that day . . .

"RIGHT!" I slur. "Time to go, where's my office keys?"

"Where's the helldesk geek?" the PFY counters.

"Where's the door?" the helldesk geek responds.

"Best get a move on, only quarter of an hour till they lock the lifts down."

. . . just over quarter of an hour later . . .

"Bugger, they've locked the lifts down!"

"Yeah, but we left the pub 16 minutes ago."

"What? The pub's only across the road! That was never 16 minutes."

"Course it was, check your watch - you're thinking in drunk time."

"Drunk time?" the helldesk geek asks.

"Yeah, you know, you decide to walk home from the pub and get there in just under 10 minutes - drunk time. Meanwhile the rest of the household who LEFT THE PUB AT EXACTLY THE SAME TIME BUT GOT IN A CAB have been tucked up in bed for the last three hours. Which means that either cabs are time machines, or..."

"Being drunk makes time go by faster?" the helldesk geek slobbers.

"EXACTLY! It's a theory I've been working on for some time - usually after I've been drinking, like now. You know how relativity means that time isn't constant for a moving objects?"

"No."

"Well it does. Einstein proved it. AND it's also tied up with the effects of gravity somehow. Well the same thing can be said for a drunk object - for whom time appears to travel much faster AND the effects of gravity are negligible."

"Eh?"

"You know how when you're sober and you drop a brick on your foot and break your toe?"

"Yes."

"Well when you're drunk, that never happens. It's only the next morning when you wake up on a traffic island in the nude that you find you have a broken toe. Which tends to indicate that gravity doesn't work as fast when you've been drinking - because you're travelling so fast, in drunk time."

"I don't th..."

"Ever noticed how you can't catch a ball, throw a dart or jump over stuff properly when you're boozed?"

"I..."

"That's drunk gravity for you."

"Tell him about the people," the PFY nudges.

"What people?"

"Because you're travelling in drunk time and moving so fast, conversations get compressed - because of the Doppler effect."

"M?"

"It's technical. Anyway, because of the compression and expansion people don't understand what you're saying."

"Oh, I..."

"And because you're travelling so fast and with the compression and Doppler effects and everything, really really good jokes get dragged out in their minds and so you tell them the best joke in the world and they're just standing there - because to **them** it seemed like the joke took half an hour to tell."

"Because..."

"Because they're travelling at different speeds. So whereas in rapid drunk time you tell them a quick joke which is the funniest joke in the world and the whole pub thinks you're fantastic, in the morning no bastard is speaking to you because apparently they THINK you told the receptionist she had a fat arse and called the PR guy a big poof. Because of the distortion of compression. Course their memory is distorted because we drunk people are doing and saying things faster than their mind can commit it to memory so they remember it wrong. Sometimes we're doing things so fast that even we can't remember it. But at least it doesn't affect jokes between drunk people - who are all travelling at the same speed - and so they're still great. For instance, there was this bloke with a wooden eye..."

. . . ten minutes later . . .

"Great joke," the helldesk geek says, chuckling away to himself "But shouldn't we be getting into this game?"

"Game?"

"Drunken ET thing?" he hints.

"Yeah, that was yesterday. It's work time now."

"I..." the helldesk geek whimpers, "don't feel so good."

"That'll be the jetlag!" the PFY blurts as he grabs a couple of coffee mugs to help us face the day ahead...

Ye Bastarde Operatore frome Helle

Published Friday 26th August 2005 12:02 GMT

Episode 25 The Shakespeare Revival Company celebrates the 441st anniversary of the year of Shakespeare's birth with this,

THE TRAGEDIE OF YE BASTARDE OPERATORE FROME HELLE

ACT I.

Scene 1 - The HR Tea Room.

Enter three female HR Consultants

HR1: When shall we three meet again?

HR2: This afternoon at the pub?

HR3: Yep, I'm free.

HR1: Don't want to talk about Promotions?

HR2: Nup.

HR3: I'm good.

HR1: >sigh<

Scene II - Outside a meeting room

CEO: That sounded like a bit of a rough meeting.

Helldesk cannon fodder who will die in the next scene: Yes, the users ganged up on the IT people about server performance and the proposed 'standardised desktop' plan.

CEO: And what happened?

Helldesk cannon fodder who will die in the next scene: It seems that the Manager of Systems put the user up to it but the whole thing turned to custard when that Bastard guy happened to stumble upon some evidence of the Manager in question stealing large amounts of the company's stationery. And shagging the head of IT's missus.

CEO: So the standardised desktop plan's still a goer then?

Helldesk cannon fodder who will die in the next scene: Oh yeah.

Scene III - *HR Tea Room*

HR1: So anyway, what about these promotions? A position's opened up in IT.

HR2: Promote from within you think? It's not really for us to say.

HR3: Shtum - Here's some now.

Enter Bastarde and PFYe

BOFH: What a bastard of a day. First that crap meeting now we're on bloody smoke alarm repairs!

HR1, HR2 & HR3: Morning.

BOFH: (*whispered to PFYe*) Promotions committee. Be Nice. (*loudly*) Morning ladies. How are we this morning?

HR1: Good, but not as good as you by all accounts.

HR2: Putting in the spadework with the CEO's standard desktop idea...

HR3: Climbing the greasy pole then?

BOFH: Huh?

PFYe: Everything all right here?

HR1: Ah, the assistant.

HR2: Lesser than the bastard and yet greater.

PFYe: Ay?

HR3: Ignore her. She's a parttime dietary consultant.

BOFH: What the hell are you talking about?

HR1: We're suggesting you're a megalomaniac corporate ladder jockey with a penchant for workplace homicide. Bound to get places fast and leave a few smoking corpses.

BOFH: Ah, so nothing libellous then.

Enter Helldesk cannon fodder who will die in this scene

>KZZZZzzzzzerrrt!<

BOFH: Woopsy.

Scene IV - CEO's Office

CEO: So the Systems Manager's gone then?

Head of IT: He was on the street before his personal possessions made it to the furnace.

CEO: Sorry to... ah... hear about the wife.

Head of IT: What? That?! It was the worst photoshop job I've ever seen!

CEO: So how are you going to replace him - promote from within?

Head of IT: What, you mean the Bastard? No, we've tried that before, it never works out.

CEO: Perhaps this time...

Head of IT: Suit yourself, but you'll regret it.

Scene V - Mission Control

BOFH: Would you bloody look at this contract!

PFYe: Hmm? I thought you'd said you'd never do that again.

BOFH: Yeah, but look at the bottom line!

PFYe: You earn more than that now.

BOFH: I think you'll find that's a monthly amount, not annual.

PFYe: **WHAT!** That's crazy money!

BOFH: Yeah well - it seems the pay is average but the workplace hazard allowance is astronomical.

PFYe: Makes you think doesn' it?

BOFH: About edging out the CEO, nabbing his role with the skilful application of bribery and blackmail then leading a full frontal attack on the US arm of the company for multinational control?

PFYe: No, I meant about the benefits of being a contractor.

BOFH: So are you in?

PFYe: What do you want me to do...

Scene VI - *The Pub*

CEO: Awfully nice of you to invite me down for a couple of drinks.

BOFH: Not at all. Another brandy or three?

CEO: Don't mind if I do!

PFYe: So what's your interest in this standardised desktop business.

CEO: Well between you and I...

(pauses to down one of the three newly delivered large brandies)

PFYe: (Moving the flower on his lapel closer) Yes?

CEO: I have a old school friend who deals in computer imports and between us we've set up a company to onsell the equipment the company needs at a reasonable profit. (*slurring slightly*) And, as I control the budget for a purchase of such magnitude the review process will be relatively short...

PFYe: ...and sweet?

CEO: Indeed.

PFY: Excellent. Another brandy or three?

CEO: Don't mind if I do!

Scene VII - The Gents at the Pub

PFYe: (*washing hands and rinsing his jacket*) Who'd have thought the old man to have had so much sick in him? There's a spot. Out damn spot.

BOFH: (*entering*) Dog problems?

PFYe: No, the CEO didn't make it to the bogs and barfed down my back. Then he dropped his watch down the toilet and is trying to get the landlord to shut the toilets down before it gets washed into the sewer..

Scene VIII - *The main bar*

HR1: So what are you having?

HR2: Gin. Make it a double.

HR3: Me too.

HR1: (Turning to landlord) So that's double, double and... (Reading sign on blackboard behind landlord's head) you've got toilet trouble?

BOFH: Afternoon ladies, can I get you three a drink? Thanks for the heads up about the promotions opportunities too. With a bit of luck I could go all the way to the top!

HR1: And bear in mind that none of woman born will stand in your way.

BOFH: Eh?!

HR1: We've been here for two and a half hours, you're lucky we're standing...

ACT II

Scene I - *Mission Control*

Enter Bastard and PFYe, looking pretty please with themselves

BOFH: So it's sorted then, the CEO's down the road faster than an insider trader, the Board's in a shambles and I, as a whistleblower with the company's best interests at heart, am in a perfect position for a takeover. And, if the HR druids are to be believed my application for the top role is a shoe in.

PFYe: Well it would be, but...

BOFH: What?

PFYe: The new HR Appointments Process auditor looks a lot like Louise Brown...

BOFH: Oh shit. The bastardes!...

BOFH: Hell hath no fury...

Published Friday 2nd September 2005 10:12 GMT

Episode 26 It appears that the Boss isn't happy. For some reason the Online Electronic Document Storage project he inherited from his predecessor is somewhat behind schedule and all fingers seem to be pointing at the PFY and I as the source of the delay. I use the ruse of urgent lift maintenance as an excuse for the PFY and I to avoid the problem for a day, knowing full well that the Boss is never going to actually WALK up four flights to berate us.

But it seems I was wrong.

"So what I'd like to know is why the 'scanning into storage' task has taken so long?" the Boss asks, checking his Project gant chart. "I mean this project's been running for almost six months and as far as I can see you've not actually **produced** anything!"

"We're still calibrating the equipment and formatting the document repository."

"What does that **mean**?" the Boss snarls, letting a little more frustration creep into his voice.

"It means that to ensure the system is reliable and robust we have to do benchmarking on various types of document and the impact that it has on the storage system. That way we can pick the best fit of document type to suit the needs of the users and the available space in the repository."

"What does that **mean**?" the Boss repeats.

"It means that we're scanning in multiple documents in multiple formats and running comparisons on readability, total size and ability to OCR text where necessary."

"And what's taking so long?"

"The age of the documents is a bit of a problem. Some of them are so old that the pages might suffer damage or just be stuck together."

"Stuck together!? What documents are you using?"

"For this stage of the Process, old *Playboys*," the PFY admits.

"What?!"

"Well they're ideal. They've got print, images, combinations of the above and the later ones are in colour!"

"What the hell are you archiving **them** for!?"

"Some of them are absolute classics. They need to be safely stored for future generations. And that's just the jokes pages!" the PFY says defensively.

"Right, that's it, you're off the project," the Boss snaps. "I'll get a temp in to scan some documents for you. What skills am I going to want to look for?"

"Blonde, blue eyes," the PFY says helpfully. "Perhaps someone like Miss April 19.."

"I mean technical qualifications, like the ability to discern important metadata from the context of the content."

I always feel vaguely uneasy when the Boss uses technical terms like metadata. It just seems wrong - he should stick to words he knows something about, like redundancy and lard. Whenever he uses large complicated words I always get the feeling he's been talking to someone behind our back. Almost like he's cheating on us with another technical person...

Now I come to think about it, he has been coming in late a lot and making lame excuses like he missed the train or that he had to stay home late with the wife.

We should have seen it coming but we just thought he was being slack bastard!

I can see the same thoughts are running through the PFY's mind and that he's looking a bit hurt. The poor blighter's has such a sheltered upbringing and is not used to Bosses sneaking out for a bit of technical upskilling on the side...

"You never used to use technical terms like that," the PFY says quietly. "Is there... someone else... giving you technical advice?"

"I... No, of course not!"

"I notice there's been a number of appointments with the presales marketing guy from the photocopier company..." I counter, browsing the Boss' online calendar via the wireless PDA.

"What, you're going through my calendar now!?"

"So you admit you've been seeing him?" The PFY asks.

"Well, yes. Sure, he had a few ideas, we might have talked about some stuff but it meant nothing. It's still you guys I come to for the real idea of what we should be doing!"

"I can't believe it," the PFY says. "How long has this been going on?"

"A month. Two maybe."

"And you thought we wouldn't find out?"

"I..."

"How did it get to this stage?" the PFY asks.

"Look, it's not you, it's him," the Boss says, pointing at me.

"Ah, isn't that supposed to be 'It's not you it's me'?" I ask.

"No, it's you," the Boss says. "You're a megalomaniac control freak and I want.... more"

"More?" the PFY asks.

"I want to make my own technical decisions! I don't want to feel stymied by you two whenever I have a good idea!"

"You two? I thought you said it was just him?" the PFY says.

"It doesn't matter. I need more. I'm not an idiot and I want a chance to prove that to everyone. I think perhaps I should.. maybe... create a head of research position."

...

"Well," the PFY says, as soon as the boss leaves. "You seem to be taking this calmly. You're not at all worried that he'll become technically competent and have no further use for us?"

"Nah. I've seen it dozens of times - these things have a way of working themselves out. Push the 'Open 6' Button will you?"

>Nggaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa< >thud<

"What was that?"

"That was the Boss using his newfound superior technical skills to step into an elevator shaft. Told you things had a way of working themselves out...."

Hell hath no fury like an administrator scorned...

BOFH: Putting a price on the Boss

Published Friday 9th September 2005 11:31 GMT

Episode 27 The Boss is in a particularly cheerful mood and I don't like it. Any moment I fear he's going to want to hug one of us or tell us we're doing a great job or something. It's just not normal! Someone's going to find out what's wrong and as it's the PFY's turn to 'tard himself down I give him a prod and point him at the boss.

"Hm. Is everything all right there?" the PFY says as the Boss sails round the office locked in his own happy world.

"? Oh. Yes, yes, everything's great!"

"Great?" the PFY probes.

"Actually, it's excellent!" the Boss replies. "You know, I sent a letter in to one of those 'What am I worth' columns in a technical magazine and they published a response!"

"Ah well, I shouldn't be too disappointed," the PFY soothes.

"What are you implying?!"

"Uh, I think my assistant was simply expressing surprise that the salary ranges they talk about went down that low," I proffer.

"Are you suggesting that I'm not worth very much?!"

"I... uh... What did the magazine say?"

"It said that with my knowledge of Systems, Networks, Databases and Project Managment I could get anywhere up to 70 thousand pounds a year."

"I think the knowledge they're talking about is the ability to configure and maintain one of the systems or manage the implementation of the above - not the ability to find the word in a dictionary," the PFY says.

"I did bloody night classes for three years!"

"And we all like the clay model of the blarney stone."

"That's a bust of my wife!"

"Ooooh," the PFY grimaces. "And I bet I know which one sees more action. Still perhaps you should try facing it towards the office?"

"It **does** face towards the office."

"My mistake - my prescription probably needs updating - it's been six months. So anyway, you say they reckon you're worth 70K?"

"Yes," the boss responds, bad mood averted.

"And you don't think that they might be inflating the figure a touch just to keep the punters happy?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well, let's say you're the editor of one of those computing rags and you want to raise your profile a bit for little or no expenditure of the old folding. You come up with a plan for rating people's jobs and just tell them what they want to hear."

"So you're saying that the figures that they quote bear no relation to reality?"

"Oh I'm sure they bear **SOME** relationship to reality, but probably not a 1:1 relationship. Maybe it's a hash table of some sort."

"I...? So you're saying someone with Networks, Database, Systems and Project Management isn't worth 70 grand?"

"I'm saying that if you found someone with real life in-depth experience of all those things **and** you found a gap of that size and shape inside an organisation that needed those abilities in a single person, they might be worth the dosh."

"And you're saying that our organisation doesn't have those needs?"

"No, I'm saying that you don't have that experience."

And suddenly the Boss is back to normal again.

"That's preposterous!"

"I know. You only get that sort of experience working at a high level in the front line, day after day, not taking a couple of night classes in between days as a highly paid chair warmer!"

"What?! I was saying that I've got in-depth experience!"

"Really. So your Oracle Database won't mount on startup - where's the first place you look?"

"I..."

"A user has a netmask of 255.255.255.224. How many addresses are available in their 'network'?" the PFY asks.

"I'd need to lo..."

"You're attempting to login to Windows and there's a significant delay between entering your credentials and the desktop appearing. What is your first concern?"

"Your network is down!" the Boss blurts quickly

"No, your first concern is who the hell's overwritten your Linux desktop install!" the PFY says.

"I think that goes to prove our point," I add quietly.

"No it doesn't! You just sprung those questions on me. In the real world I'd have time to look them up on the internet."

"Oh right! So, your internet is down, your netmask is up the pokey, Oracle's down and some cretin's installed Windows on your Linux desktop. What do you do?"

"THIS IS RIDICULOUS, THAT WOULD NEVER HAPPEN! The skills I have are more than able to cope with these situations should they arise because the key part of knowing what I know is knowing how to **find** the answers to problems, not knowing them like some rote times tables!"

"So you're saying you still believe you're worth 70K."

"YES, and I don't like the insinuation that I'm overpaid and underqualified!"

"Well I certainly didn't mean to cause any offense!" I backpedal. "I was simply suggesting that it's in magazine's interest to inflate the pay scale and deflate the real-world experience to encourage happy readers."

"Well I think they're spot on!"

"You may be, and I apologise for the implication! To show there's no hard feelings I'll shout you a drink at the pub in 10!"

"I..... Well I guess I won't say no," the boss burbles, good humour restored.

13 minutes later.

>Ring<

"Hello?" I say, answering the cellphone "What? The internet is down, someone's slapped a global netmask of 255.255.255.224 on all the servers, Oracle is down and someone's installed Linux on the Boss's desktop?"

...

"It's for you" I say, handing the Boss the cellphone.

So maybe he is worth it after all...

BOFH: Bloody computer room tourists!

To your left, our air conditioning server...

Published Friday 16th September 2005 12:02 GMT

Episode 28 Bloody Computer room tourists!

It seems the Boss has been asked by the Beancounters to "consult" on their appointment of a new technical support person after the tragic accident that befell the last holder of the position after he stole the PFY's car parking space three days in a row...

True, the PFY **does** take the tube into work and doesn't even **need** a car parking space, however the presence of another vehicle in the space made the PFY's lease agreement with a bloke in the next building a little troublesome.

Half a glass of water and one "faulty" switch mode power supply later it's all sorted out and there's a vacancy in Beancounter central.

Meantime the Boss is taking his consultancy role seriously by asking pointed questions designed to wrinkle out those people with less computing knowledge than himself (infants, the recently E.C.T-ed, etc). Part of the lead-up to these questions is the Boss taking the prospective candidates through the computer room to show them how he is "Lord of all he Surveys" and the magnificence of his earthly domain. Not wanting to be shown up as the chronic halfwit we all know him to be, he's instructed us to remain absent so as not to disturb his "review process".

In other words he doesn't want someone overhearing the fabrications he's constructing around his managerial persona.

Which leaves the PFY and I, acutely interested in the potential outcome of the selection process, having to keep an electronic eye and ear on the boss courtesy of the machine room monitor...

"I can't hear him," the PFY says. "The bloody financials server is running hot and the fans are overloading the mic input."

>Clickety<

"How's that?" I ask.

"A lot better, what did you do, change the fan modulation?"

"Yes, with the shutdown command."

>Ring<

>Clatter< >Slam< >Clatter<

"Right, request lines are closed, what's he saying?"

"Hang on, I'll put it on speaker"

"... and then I installed those two servers over there," the Boss bumbles.

"!" the PFY says, remembering just **who** installed the machines concerned.

"You've done a great job," prospective beancounter support person 1 brownnoses.

"Yes, but that job pales in comparison to when we cabled up the fibreoptic to the whole floor in one weekend. Course, that was a couple of years back when I was on the tools."

"He's got his hand on a tool at the moment if thinks anyone will buy that!" the PFY snaps.

"So you're a real all-rounder then," PBSP #1 bumlicks.

"Don't like him," the PFY says, putting a cross next to the bloke's photo.

...

The next candidate is only slightly better - less of a brownnose and more of an idiot - which is generally par for the course for the beancounter support types. The Boss's stories have benefited from the fertilisation of the bullshit spread liberally on the previous candidate and have grown substantially in size. He's now responsible for installing two RACKS of machines and has cabled the entire building in fibreoptic. When he was on the tools.

After PBSP #2 departs fawningly, PBSP #3 rocks up and things take a turn for the better.

"It's a girl!" the PFY gasps happily.

"A woman," I correct. "And don't get your hopes up - there's a reason why the geeky world is dominated by sad chunky guys with beards, glasses, BO and poor social skills..."

"But still!"

"Let's just see how she pans out."

"...and so basically I install every machine personally myself."

"Really?" PBSP#3 asks with a tinge of disbelief in her voice.

"Yeah. Course, I get the Systems guys to do all the donkey work once I'm sure it's up and running properly - otherwise I'd spend all my time in here!"

"Mmm-Hmm."

"And this is one of our networking rack things."

"Krone, patch by exception?" she asks.

"Mmmmm and over here the fibreoptic which I installed a couple of years back."

"All by yourself?" she asks - in the tone of voice which usually precedes a "bullshit" coughing session.

"She's great!" the PFY sighs.

"Now, now, lets not rush into any snap judgements!"

"...and this is one of our more recent installations," the Boss chirps, gesturing behind him. "Tell me, can you guess what we use this server for?"

"Air conditioning?" she says dryly.

"I... Oh yes, yes of course, well done."

"I think I love her!" the PFY gasps.

"Well, I suppose that ends the, uh, technical side of the interview, so how about we just pop down to the pub across the road and have a bit of an informal chat?" the Boss says, chopping down into sleaze mode.

"The Bastard!" the PFY snaps.

"Just wait," I say. "This could be the true test of character. Oh look, she's stepping in close, **doesn't** go for the knee to the groin - damn it - bumps the pen from his hand."

"Why?"

"Just wait. And he bends down to pick it up... and she slips out of the room.."

"Oh," the PFY says disappointedly.

"And slips a wedge under the computer room door..."

"Oooh!" the PFY says happily.

"Before pressing the halon release..."

"WE HAVE A WINNER!" the PFY blurts happily.

A borderline psychotic, loose in beacounter central. So it all worked out for the best then...

BOFH: What the hell's Dutch lobster?

And does it constitute an emergency?

Published Friday 23rd September 2005 12:03 GMT

Episode 29 "Well I still want to know where the hell you were?!" the Boss snaps. "I tried you on your cellphone but I couldn't get hold of you."

"At home. In bed! Curried up after a larger frenzy!" I respond.

"But I paged you! I left a number! You should have called me back!"

"Why?"

"Because I left my number!"

"No, not why should I call you back, why did you page me?"

"Because there was a systems problem up here and I needed you to fix it!"

"Was it an emergency?"

"I... Yes."

"Really?"

"It might have been. How would you have known, you didn't answer the bloody page, did you?"

"No, I didn't. I work under the assumption that had it been an 'emergency' I would have been paged by our automatic system to tell me something important had gone down. I wasn't, which led me to believe that whatever it was you'd called about wasn't an emergency!"

"Well what **is** an emergency?"

"All sorts of things. But it's easier just to tell you what **isn't** an emergency worthy of calling someone out for."

"Okay then, what **doesn't** constitute an emergency?" the Boss snaps belligerently.

"RIGHT! Your not being able to print porn at three in the morning after lengthy drinks with a vendor does not constitute an emergency!" I snap.

"That wasn't porn, I was trying to get an early start on some research on trends in online business models to present and pr..."

"You not being able to close all the windows that just keep popping up with dirty girls on them does not constitute an emergency," the PFY adds helpfully.

"I thought it was some sick form of spamming and that maybe there was a virus loose on the syst.."

"And you not receiving an email from eBay about someone topping your bid on the Hornby model railroad carriage moments before the auction closes does **not** constitute an emergency!"

"Okay then, so I'll ask you again, WHAT DOES CONSITUTE AN EMERGENCY!?" the Boss shouts.

"The world - plunging into the sun!" I say, with a measure of finality.

"Oh yes, and what would you do then?" he asks dryly.

"Well the PORN would be working for a start!" the PFY chirps.

"It's not good enough, this is a 24-hour operation!!"

"No it's not!"

"Yes it is, people come to our website and expect to be able to do business!"

"So your late night porn browsing is related to our business?"

"I wasn't browsing porn, I was looking for examples of successful network marketing."

"Ah yes, now I understand - You looked through the porn excuse website as well."

"What?"

"The porn excuses website - you know the one that gives you semi-legitimate reasons for looking at what you're looking at."

"Like 'I was verifying the colour balance of pink on my new monitor'," the PFY says.

"Or 'I was looking for NattyCokeSuckers.com and **accidentally** typed Nasty and C..'"

"No-one would believe that!" the Boss snaps.

"How about 'We've got some friends from Holland coming and I thought Dutch lobster was a seafood dish!'"

"What the hell's Dutch lobster?" the Boss asks.

"You've not travelled, have you?" the PFY sighs, shaking his head.

"You can never go past the old faithful 'I clicked on a link and it just took me there' followed by 'I kept clicking on the pictures trying to get out of it!'"

"I wasn't bloody looking at porn!"

"Suit yourself - so you believe the issue is that we're not available when you need us?"

"You should be available when you're needed."

"You realise what you're suggesting?"

"That you work extra hours when needed, yes."

"But that would mean being on call with occasional shift work!" the PFY says. "And more overtime!"

"I'm aware of the potential costs."

"And then there's the extra staff..."

"What extra staff?"

"We'd need more than two systems people if we were on shift work."

"**Occasional** shift work," the Boss says, getting a little concerned.

"And the callouts," I add. "Don't forget them. We'd have the contractual stand-down period so as to avoid 'burnout'."

"I..."

"But as it happens I know a couple of ex-operators from waaay back who are looking for work after that big comms outage in the business district. Apparently there was an explosion after a several of the generator's diesel drums were misdelivered to an office right next door to their manager - an office which for some reason also had a large industrial heater delivered and installed only days before. The explosion took out the manager's office but unfortunately nature had just called and he was out at the time."

"You mean **fortunately**," the Boss adds.

"I... Yes, yes, of course I do. Anyway they're just the sort of people we want - dynamic, able to think on their feet when rushing to the relative protection of an explosion rated stairwell..."

"So you're saying we'd have to take on more of... you..?"

"We'd have to - being a 24 hour operation and all..."

...and that's all there is to it. The carrot and the stick. Or more accurately, a stick, another stick and the promise of two more sticks.

BOFH: Hi Honey I'm home

The Bastard returns from his travels

Published Friday 11th November 2005 12:02 GMT

Episode 30 "WHERE THE **F#@K** HAVE YOU BEEN?" the Boss screams at me the moment I try my key in the door to mission control.

"Uh... On holiday?" I respond, noting two things - (a) my key doesn't fit and (b) the door's new. "You should know, you signed the leave form! Or you could have asked the PFY."

"Oh I was on holiday too," the PFY says, bringing up the rear. "But he signed my leave form as well."

"That's uncommonly generous of you, letting us both off at the same time!" I say, turning to the Boss. "Now how do we get into our office?"

"It's not your office any more - we took on new Systems people when you abandoned the workplace."

"Abandoned the workplace? We were on leave - and you apparently signed both forms which means you must have known it!"

"I.. don't recall any such thing! In any case, it's just bloody irresponsible for you both to go on holiday at the same time without being contactable."

"I had my mobile with me," I counter.

"I tried it and got no response!"

"Well, coverage in the third world is always a bit dodgy..."

"Really?" the PFY responds. "Where did you go, Luton?"

"Luton, Hull and Glasgow. A package hole-iday"

"You didn't drink the water did you?"

"Hell no, my interpreter warned me about that!"

"LOOK!" the Boss interrupts. "We were talking about you two not being needed any longer. We've replaced you!"

"Oh, right!" the PFY says. "Okay then, if you'll just organise the cheques we'll be on our way."

"What cheques?"

"The contract severance cheques - in our contract...?"

"Contract?"

"Our contract with the company," I explain helpfully. "Premature termination of the rolling contract outside of a negotiation period incurs a penalty payment equivalent to the remaining period plus one full period of the rolled-on contract."

"Which means?"

"You'd have to pay us a full year plus the six or so weeks left in this contract."

"Unless I wait six weeks for the 'negotiation period' then decide not to renew your contract..."

"You could do that, yes, but who'd run the systems?"

"The two new guys. They're permanent staff - much cheaper than contractors!"

"And you seriously think they'll still be here in six weeks?"

"I wouldn't even put money on six minutes!" the PFY says helpfully.

"Well we can't get rid of them!" as the two geeks in question roll up.

. . . Two minutes and a very quick recce later . . .

"I can't say I like what you've done with the place" I say to one of the geeks. "Where's the tape safe door?"

"We had to cut it off to get to the backup tapes because no one could find the keys - like we had to break down the door to this room because it didn't use the building keying system."

"Just ensuring data protection on site with enhanced physical security," I comment.

"If it's that protected why weren't there any tapes in the safe?"

"That's the first place a corporate spy would look."

"So where ARE the backup tapes?"

"In boxes in the storeroom marked 'Asbestos ceiling tiles'."

"WE GOT AN ENVIROMENTAL PROTECTION GROUP TO DUMP THEM!" the second geek gasps.

"I see. And the financials archive media?"

"What archive media?"

"About a hundred DVDs which **used** to be in a bin in the corner marked 'Used Needles, dispose of with care'."

"Why the hell would you put backups in there!?!"

"Again, Data security. I mean, who in their right mind would go fossicking around in there? And where's the Dilbert doll from my monitor?"

"We probably threw it out when we cleaned up."

"Not thinking as you did so that it was rather heavy for a doll - to the tune of a set of tape safe keys?"

"You should have been more careful with them," the first geek snaps.

"So you cut the door off a ten grand fireproof tape safe, dumped about five grand worth of backup tapes, then destroyed the company's financial archives and you're giving me suggestions about due care?"

"YOU SHOULD HAVE USED THE TAPE SAFES!!" the geek shouts.

"And what would the tapes have looked like after someone had thermal lanced the door off the safe?"

"I..."

"But more importantly, how long have you worked for our opposition?"

"What?!?" the geeks, Boss and PFY say in unison.

"Well look at the facts, they've destroyed our backups, archives **and** tape safe and have probably not taken any backups since..."

"WE HAD TO BUY NEW TAPES!" the first geek cries.

"And, if I'm not mistaken, have isolated the fire suppression system in preparation for the tragic workplace fire...."

"IT'S HALON, YOU'RE NOT ALLOWED TO USE IT ANY MORE!"

The PFY and I raise our eyebrows at the Boss wordlessly.

"GET ME SECURITY!"

Ah, it's great to be back in the saddle again.

The Bastard, in the Comms Room with the Cooling Pipe

J'accuse

Published Friday 18th November 2005 13:17 GMT

Episode 31 It's that time in the early morning when mistakes are made - mistakes outside of still being at a lock-in in a darkened pub in Soho. Every decision counts and you know that you can't afford to take time off to smell the roses. More importantly, you can't take time to go to the bog - even if your bladder feels like its the size of a medicine ball and filled with hot gravel - because that would be your biggest mistake...

The table waits silently for the PFY to speak while around it sits myself and a couple of other system admins we've often negotiated several pints with. On top of the table is a reasonably substantial amount of cash in notes, coins and IOUs, and beside it a manky old duffel bag destined to carry home someone's winnings...

As first light touches the roofs of the buildings outside, the PFY finally croaks out a sentence.

"Miss Secretary... in reception.... with the Cat-5 Cable," he says.

"SHIT!" he says, as I show him my Cat-5 Cable card, obliging him to add yet another 20 quid to the pot.

Around the table some feverish scrabbling takes place as people update their complicated whodunit matrices... I, meantime, roll the dice wordlessly and advance my counter towards the Comms Room, pausing only to put five quid into the pot.

Charlie (not his real name - in fact I don't even know his real name) to my left rolls the dice and moves his counter to Reception.

"The Bastard, in the Comms Room with the Cable Ties!" he says triumphantly.

"You have to be in the Comms Room to make an accusation in the Comms Room," the PFY snaps testily, no doubt feeling the effects of missing his sleep and toilet breaks.

"No, you can make an accusation in any room - you just have to be in a room!" he responds.

"Not in this game," Charlie's offsider (who may or not be Ted) says. "You have to be IN the room."

"Shit," Charlie says, dropping a 20 into the pot.

Around now everyone realises that the Comms Room is the place to be, AND why I wasted three turns to roll a six to lock the Computer Room door behind me. Ted's roll brings him to the

Computer Room door and he barely has time to drop his five quid in the pot before the PFY snatches the dice up and rolls.

I might be over reading this but the tapping of the PFY's counter as he moves from Reception towards the Computer Room does seem a bit aggressive than usual. He drops his five quid into the pot wordlessly and hands me the dice.

A quick five later and I'm in the Comms Room, poised for Victory.

"THE BASTARD, IN THE COMMS ROOM, WITH THE COOLING PIPE!" I cry happily.

Shoot me down in flames if I'm wrong but do I see a glimmer of a smirk on the PFY's face as he reveals his Cooling Pipe card?

I drop my false accusation 20 quid into the pot and contemplate the work of genius that is my personally designed cross referenced chart, running through all the possibles and impossibles.

Charlie's next move only brings him three moves closer to the Computer Room and five quid closer to Bankruptcy, while Ted rolls a six on his first attempt unlocking the Computer Room door and, in his bonus roll, gets another six, then a five, bringing him into the Comms Room with me.

"You could've locked the door," I murmur uncharitably.

"Why bother?" he asks, smiling broadly, "because we all know it was THE BASTARD, IN THE COMMS ROOM, WITH THE FAULTY POWER POINT!!!!!"

A quick round-robin of the table seems to prove his point and he digs amongst the winnings to get to the envelope.

"And the nominees are..." he chuckles, as he one by one reveals the cards within, "The Comms Room, The Bastard and The Faulty Power Point. GENTLEMEN, IT HAS BEEN A PLEASURE!"

While Ted's forcing down a victory pint the rest of us dash to the Gents, noticing as we do that the sun appears to be up and that it's about an hour till work time.

Sigh.

. . . about 2 hours later in Mission Control . . .

"I still can't believe you missed it!" the PFY chuckles. "I showed you the Cooling Pipe card in your first guess."

"Yeah I must have forg.."

My response is cut short by the arrival of the Boss with a long list of complaints and grievances that he's chosen to address today, of all days, when I'm tired, slightly inebriated and broke.

>CLONG!<

"Don't tell me," the PFY says as I help the groggy Boss back into Mission Control. "THE BASTARD, IN THE COMMS ROOM, WITH THE COOLING PIPE"

"Which only goes to prove you can't be wrong every time," I say, nodding cheerfully.

BOFH: Woah there, Crash Gordon

Percussive maintenance

Published Friday 25th November 2005 12:02 GMT

Episode 32 "WOAH THERE, Crash Gordon!" the PFY shouts as our engineer prepares to put our system back together "How's about you go get another disk drive!?"

"Huh?" the engineer asks blankly. "I just replaced it."

"Yeah, then you dropped the drive and the tray off the desk onto the floor!"

"It won't harm the disk, they're rated to 9 Gs!"

"Save it for some who believes you!" the PFY snaps disinterestedly.

"But it's a valid replacement disk - **and** it's new, not a service drive!"

"I don't give a crap if it's new, it's been dropped!"

"But it can take it!"

"If it was designed to 'take it' they wouldn't pack it in foam AND WRITE **FRAGILE** ON THE BLOODY BOX!"

"It's probably an old box," he pinocchios.

"No, it's a new box," the PFY says, fingering some barcode gibberish on the side which probably means something to people without lives.

"Well let's just see if it fires up, eh?" he asks.

"DON..." the PFY shouts as the engineer flips the power switch.

...

"There, see, it's seen the drive!" >Clickety< he says, firing up the SCSI card BIOS tools. "Hmmm, Low level format with error checking just to be sure it's ok... >click< uh... ...YES I'm sure.."

"DON'T CL..."

>click< "Too, late, it's running! The quicker we get it formatted the quicker it'll be in service!"

"Uh," the PFY says, suppressing anger. "You've just started a low level format of the surviving member of the mirrored set - **not** the disk you just replaced"

"I... Oh. Well, it's a RAID set, so you'll be able to recover it from the other drive."

"... Tell me, did you actually **do** any computing training when you changed careers from rounding up stock?" the PFY seethes.

"Wa?"

"He's implying that you're a complete cowboy who doesn't know the first thing about computing because if you **did** you'd know you'd just destroyed our dataset," I say helpfully, reaching for the computer room phone and tapping out the service number.

"Don't you do backups then?" he asks.

...

Two hours later he's gone and a replacement's arrived.

"So what's the problem again?"

"He removed the failed disk, put a new one in the hot plug tray, dropped the tray on the ground, then put it into the machine then formatted the wrong disk," I say.

"Oh," he says. "So you've lost your data. But surely you'll just recover it from backup? I mean there's not a lot I can do."

"We'd like you to replace the disk he dropped," I say, kindly.

"?! It's working isn't it?"

Sigh.

"It's working now," I say slowly. "But its lifetime is likely to be severely shortened by the mistreatment, which means it'll probably fail in a couple of months - or hours - instead of a couple of years."

"Well firstly the company would want proof that our engineer dropped the drive - which I'm guessing you don't have, but secondly the drive's actually working so I can't replace it - there's nothing wrong with it!.. uh... Sorry."

"Ok, lets put it another way. You can order a disk now, have it couriered here and spend a couple of hours lazing around having coffee and biscuits, or you can leave now and have to come back in a couple of hours to replace the failed disk."

"It might not fail within a couple of hours!"

"Trust me - it will!"

"You'll void your warranty if you damage the disk!" he blurts.

"As if we would! You know there **were** times when we'd run an aggressive disk exercise pattern on the disk until it crapped itself, but these days we're much less sneaky. These days we just use a rubber mallet."

"...On the engineer until he replaces the disk..." the PFY adds.

"It'll leave marks!" he says.

"On you or the disk?" I ask.

"On the disk. There's a misuse indicator inside the drive, they'll know as soon as they open the drive!" he gasps.

"And what would this indicator look like after the drive's been dropped?"

"I... .. I still can't replace the disk - it's all inventory controlled. They know it was working"

"But they know it could fail at any time..."

"Any disk could fail at any time - it could be the one in a million that fails the moment it's installed."

"So why don't we say that it failed just now."

"Because they'll do the diags on it back at base and find out it's still working, and then I'll get it in the neck for not diagnosing it properly."

"So what you're saying is you'd like to help us but the drive needs to be dead before you take it back."

"Yes!" he gushes happily, having made his point.

"And you'd really like to help us out?"

"Of course!"

Two minutes later, as the PFY and I are watching the engineer pounding the side of the hard drive with a rubber mallet, I can't help thinking that everything's going to be all right after all.

"No one will ever believe you talked him into that," the PFY says, shaking his head.

"No, that's why I'm taping it."

"Smooth!" the PFY nods appreciatively, reaching for a coffee.

"No, smooth is the fact that he's currently beating to death a drive from another machine which isn't even under warranty... On tape..."

BOFH: the PFY goes AWOL

Wasn't he just in the tape safe?

Published Friday 2nd December 2005 13:18 GMT

Episode 33 It's a quiet afternoon in Mission Control when I'm woken from my slumber by a dull banging noise coming from the Tape Library room. The sound seems so familiar and yet still so elusive, and for some reason I just can't put my finger on it...

As the sounds seem to die away (die being an all too appropriate term in this case) the penny drops - someone's shut in the tape safe!! Ordinarily this wouldn't cause me the concern that it otherwise should, however another fistful of pennies drop when I realise that the PFY didn't okay any 'lockin' with me and... ...it's been a reasonably long time since I saw the PFY. In fact, I think the last time I saw him was when we were in the Tape Library room and he was unloading the safe and I was stacking some fresh tapes on the shelf behind the tape safe door...

>Click< >Grind< >FfffPah<

"!" the PFY says wordlessly falling to the floor.

"Hmmm. You're not looking so flash you know?" I say to the PFY as he starts gasping for lungfuls of breath. "You really should get out more."

"You..." the PFY wheezes, dragging himself into a sitting position "...BASTARD!"

"What?"

"Locking me in the safe!"

"When?"

"Before, when I was unloading the tapes out of the safe."

"I didn't shut you in!"

"Someone bloody did!"

"I..." I say, replaying the morning's activities in my head "...uh... may have closed the door to make room to put another shelf in the shelving unit - but surely you weren't actually IN the safe".

"I was repositioning the sliders!"

"Why didn't you bang on the door?"

"I thought you'd done it on purpose and thought I'd wait patiently until you got bored with the joke."

"I WAS GOING TO HAVE A PUB LUNCH!! I COULD HAVE BEEN HOURS!"

"So you **do** care?" the PFY sniffs.

"Of course I do. I'm expecting a package of DVDs from Amazon and I wouldn't trust any of the bastards out there to check the packaging is intact!"

And just like that the situation goes from being a simple workplace misunderstanding which could have lead to a slow lonesome death to being something the PFY is going to hold a grudge about. Anyone would think that I'd planned it - anyone in this case being the PFY.

"It was an accident - it could have happened to anyone!" I say.

"Accidents don't just happen, they're caused," the PFY says, repeating one of the primary tenets of Bastard Operatism.

"Yes, yes, but this was just a genuine misunderstanding," I say, realising that I'm going to have to watch my back for the next little while. Six months should do it.

"Where's my pen?" the PFY asks, scrabbling round amongst the rubbish on his desk in an annoyed manner.

"I dunno. Were you using it in the tape room?"

"No!"

"Here, use this" I say, throwing over the pen I'm using.

"THAT'S MY PEN!"

"That's **a** pen, I'll grant you, but it could be anyone's."

"No, it's mine, I file a little mark at the end so I can recognise them."

"Oh, right" I say, foregoing the opportunity of a long and impressive diatribe about the sadness of people who feel it necessary to take to a piece of disposable stationery with a file. After all it would only make things worse, and I'm really a people person. Or something.

"You stole my pen," the PFY snaps.

"I may have borrowed your pen."

"You stole my pen from my desk, where it **lives**," he replies.

"It's... just a pen."

"But it's not just a pen is it?" the PFY snaps. "It's a .5mm roller ball in off blue - a very unusual colour. I had to order it specially - which I'm sure you knew when you shut me in the safe!"

"Wait a minute - you're suggesting that I shut you into a safe to provide me with an opportunity to steal a pen that's worth about the price of an average cappuccino?"

"Uh-huh."

"Instead of just ordering a box load of them for the department at no cost to myself?"

"I know how your mind works. Locking me in the safe saves you the hassle of paperwork"

"So tell me, you didn't happen to knock over a bottle of madness serum when you were in the safe did you?"

"Tell you what I'll do. RIGHT NOW, I'll ORDER you a whole box of those pens which you can use to your heart's content without worrying about being on someone's hit list. IN FACT, I'll even pay for them myself."

"Believe it when I see it," the PFY says.

"Chuck the pen over so I can get the part number."

"Oh you'd like that wouldn't you?" the PFY says from his position right up against the verge of insanity.

"Ok then, WRITE THE PART NUMBER DOWN and I'll order you a box," I sigh.

The PFY scribbles down a part number and I get an internal order form out. While writing out the form I take the PFY's point about the unusual nature of the blue in his pen. It's almost cerulean. And the width of stroke is that much more impressive than the .4, but not quite as chunky as the .8. Thinking back the ergonomic design of the pen was quite pleasing in a...

"So did you finish putting the sliders into the tape safe?"

"I could hardly do it in the dark!"

"So that's a no then?"

"It'll be done before you've finished ordering the bloody pens!" the PFY says, stomping off.

"Excellent!" I say, screwing up the order form, grabbing the PFY's pen and following him into the tape safe room...

BOFH: Beware the lie-detecting mouse

Busted!

Published Friday 9th December 2005 15:26 GMT

Episode 34 "You've **got** to be kidding!" the PFY slurs, putting down his glass of port. "It's Friday at 4:30 - you can't expect me to **do** anything!"

"It's just a quick job," the user gasps, extricating his laptop from his briefcase.

"Quick as in 'which is the space bar?' or quick as in reinstalling XP on your laptop including non-slipstreamed patches, Office and all your games from scratch?"

"No, no, there's just something a little screwy with it. It seems to work most of the time, but every now and then it runs a little slow."

"When did you last run a virus scan?"

"Every day!" he lies.

"And how often do you update your definitions?"

"Oh, it's set to automatic," he pinocchios.

"Uhuh, and when did you last plug it into the network?"

"Oh, I'd never plug it into the network!" he says.

"Then how do you update the virus definitions?" the PFY asks pointedly.

BUSTED!

"I.. Uh... Well it's automatic!"

"Or your machine is virus infected and you never update your definitions..."

"It's automatic!" he bleats.

"I think he's lying," I say, getting in on the act.

"I'm not!"

"So you'll be willing to submit to a lie detector test?"

"Uh..Ok."

"Righto, pop your hand on this."

"What, the mouse pad?"

"MMmm Hmmm."

"It's just a mouse pad!"

"Ok then, so it won't matter if you put your hand on the pad, will it?"

"I... No, I guess not."

"Right. Comfy? **Is** your machine automatically set to update it's virus definitions?"

"Yes."

"Ok, lets see what the lie detector says about that answer..."

>click click<

We look across to the PFY's desktop, which has a window with the words "He's lying" in large red letters on the screen.

"Ooooh, doesn't look good for today's contestant!" the PFY blurts.

"I... Hey! It's just a Word document! You just opened a Word document called **He's Lying.doc** - you can see the name in the title bar!"

"The detector has spoken!" I cry loudly.

"It's a bloody word document! Ok, let me have a go and I'll open the one called **He's telling the truth.doc**."

"There's no such document" the PFY says. "We've never needed one. We've got a **She's Lying.doc** though."

"So you're saying all users are liars!?"

"Uhhm.. Yes."

"Well I'm not a liar!"

"And the detector says.... Oh, **SHE'S** lying. Is there something you neglected to reveal in the interview process which you'd like to get off your... chest... now?"

"This is preposterous! In any case I'd still like my machine fixed!" he says. "And I'd like it done before I go home!!"

"And I'd like Claudia Schiffer waiting for me at home with a magnum of lager, but it's not going to happen baby!" I say, refilling my glass. "So how about we settle for a compromise?"

"What sort of compromise?" the user asks.

"You walk away now."

"Yes, and...?" he asks.

"And.... that's it."

"Where's the compromise in that?"

"You'd still be able to walk," the PFY says.

. . . The following Monday . . .

"I've... got a complaint I'd like to talk to you about," the Boss says, cautiously.

"Really? What is it?"

"A user says that he came to you with a problem on Friday afternoon and he got less than satisfactory service."

"How so?"

"He says that he came to you and asked you to take a look at his machine because it was behaving strangely."

"Yes, with you so far?"

"And you didn't help him out."

"Really?"

"Yes we did! In fact, I think we should call him now and sort this out!" the PFY blurts.

"Really?" the Boss says, surprised that it seems to be going so well.

"Most certainly. If someone believes they've had unsatisfactory service from us, it's the least we can do to find out what the story is!"

"Well if it helps get to the bottom of things."

>ring<

"Hello?"

"Hi, Systems and Networks here, just following up on a complaint you lodged with our manager."

"yyyes?"

"So it's your claim that your machine wasn't virus infected?" says the PFY motioning the boss over to his screen.

"Yes!"

>click click<

"And that you automatically update your definitions."

"Yes!"

>click click<

"And that you're a man, not a woman in drag?"

"WHAT?!"

"It's your claim that you're a man."

"Of course it is!"

>click click<

"And you feel that you were treated poorly?"

"Of course I was!"

"Ok, thanks for your time, someone will get back to you shortly."

"I can't believe it," the Boss says, looking up from the PFY's document. **"He's a woman!!?!!** Are you sure this thing is accurate?"

"Oh yes, we had it calibrated for voice stress last week when she rang asking for your number."

"My number?"

"Yes, apparently she fancies you!"

"What? I... Well.." the Boss burbles wandering out of Mission Control with a thoughtful expression on his face.

"The 'fancies you' bit was laying it on a little thick don't you think?"

"My thinking," the PFY counters, "is worst case scenario we lose one of them. Best case scenario, we lose both of them AND take a patent out on our lie-detecting mouse pads!!!"

"It's win-win isn't it?"

"You betcha!!!"

BOFH: Can you call me a cab?

Of course, sir - you're a...

Published Friday 16th December 2005 12:31 GMT

Episode 35 There's something indefinable about the Christmas season that makes the whole workplace seem a little brighter. It could be the impending arrival of relatives, the promise of presents or just the knowledge that for a short space of time you're free of the horrors of the workplace. Whatever it is, the workplace becomes a much nicer place to work and people often put aside their petty differences in the spirit of goodwill.

"We can't call it Christmas any more," the HR Droid says, reading from his memo. "From now on it's got to be called the holiday season."

"Why?" the PFY asks.

"Because not everyone celebrates Christmas. It's not PC."

"So the non-Christmas lot will be working through then?"

"Well, obviously not. It's a public holiday!"

"So this is a cake-and-eat-it-too situation then?"

"I... don't want to go into it, that's just the way it is. Now... uh... the next point is that if you're participating the five quid anonymous present thing you must adhere to the five quid maximum."

"Eh?"

"Last year one of our traders donated an overly large present 'because he earns so much more than the normal participant'."

"..which made everyone else feel like fried dogs balls on toast?" the PFY asks.

"Pardon?"

"I think he meant that it probably made the other people feel bad," I say, interpreting.

"It did. And it's not to happen again!"

"Tell you what, why don't you leave that item with us to bring up - as a Christmas treat to you."

"I... Well ok then, thanks!"

...

"So which trader was it?" the PFY says, scrolling through the directory.

"Brown," I say, fingering the name on the screen. "He gave an espresso machine."

"I... That **is** excessive!"

"Yes, but it goes nicely with my toaster - I had to X-ray everything for security reasons."

"So he knew it was going to you?"

"He **may** have been under the impression that it was going to the young woman in accounts he was having a clandestine relationship with at the time, but I'm sure he felt better about it when she dumped him after getting the five pairs of running socks..."

"And you think it'll happen again?"

"He does appear to be spending a large amount of his time receiving stationary selection lessons from the temp in the supply cupboard..."

"We've got a temp in the supply cupboard!!!!" the PFY sniggers, just before a surge of voltage surges through his frame.

"So," I snap as the PFY recovers his faculties. "We need to get to work. Now how do we stop him buying something excessive?"

"Ask him?" the PFY suggests.

"No."

"**Tell** him?"

"No."

"Threaten him?"

"No. No we need to remove the urge to splurge".

"Steal his money?"

"He's a trader, they don't have any money."

"Steal his credit card!"

"Getting warmer..."

"Oh..." the PFY says, handing me the phone.

>clickety< >click< ...

"Hi, systems and networks here," I say, speaking to Mr Brown. "We've got a problem with your username and I was wondering if you'd be so kind as to logout and log back in again."

"Sure," he burbles, tapping away quickly. "... Wait, No, I can't!"

"Yes, as we thought, it's a problem with our network but I'm AFRAID you're going to have to come down here in person for us to change it - rules and all that."

"Okay, well I suppose I can't work without it."

"Always the way," I sympathize. "And if you can bring a couple of forms of ID with you too."

"Sure"...

. . . ten minutes later . . .

"Ok, so here's your drivers license and credit card back," the PFY says, handing back a substitute he crafted earlier, "and if you could just select a four-digit PIN number on the keyboard over there which you can use to automatically verify yourself if you ever need to get support over the phone again."

"Oh, ok, >tap< >tap< >tap< >tap<"

"And once more to lock it in."

>tap< >tap< >tap< >tap<

"And you did make sure not to use the same PIN number as any other service?"

"Oh... uh... yes!" he lies.

. . . two minutes later . . .

"Yes, I'd like to increase my credit limit," I say, once the formalities of the credit card number and expiry date are out of the way.

"Certainly" the professional young woman at the end of the line says "And if you could just type in your PIN number..."

>tap< >tap< >tap< >tap<

"...no, I'm sorry, that's not working."

"Backwards," the PFY mouths silently.

"My mistake, I'll try again," I say tapping away.

"Excellent. And a final verification, your mother's maiden name?"

"!!!!!"

"Uh, Eva Braun."

"Wa... Uhh... that's not what I have here!"

"Course it's not, I usually make one up - what with the connotations and all..."

"I... see. Well, I suppose if you know your PIN... What limit would you like?"

I go for gold and pick an excessive number out of thin air.

"Uh.. I thought you said you wanted to **increase** your limit?"

BONANZA

"Oh of course, I was thinking about the price of the car I was thinking of buying my girlfriend - how about you just double the limit?"

"I'll just see... >clickety< Annnnnnd that's been accepted. Is there anything else I can do for you?"

"Can I update my emergency contact details - you know, the number you call if you notice a drastic change in spending behaviour?"

"Sure..."

... 30 seconds later...

"...and is that all I can do for you today?"

"Can you tell me where the nearest money machine is?"

The rest of the day **is** a bit of a blur, ending up at a bar so posh the toilet lollies are menthol flavour.

"Just one more 30-quid-a-glass cognac!" I say to the PFY. "I sense we're on the edge."

"I can't. I can't do it," the PFY slurs, sliding off his chair onto the floor.

"Don't do it for me, do it for the company! Do it because it's bloody Christmas!"

. . . Early the next morning . . .

"I'm sorry sir, your card has been declined!" the Posh Barman says.

"Thank goodness," the PFY gasps. "Can you call me a cab?"

"Of course sir - you're a cab."

Drinking all day and most of the night, hearing a good dry joke from a barman then getting the crap kicked out of you because the PFY landed a right hook on a bar stool - now **THAT** is priceless.

Dr Bastard's photo lab

Image is everything

Published Saturday 31st December 2005 11:01 GMT

Episode 36 There's nothing like a workplace on Boxing Day! Sure, it's deader than a dead thing on a bank holiday and anyone with a life would be doing something else, but this is where the year is prepared for...

First job is cleaning up the debris in the cafeteria - which is quite a task after several cases of anonymously donated cheap bubbly arrived on the premises on the last day and were immediately consumed by the staff, resulting in a bit of... untidiness.

Once that's done I abuse my heightened level of access to the building to snaffle all the personal and company digital cameras I can find, putting each in it's own carefully labelled brown envelope.

...

"What're they for?" the PFY asks, scaring the crap out of me in the all but abandoned building as I sneak back into a darkened Mission Control.

"What are what for?" I ask, slipping the bag of cameras behind me.

"The bag of cameras behind your back," the PFY says, tapping the CCTV console feed.

Bugger, I'll have to make him an accomplice...

"It's... my annual incriminating evidence gathering mission."

"?"

"Every year there's a Christmas party and every year people do some inadvisable things."

"So?"

"In the past some of these things were lucky enough to be recorded on the CCTV system, but in these days of biometrics and enhanced burden of proof the leverage of a poor quality black and white image isn't what it once was."

"Oh I'm fairly sure the authorities could base a case on what I've recorded this morning..." the PFY hints.

"Be that as it may, I'm after bigger fish. Last year I left disposable cameras in strategic places in the hope that they'd be used to capture 'magic moments', but I was sadly disappointed."

"So you're stealing people's digital cameras to make up for it?"

“No. They'll be returned to their place of origin once I've accessed the flash memory”

"**FLASH** memory being the operative word” the PFY comments, winking.

... Half an hour later ...

"Well that was a bust!" the PFY says, looking at the collections of images. "Hardly blackmail material, is it?"

“Yes, well, finding incriminating evidence was the original plan but it occurred to me that with a bit of memory retardant the authenticity of reality could be challenged."

“And translated into English this means?"

"I realised that finding images was a crap plan. A far better plan would involve them finding incriminating images..."

“Yes but there aren't any” the PFY explains slowly.

“I think you mean there aren't any **yet**.” I say, firing up Photoshop...

“But they'll know they're fakes!”

“No, they'll probably just hope they're fakes.”

“What do you mean?"

“In the week prior to Christmas I invested heavily in an end-of-line champagne substitute known by some as Château de legopener, sending several cases to the Company under a pseudonym. I'm sure you witnessed the effects..”

“So you're suggesting that most people won't remember what they did?"

“I'm suggesting there might be a grey area or two which could be filled by an image or two from **Doctor Bastard's Lab!!!**”

“Will it work?"

“Of course. I take all the images from the cameras >clickety<, feed them into the morph package, >click< add a bit of anonymous porn, select our... victim.. and Viola!"

“Nothing happened!" the PFY says.

“Of course not, it takes about two hours an image – but time well spent, I assure you!"

. . . three days later . . .

“I'm a little... disturbed by some images that were printed on our colour printer,” I say to The Boss. “Images, what images?" he asks – in a hunted tone.

“Uh.. I'm not sure how you would describe them.. Candid snaps maybe? Only they look to have come from your workstation late in the afternoon on the 23rd....”

“There's nothing on my camera,” he blurts.

“I didn't suggest there was,” I counter. “Although one of them does feature you. Well, a part of you.”

“Yes, yes, well just throw the print-outs away. Or actually **I'll** throw them away!”

“Yeah, I **could** do that but the company has a policy about images of this nature – who to notify, how to gather evidence for the disciplinary process, etc.”

“**Disciplinary Process!** Surely it's none of the company's business,” the Boss blurts. “Can't you just.. pretend you didn't see anything?” “Oh, you mean act as if I hadn't seen you in the photograph – the same way you could act as if you didn't see the bottom line of the expenses claim I'm about to present.”

“So we're talking blackmail?”

“Really? I didn't notice one – although I wasn't looking too carefully. I could check the prints...”

And just like that the Boss is a broken man, signing any form we put in front of him - It's almost too easy. While he's contemplating the possibility that he's been living a lie I make a quick call to ensure that the expenses claims will get processed in the next pay run.

“I'm afraid the close-off date for the next run has passed,” the Accounts woman informs me.

“Can't you make an exception for me?” I ask.

“I don't think so.”

“So it's only your Boss you make exceptions for – giving him his.... Christmas present early... so to speak.”

“What do you mean?” She asks, taking on the Boss's hunted tone.

“I think you know.”

“I...”

“..think you can make an exception after all?”

“I'll get right onto it”

“Course you will...”

Yeah, it **is** too easy.

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BOFH: 17 minutes of goodwill

Happy New Year

Published Friday 6th January 2006 12:40 GMT

Episode 1 The good thing about the New Year is that past differences are put behind oneself and the year's started with a clean slate. Everything's that little bit nicer and you get the feeling that in some small way you're contributing to the ongoing goodwill of the workplace. True, my attempts and maintaining a positive outlook in previous years have failed dismally but this time I'll really give it a go...

>Ring ring<

"Hi, you're talking with Simon from Systems and Networks!" I gush cheerfully.

"Why's my machine running so slow?" the user asks, skipping the social niceties.

Detecting the subtle undertones of a problem I decide - in the spirit of geeky glasnost - to do my best to help.

"What do you mean by slow?" I ask. "Does it take a long time to wake up, or is it slow all the time?"

"It's just slow. It was fine yesterday but it's slow today," he replies.

I... can do this!

On attempting to access the machine I notice that it IS taking an exceptional amount of time to connect - and when it does the data rate's similar to that of remote desktop over acoustic coupler...

"You're not... doing anything on the network are you?"

"No."

"Not browsing or downloading anything?"

"No."

"Well I've connected to your machine and can't see anything TOO unusual running."

"You connected to my machine?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"Remote administration."

"But you don't know my password?"

"But I **do** know the Domain administrator password - and your machine is a member of the Domain."

"But it's my machine - surely you need to get my permission first?"

I feel the stirring of the Dark side, but suppress it quickly!!

"TECHNICALLY it's the COMPANY'S machine, and I was accessing it in the resolution of your problem, not out of idle curiosity."

"Oh, I see. Well what happens now?"

"I'll just have a closer look at the network traffic to check on a couple of processes..."

>clickety<

"Ah."

"Yes?" the user asks.

"Get an iPod for Christmas did you?"

"Yyyess, why?"

"And you loaded all the music off your home machine into it?"

"Yes."

"And then you copied all the music onto your desktop?"

"Well, yes - I want to save the battery for commuting."

"Uhuh. And then you told all your workmates about the 30 gig of music you'd just put into a public share on your desktop?"

"Oh one of them wanted to get a copy of one of the songs I..."

"**About 20 of them** are currently getting copies of **all** your songs."

"Oh."

"Yes, and the added impact would be the backup you're running. Why'd you be backing up your music to the backup server?"

"Oh, in case I lose it!!!"

"So you're worried about it being lost from your desktop machine?"

"Yes."

"When you could put it all back from your iPod - or failing that off your home machine via your iPod - or failing that your fellow worker's machines - or failing that the original media - or the backup DVDs you've probably written at home?"

"Yeah, but that's a hassle."

nnnnngggg!

"I see, well I don't think there's a lot of help I can give you apart from >clickety< cancelling your backup session and >clickety< removing your ability to share files. Has that helped?"

"I... suppose so."

"Ok, anything else I can help you with?" I ask, thinking nice New Year thoughts.

"I... Could you increase my mailbox quota limit?"

"Uhhh, Sure, I think we can do that. How much to you think you'll need?"

"Well I'd **like** about 10 gig if I can?"

"10 gig, that's a lot of space - are you sure you're going to need it all?"

"I think so. I want to send all my other MP3s that don't fit on my iPod to my work account so that I can listen to them here."

"And you've got 10 gig of files to put through our mail system?" I ask, squeezing my mouse in a non-approved manner.

"Yeah. But I also thought that if they were in my mailbox I could play them when I went to an internet cafe or something just by calling up the mailserver..."

Nnnnnngggggggggggggg! Can't... suppress... the... anger... Can't... stop... the... voices.....

"I'll call you back" I blurt, slamming down the phone. "How long was that?"

"Uuh... seventeen minutes" the PFY says, looking up at the clock.

"Seventeen minutes. And what did I manage last year?"

"Fourteen - although you timed it from when you entered the building last time, so it was probably more like 10."

"So I'm 50 per cent better?"

"You **would** have been if you hadn't deleted all his music files and uploaded the faulty BIOS to his iPod rendering it useless."

"I didn't!"

"Yeah, but it was only a matter of time so I just cut out the middle man and did it for you."

"Oh. Ah well, better luck next year!"

"Two steps forward, one step back and all that," the PFY responds helpfully. "Now how's about shutting down the mail server and taking an extended morning tea?"

"As far as plans go, it's a scorcher!!"

BOFH: The Way of the Hammer

Engineers are great!

Published Friday 13th January 2006 12:32 GMT

Episode 2 "And if I just >tap< move this >tap< >tap< a fraction of an inch over >tap< I'll be able to >tap< put it >tap< >tap< >**Crunch!**<..."

"...into the dustbin?" the PFY finishes helpfully.

"Bugger. It almost went, though. It's probably just not made very robustly."

"Yes," the PFY adds thoughtfully. "When will motherboard manufacturers realise that so many engineers are skilled in 'The Way of the Hammer' and strengthen their componentry accordingly?"

"I..."

"After all, the Way of the Hammer is an art passed down from generation to generation."

"It's not like I INTENDED.."

"From grandfather to father, from father to uncoordinated son."

"I hardly think it's..."

"A time-honoured tradition of the passing on of skills - were your chosen career PANELBEATING or DEBT COLLECTION, BUT IT'S NOT, IS IT - IT'S THE REPAIR OF MICROELECTRONIC CIRCUITS!"

"Yes, but it only needed to move a fraction of a mil - I've done it dozens of times!"

"And how many times was it successful?"

"Every time!" the engineer responds, sounding slightly hurt.

"I'm talking about the machine being in a working condition at the end - not the hammer surviving!"

"It's..."

"...a buggered phone charging machine?" the PFY finishes.

... One motherboard replacement later ...

"It's just that these motherboards aren't designed for this particular PCI card - there's no clearance because of the AGP card," the engineer explains as he puts the machine back together and attempts to squeeze the new card in.

"Why not put it in another slot?" the PFY says wincing at the butchery taking place.

"There's no slots free."

"Look, if you moved this card to that slot you could use the vacant slot - with more clearance - for the new card."

"But then I'd have to remove that card."

"To make space, yes."

"But this is just an install job, I can't do modifications - it's not on the work request." he says, flashing his PDA.

"But now it's a motherboard replacement job, too."

"Which I've done."

"So why don't you move the cards around - they were all out anyway."

"No, I couldn't do that - I'd be liable if something went wrong after the move".

"What about if I did the move," the PFY snaps testily.

"If you did the move you'd void the maintenance on the box."

"But, if I'd done the move before you got here, you'd never have known."

"But you didn't."

"What about if, while you were having a cup of coffee, the board suddenly moved."

"Well you'd void your maintenance."

"Why?"

"Because the card had been moved."

"But no-one would **know** it'd been moved - it's not like you document the card locations of all the machines you maintain is it?"

"No, but **I** would know it had been moved" the engineer responds, in a life-threateningly pedantic manner.

"How?"

"I'd remember."

"Not if you had Alzheimer's."

"I don't have Alzheimer's!"

"Well maybe not Alzheimer's, but what about a bang on the head?"

"I haven't had a >**CLANG!**< >**thud**<"

"You have now... "

. . . 10 minutes later . . .

"...and you must have hit your head on the top of the rack when you stood up," the PFY explains to his groggy victim.

"Oh, really? Right well, nothing broken so I'd best get this card in... Wasn't that card in that slot over ther.. >**CLANG!**< >**thud**<"

> BOFH EPISODE COMPILER ERROR, RECURSIVE LOOP DETECTED <

... >BOFH EPISODE COMPILER ERROR, CLOCK RESET< minutes later ...

"...so I'd best get this card in. Ah, at least we've got a free slot with some room around it. A lot of the time you have to cram it in against the AGP card which means you sometimes have to give the PCI slot connector a little bit of a tap. And...."

"And?" the PFY asks.

"Do you ever get... Deja Vu?"

"No, but we get most of the other Sky channels."

"Pardon?"

"Did you say something?" the PFY asks innocently.

"I... No. Right, well it all seems to be done. Now if you could just sign here as some of the work I did was chargeable."

">**clang**< You don't need me to sign there," the PFY says, staring into the engineers eyes intently.

"I don't need you to sign there."

"This isn't the job you're supposed to be at."

"This isn't the job I'm supposed to be at."

"You can go about your business."

"I'll go about my business."

"OK then," the PFY says. "Got all your stuff?"

"Yes, I've got my tools, got the install software and... What's this motherboard off?"

"Oh it's a broken one," the PFY says. "One of our other engineers left it."

"Oh, because it looks like someone tried to move the PCI slot over by ta.. >**CLONG!**<"

> BOFH EPISODE COMPILER ERROR, RECURSION REENTERED, EPISODE
ABORTING <

BOFH: 'Did you know..?'

Yes, we did - we're Systems and Networks

Published Friday 20th January 2006 12:07 GMT

Episode 3 "Did you know..?" the Boss asks, strolling into Mission Control and attempting to read at the same time (which probably accounts for those thudding noises we heard earlier).

"Yes we did," the PFY says, getting in early before the Boss can really get started.

"How can you possibly know, I haven't told you what I'm talking about yet!?"

"We're quite used to not knowing what you're talking about, but in any case - we're Systems and Networks - it's our job to know," the PFY replies smugly.

"According to last year's 360 degree internal survey," the Boss continues, "you're rated as the least-liked members of staff".

"Well, IT has never had a good rep with the punters," I counter.

"Not IT, just you two."

"Yeah, we knew that," the PFY says.

"I don't think you did. This report only came in this morning and, with the exception of this extract, has only been seen by the senior managers in the company."

"Yeah, we knew that, too."

"I find that rather unlikely. The results were collated by a top-flight company..."

"... which completed the draft findings two days ago, OKed by their auditing and legal people yesterday, was printed and bound in the early hours of this morning, delivered around here by a motorcycle courier, registration plate LM..."

"How can you know this?!"

"We're Systems and Networks," the PFY replies, oozing smugness from every pore.

"The report was delivered to the front desk at 8:22am," I continue, "received by Dave".

"Short Dave or Big Dave?" the PFY asks.

"Short Dave."

"Oh."

"...and was collected by the CEO's PA - who, incidentally, was the brains behind commissioning the report - was read by her between 9am and 10am and summarized into three main points to fit the CEO's attention span by 10:20am."

"I..." the Boss says.

"The CEO called the Head of IT about point two - the extremely poor rating of the Systems and Networks people - at around 10:40am; you were brought in at around 10:45am at which time the CEO unveiled the board's master plan to have a second, snap random survey executed in a couple of days, the results of which will be the basis for a round of dismissals at all levels of the company - no exceptions."

"It'll never fly!" the PFY says.

"It will!" the Boss blurts emphatically. "The CEO's already talked a large management consulting website into interviewing random managers for tomorrow's article on pruning corporate deadwood. The plan's going to be mentioned there!"

"Which managers?"

"It's random - no one knows. So you'd better do something about raising your profile!"

"Nah - People forgive and forget!"

"You're the worst-rated people in the company, they won't forget that - You need a plan to improve your rating!"

"Yeah, well, we had a plan to employ a stack of parking wardens."

"What?"

"To create a 'buffer zone'. But then we realized it'd cost us money so we changed the plan."

"To?"

"The same as the first plan, only we'd use insurance salesmen. It would cost less, what with commission-based payments and all."

"And I take it you've abandoned this plan?"

"Yes, with plan three we realized that we need to distinguish ourselves as a 'cut above' average."

"How?"

"Random acts of kindness, generosity above and beyond the call of duty, that sort of thing."

"I... don't know that it'll work given that you've only got three days..."

"**And** it's lunchtime," the PFY interrupts as the second sweep hand hits 12pm.

>EOC<

. . . 11am, three days later . . .

"So how the hell did staying in the pub on a three-day bender help your case any?" the Boss asks as we trundle into his office.

"We realized," I explain, "that by limiting contact with the punters we'd stop our situation getting worse".

"But I thought you said you wanted to be a cut above average!"

"We do!"

"Well how'd that help?" the Boss gasps.

"There are two ways to get to be above average," the PFY explains, raising a finger. "One, strive to improve."

"Yes yes," the Boss says. "And two?"

"Lower the average," the PFY says, raising a second finger and gesturing.

"I... What do you mean?"

"OK. Let's say finance got an anonymous tip-off that loads of people buy their mates meals and drinks and get them reimbursed under the guise of entertainment expenses and office sundries. As a result, the finance department rejects all outstanding expenses claims and actions an audit of all current and past claims, requiring people to produce receipts or else reimburse the company?"

"Yes... that would be unpopular," the Boss says thoughtfully.

"That **IS** unpopular," the PFY says.

"Or security get tipped off that smokers are leaving the external fire doors open and, as a result, people from other companies are sneaking in for the free lunch buffet - resulting in a no-smoking ban for staff within 10 yards of the building and compulsory ID card checks before you can get your lunch."

"Oh yes, that is rather annoying," the Boss concedes.

"But the worst one would be the quote on that Management Website from one of the managers they interviewed, calling the staff... ahmmm.... " I say, trying to recollect correctly.

"...a bunch of inbred hermaphrodite proles with the collective appeal of an unflushed toilet at a curry house," the PFY quotes.

"You're joking!"

"No no, that's what it says on the website! You should have see pagehits on the company proxy server. I think everyone saw it!"

"Well who said that?!" the Boss gasps.

...

...

...

>knock knock<

"That'll be security," the PFY says nodding at the door.

"YOU BASTARDS!!! But how'd you know they'd talked to me!?"

"We're Systems and Networks," the PFY sighs. "It's our job to know..."

BOFH: Automated attendant abuse

'I'm sorry, that serial number is not recognised'

Published Friday 27th January 2006 12:02 GMT

Episode 4 "Uh... " the Boss says, sneaking into Mission Control "...there's been a complaint."

"A complaint?" I respond.

"It may not be about you. It's about a phone call that came from your phone."

"Really, how can you be sure?"

"I called our telecommunications helpdesk who dialed in and looked up the call - and it came from this office."

"So it could have come from anyone with access to this office?"

"I suppose so. How many people is that?"

"Three, plus the modem on my desktop machine. So that means it was myself, my assistant or you."

"Okay, well I'm sure that I can account for **my** movem..."

"And getting back to the complaint..." I interrupt, before the Boss can present his alibi complete with witness statements from members of the local train spotters' guild.

"Yes. Apparently you..."

"Or someone using his phone..." the PFY adds tactfully.

"Yes, ...has been harassing the automated attendant of one of our suppliers."

"Sorry?" the PFY and I say in unison.

"Someone's harassing the automated attendant at one of our suppliers," the Boss repeats.

"So what you're saying..." the PFY says slowly, "...is that someone's harassing... a machine?"

"Yes."

"And you realize the pointlessness in harassing something infinitely impatient?"

"No, they're harassing it in a different way."

"Wait a minute. Who complained about this - the machine?"

"Don't be ridiculous, one of their engineers was looking into the unavailability of their attendant and found that someone had been abusing it."

"So first there was harassment then some abuse?"

"I... Look, regardless of what it was, they'd like it investigated!"

"Okay so first things first, what was being abused?"

"Their fault reporting mechanism, one of those IVF things."

"I think you mean IVR," the PFY corrects kindly.

"Oh. Right, well anyway, it was the hardware fault system that was being abused."

"Ok," I say, entering the conversation. "Why don't we just ring the system and make sure it's not a fault at their end **appearing** like abuse. We'll pretend we have a faulty hard drive like... this one - which we had this morning."

"Excellent," the Boss responds.

. . . >beep< >beep< >brrrrrrrrrrrr brrrrrrrrrrrr<

"Welcome to the Platinum Class twenty four hour Support Line. To log a Software Support call, press 1, To log a hardware support call, press 2."

"Press 2," the Boss says.

>beep<

"Thank you. For desktop support press 1, for server support press 2, for storage support press 3, or for new maintenance contracts, press 4."

"Press 2," the Boss urges. "It is off a server isn't it?"

"Yes," I respond. "But is it a server problem or a storage problem?"

"I.... Press 2 and see."

>beep<

"Thank you. Please enter the thirteen digit serial number of the faulty item."

>thirteen beeps later<

"I'm sorry, that serial number is not recognized, please re-enter the number."

"Type it in again," the Boss says.

"I got it right the first time," I reply testily.

"Well go back a level and try the Storage option."

"There's no back-a-level option"

"Press Hash."

"I'm sorry, that serial number is not recognized, please re-enter the number."

"Hash just repeats the message," the Boss blurts. "Press Star."

>beep<

"Thank you, your call has been logged."

"There!" the boss says. "Done!"

"Yes, these intuitive IVR systems are great aren't they?" the PFY adds sarcastically.

"What do you mean?"

"They've got no information - no serial number, no contact name, no job information."

"They'll call back for that."

"Yuh-huh," the PFY blurts.

"Alright, call them again."

"Welcome to the Platinum Class twenty four hour Support Line..."

...

"Thank you. For desktop support press 1, for server support press 2, for storage support press 3..."

"Press 3!" the Boss says.

>beep<

"Thank you, please enter your seven digit support contract number."

"Isn't it a serial number?" the Boss asks.

"That was the server option, this is storage," the PFY explains. "You never use the same key twice."

"It's ok," I say, pressing in some digits. "I've got the number written down."

"Thank you. Please enter the thirteen digit serial number of the faulty item."

>thirteen beeps later<

"I'm sorry, that serial number is not recognized, please re-enter the number."

"Press 0," the Boss gasps.

>beep<

"Nothing's happening..." the PFY says.

"Maybe it thinks it's a serial number, press the Hash."

>beep<

"Still nothing," the PFY adds.

"Hang up and call again!" the Boss snaps angrily.

. . . Three calls later . . .

"THIS time!" the Boss says, with just a tinge of hysteria in his voice.

"Welcome to the Platinum Class twenty four hour Support Line..."

. . .

"Thank you. For desktop support press 1, for server support press 2, for storage support press 3..."

"**PRESS 0!**" the Boss shouts.

>beep<

>brrrrrrrr< >brrrrrrrr<

"It's ringing!!!" the Boss chirps happily. "**Finally**. See, you've just got to know how to use these things"

"Yes," I reply. "Say, did you ever watch the last episode of Sapphire and Steel where they're stuck in a time loop forever and ever?"

"Ay? What's that got to do with anyth..."

"Welcome to the Platinum Class...."

"**THE... BASTARDS!**" the Boss screams, before making a strange noise and staring off into space vacantly.

"And do what we do now," the PFY says, helping the Boss to the chair beside the comfy strap-around jacket, "is fire up the old desktop modem on demon dial with random IVR entry enabled. And we let it run for a couple of hours."

"Will it... get an answer?" the Boss whimpers.

"No, they've only got one engineer - and he just looks after their IVR system."

"I..." the boss burbles, going vacant again.

"But don't worry, when he calls you back to complain again, you can be the one to tell him to log his fault with our IT complaints line. Our IVR complaints line. It's 10 levels deep, 12 options per level and recursive. It's so convoluted I think I saw Amelia Earheart in there. And, more importantly, it uses caller ID to ring back if you don't complete the job log..."

"Ah..." the Boss sighs dreamily, wandering back to his office.

It's the least we can do...

BOFH: Headhunted

'A wonderful opportunity'

Published Friday 3rd February 2006 11:26 GMT

Episode 5 I'm sitting in Mission Control listening to the PFY recount the amusing anecdotes from his night on the overproofed Rum when the phone rings. Not unusual in itself, but it's an outside line so I answer it.

"Hello?" I ask

...

>Click<

"User?" the PFY asks.

"Mmm?"

"A user - calling you?"

"No, just a headhunter, wanted to know if I wanted to work for some company opening up an office in this country and needing someone who knows the lay of the land."

"What was it worth?" the PFY asks.

"No idea, didn't ask."

"So you're that happy here?"

"Not as such, but you do get a bit complacent - the devil you know and all that."

"So you're not even going to find out?"

"Nah."

>ring<

External Line again. I hands-free it this time.

"Hello?"

"Hi, we must have got cut off last time", the Headhunter woman says. "I was just telling you about a wonderful opportunity with a company opening up a branch office in this country."

"Yes, you mentioned that. What does the position pay?"

"I...Well they have a very attractive remuneration package."

"How much?"

"It's difficult to say without an interview..."

"Ballpark figure?" I ask.

"I'm afraid I'm not really at libert..."

>clatter<

>ring<

"Say 10,000 more than you make now," she says, before I can put the receiver down.

"And how do you know what I make now?"

"I can't really s..."

>clatter<

>ring<

"Your boss told me!" she gasps, when I answer the phone.

"Now why would my boss want to tell you what I earn - unless he's trying to get rid of me?"

"We're old friends," she gasps, before I can hang up again.

"Sorry, I don't buy it," I say, reaching for the switchhook.

"There's a finder's fee!" she gasps. "The agency just needs to put three names forward - you don't even have to take the job!!!" "Go to the interview," the PFY urges, playing Bill's advocate. "What the hell!"

"And how do I go about getting an interview?" I ask.

"You know the Slough rail station?..."

>clatter<

>ring<

"The job's not in Slough!" she blurts. "That's just our offices - the placement agency."

"I'm afraid I'm allergic to Slough, so how about you come here - we could do an interview over lunch?"

"I...OK then - tomorrow?"

"That'll be fine" I respond, giving her a time and place.

"Lunch?" The PFY asks.

"What the hell, a free lunch if nothing else. I'll make up my mind after I've necked as many pints as they'll buy me!"

...After lunch the next day...

"I'm leaving," I say, crashing through into Mission Control with a blood alcohol level so high that it probably qualifies as embalming.

"What?" the PFY asks "I thought you were only going to get a free lunch!"

"That was till I saw the 'attractive remuneration package'."

"How good could she be?"

"She's fine," I respond, "but the job's better: Money, medical, discretionary spending budget, training budget and unlimited sick leave. I'm out of here!"

"You'll need to give six weeks notice," the Boss snaps.

>clickety< >click< >tap< >tap< >clickety<

"I did six weeks ago!" I respond. "Check your Inbox."

"Well," he sniffs, knowing the sanctity of his Inbox has once again been violated. "I'll have security escort you to your desk to collect your personals. I wouldn't worry about us though - I'm sure we'll find a suitable replacement in no time."

"Don't worry about the personal crap," I say, grabbing my coat and coffee mug "I'm sorted!"

"But..." the PFY says "...aren't you going to..."

"Stay around for drinks? - nah!"

...

A week later I'm sitting at my new desk twiddling my thumbs and basically killing time for four weeks until all the gear I've ordered arrives. It's getting so boring I consider writing some policy documents.

My laughter is interrupted by a phone call on the one working line in the building.

>Ring<

"Hello?"

"Hi", the ubiquitous Headhunting woman says. "I was wondering if you'd be interested in an excellent central city company needing a senior systems and networks administrator?"

"Really, a company I might know perhaps?" I ask casually.

"I...."

"What does the position pay?"

"I...Well they have a very attractive remuneration package."

>clatter<

>ring<

"Five grand more than you make now," she snaps as soon as I pick up.

"Excellent. I suppose it's a deal then. But don't you lose your commission for me walking out in the first week?"

"Nah, we don't have that clause in our contracts," she chuckles.

"Lovely. So just let me get this straight, you headhunted me to **this** company and now you're headhunting me back to the **old** company? You don't feel a little...dirty..?"

"Not really."

"Yeah, me neither."

...one week later...

"So, basically you knew she'd try and headhunt you back?" the PFY gasps.

"Of course - heaps of people do it! And, by not documenting anything I do I'm basically ensuring that the company will want to reemploy me - so long as the money isn't too extortionate!" I cry.

"I...Don't you feel, well, a little unscrupulous?"

"Yeah...no"

>ring<

"Hi, I was ringing to tell you about a wonderful opportunity with a company opening up a branch office in this country!!"

"It's for you..." I say to the PFY, handing the phone over.

BOFH takes a leaf from Captain Kirk's log

New recruit lost on unexplored planet

Published Friday 10th February 2006 14:47 GMT

Episode 6 It's always the new guy that starts the trouble. OK, that's not entirely true - very occasionally it's the sleeper who's been happily working away in the company for years who suddenly gets his activation signal - but **mostly** it's the new guys.

"I now know why Kirk always sent the new guy down to visit the unexplored planet," I tell the PFY as I open the latest memo.

"He didn't **always** send the new guy," the PFY counters, showing some closet trekkie traits.

"But when he did, what happened to the new guy?"

"They usually never came back."

"That's right. Because Kirk could SPOT A TROUBLEMAKER A MILE AWAY!"

"Yes" the PFY says both dryly and doubtfully.

"Ok, pop quiz. There's a new guy in HR with no redundancies to hand out and no pay rises to veto. What's he going to do to make sure that it looks like he's working?"

"Shuffle papers?"

"No, that's a dead giveaway. He's bored and looking for a way to ensure his name's at the top of the list come promotion time...."

"Uh..."

"There are two common ways to distinguish yourself, either a. by having a fantastic innovative idea which makes the company a better place to work in, or b. taking someone down for some petty violation of a policy that's impossible to implement. And if you can combine both by taking down someone who may have massaged a couple of rules regarding personal disclosure, all the better"

"What do you mean?"

I hand the memo over.

"He wants to see our Data Security Policy document, so what?"

"Get it for me will you?"

"Sure, where is it?"

"And **THAT** is the problem. If you read on, they also want to see our Disclosure to the Media Policy and Personal Privacy Policy Documents."

"So?"

"So we haven't got them. And as contractors we're required to have them available to the company."

"Oh. How come they've never asked before?"

"Because no one cares. Yes, they care about data security and personal privacy, but they don't want to see a policy documents about them - they'd just like to know that we have a code somewhere which we adhere to."

"And the new guy knows we don't have them?"

"Who knows? He might just be good at his job or he could just be a dyed-in-the-hemp privacy loving hippy. We won't know till we go to the meeting."

"Meeting?"

"Yes, meeting. "See," I say, tapping my memo. "You got one of these memos too, as did the contract DBA."

...Later that day...

"Ok, so I've been looking at your policy documents and just have a few questions," the new HR guy says.

"Mmm?"

"For a start, they're all the same."

"Yes, we agreed to combine our efforts to produce the documents."

"Two years ago," the DBA adds - as rehearsed.

"Uh-huh," the HR person comments. "I note that these contracts look a lot like ones available on the internet. In fact, the section on 'Non-disclosure of personal information' happened upon in the course of your work' is word for word the same as found on this website."

"Really? Great minds must just think alike."

"Which would mean that you'd be able to answer questions on a section at random?"

"Uh...not verbatim responses, but the gist of the document, yes."

"So what about >flip< >flip< Section 4 - Non-Disclosure, subsection B: You observe the actions of an employee which may or may not be part of their work during a period of the day which

might be personal time. Under what circumstances would it be permissible to communicate these actions to a fellow employee?"

"You mean if someone's probably on work time, probably arsing around - and we see it - could we tell their Boss?" the PFY asks.

"That's one possible interpretation, yes."

"Sure."

"No you can't," the HR geek counters.

"What?"

"You can't communicate it because a. it's potentially their personal time and b. it's potentially unrelated to work. If there's any ambiguity privacy must be maintained."

"It doesn't say that in our document."

"Then I suggest you update your document."

"Ok. >tap< There we go." the PFY says tapping away at his PDA then pointing it at the infrared receiver on the printer in the corner "New revision, coming up."

>Whirr<

. . .

"Yes, that's better" he says. "And one final question - where are the publicly available copies of these documents?"

"Sorry?" I ask, getting a little testy.

"As part of your contract you're required to have copies of these document publicly available for perusal by staff. Not doing so - well, that would be a breach of your contract" he smiles evilly.

...can't...stop...the...voices...

"No problem," I respond. "They're kept in the documents room in the basement."

"Really - how's about I go and check on them now?"

"I...well, it's afternoon tea time - why not?"

...Later, in the basement..

>ring< >ring< >ring< >ring< >ring< >ring<

"Hello?" the HR guy gasps.

"Hi, I just thought I'd see if you'd located those documents?" I ask.

"You're for it! There's no documents down here - just an empty filing cabinet and a phone which won't make outgoing calls."

"Really?" I gasp, going for the shocked reaction.

"And the door handle on this side of the door is broken!"

"Really - I'll pop down and let you out. But wait! You've got the only key!"

"Ring the buildings people."

"Good idea! But wait! You went down there at afternoon tea time."

"So?"

"Well that would potentially be your personal time. I... couldn't tell anyone."

"IT'S NOT MY PERSONAL TIME!!!" the HR geek cries.

"Yeah...but I'm feeling a bit ambiguous about this..."

...

"So how long so we leave him down there before we slip the resignation form under the door?" the PFY asks.

"I'm thinking almost to the drinking-your-own-urine stage..."

"This time tomorrow then?"

"Yeah!"

BOFH: Birthday present backfire

Snap...happy?

Published Friday 17th February 2006 11:58 GMT

Episode 7 "I'd like a bit of birthday advice," the Boss asks, after the PFY and I show up to his office in response to a call.

"Keep having them?" the PFY chips.

"Wa?"

"Forgive my assistant," I say calmly. "His battery's almost flat and needs a good recharging with a high voltage device. What he *meant* to say was that we'd prefer cash in large denomination bills."

"?"

"Normally it's up to an individual manager's discretion about making some personal contribution on the anniversary of someone's birth."

"Oh. No, that wasn't what I was after. I wanted to know about digital cameras."

"I'd still rather have the cash," I confess.

"No, I want to buy one for the wife - *her* birthday!!!" he blurts, tapping the photo frame on his desk. "But I don't know what to look for."

"What do you want the camera for?" I ask.

"Her birthday."

"No, what do you want to *USE* the camera for?"

"Just holidays, photos of the family. But I don't know what I should be looking for - there's so many options," the Boss burbles, flipping the pages of a digital photography magazine.

"Well if it's for your family," the PFY responds, suppressing a shudder as he looks at the chamber of horrors that is the Boss' desktop photo. "I'd be looking for a couple of things."

"Yes?"

"Low resolution for a start," he continues, taking another gander at the Pandora's family photo.

"Really? The magazines seem to rate higher resolution as important."

"Low resolution gives you the benefit of...uh...soft focus - especially if the camera is used at a distance."

"Oh. What about zoom?"

"Ordinarily a good thing, but in your case I'd avoid it like the plague. You can use *digital* zoom later!"

"But won't my images become... >flip< >flip< >flip< uh...pixilated?"

"Yes. But pixilation is a good thing - it's even more soft focus."

"Speaking of focus - fixed focus or auto focus?"

"I shouldn't worry too much about focus if I were you..."

"Why not just get a family portrait?" I say tactfully. "They can do wonderful things with an airbrush these days!"

"What...why?"

"Well...Just...sometimes it takes a professional to bring out the true photogenic quality."

"Oh. I *SEE!*" the Boss snaps. "Well my family may not be the Osbornes..."

"Donny and Maree, or Ozzy and Sharon?" the PFY asks helpfully.

"..." the boss says.

"Don't listen to him," I say, cooling the situation off a little. "How about you just buy something entry level and, if things...work out...you can upgrade to something much better in the future. That way you get a chance to experiment with the medium and see how you like it!"

"What about digital enhancements?"

"I think you'd best leave that to the professionals - they get paid to do that to themselves. Those new electronic vacuum devices are not for the uninitiated..."

"Huh? I was talking about external flash and date stamping."

"Oh, right! In that case I think you'll find most cameras have date stamping and an internal flash."

"Yes, but what about an external flash?"

"Ah...darkness is your friend," the PFY suggests condescendingly.

"I...should I get more storage?"

"Nah, cameras are tiny things - you could just put it on the shelf."

"I *meant* more internal storage in the *camera*!"

"Oh, ok. I dunno, if you use all the soft focus options we've suggested you should get by with the standard 128 MB card."

"Hmmm. Yes, well, thanks for your help but I think I'll just ask the guy at the shop."

There's just no helping some people...

...

"So what do you think?" the Boss asks, displaying his latest purchases.

"Nice," the PFY says. "10 megapixel SLR with interchangeable lenses, low light enhancement and up to 1/4000 shutter speed. And you're sure you showed the sales guy your wallet photo? It's such a cruel trick!"

"What?!"

"I said it's such a cool thing," the PFY blurts. "It's what I'd get myself if I were looking for a camera. Oooh, and look, a one gig storage card. I like it. Mind if I snap a couple of shots of the office?"

"I...no, go ahead."

...The next day...

"It's going back?!" I gasp as I see the camera all boxed up as new with attached receipt.

"Yes, I...the wife's decision. She doesn't like it."

"That's such a shame. She didn't like the features?"

"No"

"The cost?"

"No"

"The complicated interface?"

"No, I think it must have been the HUNDRED OR SO PHOTOS OF THE ATTRACTIVE WOMEN THAT WORK HERE!" the Boss snaps.

"Ah. So the PFY left some images on the card that your wife thought *you'd* taken?"

"It would seem so," the Boss seethes.

"Oh, and as a result you lose your camera?"

"Oh, not just the camera," the Boss says, as he starts putting his desktop contents into a box.

"SHE MADE YOU RESIGN!" I gasp. "What a result!"

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, what an insult!"

...later that day...

"He QUIT?!" the PFY said "But I actually liked him!"

"So you sabotaged his camera?"

"I didn't, I was taking some snaps of the girls. I didn't want him to go!"

"I think you're going to have to accept *some* of the blame."

"I...didn't even mean to!"

"Sometimes bastardhood's like a magnet - you just can't turn it off."

"That's terrible" the PFY says. "... ... Still, tough luck. Fancy a pint?"

Ah, the recovery powers of youth. They bounce back so quick...

BOFH: Being root

Seminar sabotage

Published Friday 24th February 2006 11:28 GMT

Episode 8 Don't you just hate it when you rock up to a training course only to find out that the person taking the course knows about as much about the topic as you can tattoo on a DIMM with a jackhammer?

And so it is that the "advanced Linux" administration that I've booked myself onto is complete crap. Mind you, I'd never be on the course in the first place if the dates hadn't coincided with a major sporting event that one of our suppliers has a corporate box (with lashings of lager and small savory treats) at. MmmMMmm sorted.

So of course I'm sporting a headache that measures 'Kurt Cobain' on the pain scale and instead of easing it with some hair of the dog I have to sit through the inane drivel of a man who knows as much about Linux as Princess Grace did about mountain driving...

"And **ls** is what you use to list your files - **ls** being 'list' with every second letter removed" the dweeb burbles. "And you'll find a lot of Unix utilities are similarly named - like **cp** for copy, **mv** for move"

"And **su** - for shut?" I ask idiotically.

"No, **su** is used to become root."

"Oh, so it's short for slut - not shut."

"No, no," he chuckles condescendingly. "**Su** is short for substitute user."

If there's one person that gets on my **tits**, it's the person at a training course that thinks they know more than the tutor and continually adds their 10p worth into the conversation when it's not wanted. I **realise** that I'm in danger of becoming that soldier, but I can't help myself, this guy is just **crap**!

"And **ps** which is used to..."

"Find a list of the users that piss you off?" I suggest

I can't help it, I just can't help it. It's like I've lost control!!!!

"No, it's used to find a list of processes. Now as someone's already mentioned **su** I think we'll talk about that for a while. With the exception of, say, changing to the oracle user or similar, the majority of the time, **su** is used to become the **root** user. And the **root** user is a very special user with enhanced powers."

"Like X-ray vision" I add quietly.

"Because of this" he continues, ignoring me, "**root** is used very sparingly and in the course of a normal day a good administrator is never logged in as root."

"Beg pardon?" I snap.

"I said a **good** administrator is never logged in as root."

>snap<

"Bullshit! A **real** administrator is always logged in as **root** - it's CRAP administrators that aren't!"

"I think you'll find real administrators always use their **own** account and **su** to root" he replies condescendingly.

"Pffft!"

"So you use root all the time do you?"

"Only for the past 20 years."

"And you're not afraid of accidentally removing all the files from your home directory?"

"I used to be, but now I always do my work in someone else's home directory."

"But aren't you afraid you'll accidentally type in some command that would crash the system?"

"No more that I'm afraid I'll accidentally **say** something like *You're a complete fraud!*"

"That's completely different."

"Yes, it's a lot easier to **say** something without thinking than to **type** it."

"So you're saying you always use **root** rather than your own account?"

"**root** is my own account..."

"Well I think we'll have to agree to disagree on that one. It may be that **some** Linux administrators are less concerned with their system security than others, but in my experience Linux administrators are just as concerned as Windows and OS/2 administrators about the ability of malicious software being downloaded and affecting the machine with enhanced privileges."

"Oooh, yes," I add. "When I used OS/2 I was very concerned about malicious software exploiting enhanced privileges."

"What, the ability to activate code which could destroy the operating system and data on it?"

"No, my concerns were more along the line of it not setting the machine on fire and hammering a stake through the install media - apparently viruses can't do that," I sigh.

Around now the tutor has probably realized that I'm one person he shouldn't hand a course evaluation form to at the end of the session, so he decides to move on...

"Ok, so I think it's about time we try a couple of the exercises, so if you could all login to the server with the username at the top of your worksheet"

"You mean **root**?" one of the other students asks.

"No, I mean the other username, above root"

"It's not working for me," another student chirps.

"Or me."

"Or me."

"What about you?" the tutor asks me.

"Oh bugger!" I say.

"What?"

"It seems you were right after all"

"What do you mean?"

"About a silly typing error causing problems"

"How"

"Well I logged in as root earlier and I was just going to try that **ps** thing you mentioned, but instead I accidentally typed in 'nohup cd /; rm -rf * > /dev/null 2>&1 &' "

"Okay." he gasps, "Just type in **fg**."

"**fg**, ok, oh bugger, I accidentally typed control-d instead."

"I...well, I suppose we could have a lesson on reinstalling a box from scratch," he sniffs.

"...or we could have one on gaining access to a corporate box at a major sporting event which has trolley loads of lager and nibbles?"

>Cue tumbleweed<

BOFH: A change in tone

Insert this, way up

Published Friday 3rd March 2006 14:07 GMT

Episode 9 "Is it a full moon?" I ask the PFY disgustedly as I put the phone down for the third time this morning.

"Could be," the PFY says, deleting a swathe of jobs from the helpdesk system.

"What could be?" the new Boss asks, fresh back from his course on helping people the IT way.

"A full moon," I reply.

"Why?" he asks, smiling faintly and waiting for the punch line.

"Because there's a large number of weirdoes calling for help."

"Weirdoes?"

"Yes, as in Lunatics," the PFY replies.

"Hence the full moon reference," I add.

"Sorry, I'm not with you."

"Lunatic - from Lunar, meaning to do with the moon, and Tic, meaning..."

"...uncontrolled movement." the Boss finishes.

"No, tic - from Tick the box which says 'I'm a loon'."

"Oh. But what makes you think things are any worse now than normally?"

"Look at the helpdesk call frequency for a start. In any normal day they'll get around 100 or so calls total, around now they're clocking 150, 180."

"It could just be an anomaly."

"The same anomaly, every month. Even the calls are different - look at this one," I say, tapping my screen.

"What about it, a printer's not printing."

"No, and it's because the toner cartridge is out. And they know it's out because the printer tells them that it's out. Any other time they'd just replace the toner cartridge, but today they suspect

that it might be a cunning plan by the printer manufacturer to sell more toner cartridges by saying the cartridge is out when it's not."

"Like the inkjet people do," the PFY adds.

"So what - you show them that the cartridge really is empty."

"Oooh no, that would mean that I'm being paid by the printer company. No, they'll be expecting step by step diagnosis, followed - finally - by the successful printing of a single page, before the toner light comes on again. Then they'll be satisfied.

"These diagnostics, what are they?"

"How about we show him, Sheryl?" I say to the PFY.

>ring ring<

"Hello, I'm ringing about the printer problem," the PFY says

"Oh good."

"Now you have a new toner cartridge on hand?"

"Yes, but I don't want to use it as I'm sure we used to get a lot more pages out of our old printer."

"The one with the larger toner cartridge?"

"I...I can't remember."

"Ok, well let's just run some checks shall we? Can you pull the current toner cartridge out and rock it gently from side to side, then forward and backward and then put it back in the printer?"

... >whirr<...

"No, the light's come back on."

"Then it's probably out of toner."

"But it still feels heavy."

"As heavy as the new cartridge?"

"Yes."

"Which is still in its packaging?"

"I...Yes"

Sigh

"Ok, how about we try some more diagnostics. Can you turn the paper in the tray over and hold the ready button down for five seconds"

>whirr click whirrrrrrrrr<

"It's printed a page, but it's a bit patchy."

"Patchy like when the toner cartridge has run out?" the PFY hints.

"I...No, it's just patchy."

"Right," the PFY says testily. "Do you have a piece of light cardboard?"

"Uh...I've got some...120 GSM backing card."

"Put that in the paper tray and hold the ready button down again."

>whirr click whirrrrrrr<

"It's come out patchy and a bit crinkled."

"Patchy like the toner cartridge is out?"

"No."

"Ok, do you have any laminating plastic?"

"I...Yes?"

"Ok, listen very carefully. I want you to put a piece of laminating plastic into the paper tray, inside up, then a piece of paper, then a piece of laminating plastic inside down. Got that?"

"I...yes?"

>whirr click click whirr click click cccclllllllliick<

"It's got a jam."

"You did put it in laminate up, paper, laminate down?"

"I...think so."

"You think so? If you got it wrong it'll clog up the printer."

"I...I'm not sure."

"Ok, we're going to have to come and look at it. Can you use your departmental printer meantime?"

"Yes."

"Good."

"Only..."

Wait for it....

"Yes?"

"The toner cartridge is out and we only put it in about a month ago."

"Ok, we'd best run some diagnostics. I'll need a couple more sheets of laminate, an A4 sheet of tin foil and a small bottle of acetylene free contact cleaner."

"I don't think I have that..."

"Ah, nail polish remover will probably do..."

...

BOFH: Feral access points

Wild, untamed...

Published Friday 10th March 2006 12:02 GMT

Episode 10 "What's he doing?" the Boss whispers, noticing the PFY's absence from and disinterest in the conversation he and I have been having about the shameful nature of internet porn sites these days. Put another way, the boss has been gently probing [oooh errr] for a list of potential spank sites while implying that he's in some way concerned about the moral condition of the workplace..

"He's...oh...looking for feral access points by the look of it," I say, glancing over the PFY's shoulder.

"Feral access points?"

"Wireless access points..." I explain.

"I see - but 'feral'?"

"Yes," the PFY says without looking around. "Like feral cats. Wireless Access points with no identified owners. Wild, untamed."

"I... see. And what do you do when you find one?"

"What, a feral cat?" the PFY asks. "You shoot them!"

"No, I mean a.. feral.. access point"

"Oh, the same thing," the PFY responds.

"So... you're suggesting that you shoot people's access points?"

"No, no, I'm suggesting we shoot their cats!"

"What?!"

"Obviously it'd take a couple of times before the message gets through, but believe me those access points will disappear like a shot (so to speak) once word gets out!"

"You can't be serious!"

"Of course he's not," I say, calming the Boss while shuffling the PFY's urban hunting magazine under some paper on his desk. "No, his plan is to identify the access points which are either illegally installed or improperly configured and take the appropriate steps."

"What steps would they be?"

"The ones in the stairwell between the Beancounters offices and the lunchroom - after darkening the stairwell of course," the PFY says. "An eight foot fall into a concrete stairwell tends to reinforce the idea of asking before installing ad-hoc networking kit!"

"I...What?"

"Again, a little joke," I say, nudging the masonry drill a little further under the PFY's desk. "No, we generally find that a quiet chat outlining the importance of network security is all that's required. Once we've shown them how simple it is to break into our network via their access point, explained the delicate nature of some of the data on our network..."

"...hit them repeatedly with a potato in a sock..." the PFY adds.

"What!?"

"Forgive my assistant's levity!" I counter making sure the aforementioned sock is still behind the masonry drill. "He's just wanting to ensure our network is safe!"

"But how can you **really** be sure that it's safe?" the Boss asks.

Before the PFY can demonstrate this on a Dustin Hoffman-like user with the aid of some dentistry tools, I decide to move the boss on with a Management Level Non-Maskable Interrupt.

"Is it true that they're serving extra large Onion Bhajis on the menu for lunch today?"

"I..." the Boss says, "...don't know, but I might just read up a bit more on this security thing..."

"Yes, good idea," I say while shielding my ears from the sonic boom as the Boss rushes to the cafeteria...

...

"So," I say to the PFY a couple of minutes later. "Any hits?"

"None," the PFY says. "Well, not after yesterday anyway. The one I did find was being used by the people in the next building to browse porn."

"What, not www.nastynunsinleather.com again?"

"Nah, just yahoo photos," the PFY chuckles.

"Did someone say porn?" the Boss asks, appearing out of nowhere with a large bag of Bhajis, his MLNMI overruled by the Hardware Level Reset of the word 'porn'

"He was just saying that there's no Rogue Access Points..."

"Rogue? I thought you said Feral?"

"It's the same thing, except that one has the Amulet of Yendor," the PFY explains - in a geek joke that passes the Boss by like a salad bar.

"I...So we're secure then?"

"Security is a journey, not a destination" the PFY says, repeating the well worn adage.

"Uh...So they **did** have bhajis?" I interrupt, getting an NMI of my own from the smell.

"And pakoras!"

"We'd better get some before it's too late!" the PFY gasps.

"Too late," the Boss chuckles smugly. "I barely had time to grab a couple of bags before they were gone!"

"Sharesies?" the PFY wheedles.

"I..." the Boss mumbles, in the same tone of voice reserved for answering the 'spare change for a cup of tea?' request..."don't think so. Anyway, are you saying we're not secure?"

"Wha? Oh, yyyNO, no, we're not secure. They're everywhere," the PFY responds, staring intently at the Boss's nose bag.

"What, access points?"

"Yes, and to avoid detection it seems some staff have started made them look like air-conditioning thermostat units and popped them in neighboring offices."

"You mean like those!" the Boss asks, pausing mid-munch to point at our wall.

"EXACTLY like those."

"Is that one?"

"It could be!"

"But it's been there for years!"

"Yes, but it **could** have been replaced!"

"How will you know?"

"Simple, you just take the cover off," the PFY says, unscrewing the plate "and see this bit here."

"The bit which says **Caution, Mains Voltage?**"

"Yeah."

"What about it?"

"You press on this piece of copper here to and listen for a buzz from the computer."

"Aren't you going to press it?" the Boss asks.

Around now I'm wondering **just** how much the PFY wants those bhajis. Sure, he has insulated shoes, but can they be trusted...

"I tested it earlier," the PFY lies - the bastard - "and all the ones in the open plan area too. There's no other ones on the floor."

"There's one in my office!" the Boss says, right on cue.

"No there's not," the PFY says. "They're for open plan areas only."

"There's one in my office!!!"

"Well, it's **possible** you've got a legit one, but you'd best check it now while you've still got some bhajis left."

"Bhajis left?"

"Bandwidth left, yeah. They'll use up all your network bandwidth!!"

"Oh!" the Boss says, shuffling out quickly.

>KZERRT!<

"That'll be the lunch bell," the PFY chirps. "Get'em while they're smoking!"

...

BOFH: Clear and present danger

When loop pile carpet attacks

Published Friday 24th March 2006 14:23 GMT

Episode 11 Nothing starts a day worse than the Boss wandering into Mission Control with a clipboard in his hand. It's just never a good sign...

"Just collecting your thoughts on who the new Health and Safety representative for the floor should be?"

"Oh yes, yes, very good," I respond enthusiastically. "And about time too!"

"So you're keen to vote then?"

"Most definitely!"

"And so who would you like it to be?"

"Oh! uuuuuhhhmmm, who was at the top of the list?"

"Baxter."

"Baxter... Baxter... YES, that's him, Baxter's the man!"

"Sharon Baxter?"

"Sharon now, but used to be Shane," the PFY adlibs.

"What you're saying she, well he's a transsexual?" the Boss asks, horrified at the thought that he might have been browsing him/her/it with an appreciative eye.

"Not exactly - Work place accident, running with scissors..."

"Oh, I see, it's a joke!" the Boss chuckles, relieved to have his sexuality intact. "But are you sure you want Baxter?"

"Did I say Baxter?" I ask. "No, not Baxter, I meant... oh.. what's-his-name. Bottom of the list."

"Kennerley."

"Yeah Kennerley's the man! He is a man isn't he?"

"You don't care who's appointed do you?" the Boss asks dryly.

"What? Of course we do!" the PFY says defensively, jumping aboard the bandwagon. "We really care! I mean the successful candidate will be the person who meets with us on a regular basis to discuss whether paper cuts from printer stock poses a danger in the workplace!"

"Lets not forget checking that we've secured our mats in the prescribed manner," I add.

"Or putting signs up to warn people that there are dangerous voltages inside pieces of equipment which have power cables running into them - power cables which incidentally need to be tested every three years and labeled with a cable test sticker - which also warns of the dangerous voltage inside the cable - and is in turn plugged into a socket which has warning signs about the insertion of metallic objects and dangerous voltages."

"..." the Boss sighs before exiting slightly miffed.

...

I realize a day later that we may have pushed the Boss a teensy bit too far on this when a fluorescent yellow blazer arrives on the PFY's desk. I'm still laughing heartily at his misfortune when my own blazer arrives.

"What the hell's a floor warden?" the PFY asks, reading the back of his jacket.

!

So we're the new company Health and Safety reps for the floor (apparently because of the high accident rate they've decided it's best to upgrade the required number of reps) and as the first part of our new role we have to attend a workplace safety seminar.

And sure enough the place is cram packed with the anal retentive types you'd expect to see working security at the smorgasbord in an old folks home - the ones who make sure no one gets too many portions of pet food. Only now their perceptive abilities have been honed to seek out potential causes of danger.

"I think you'll find there's more of a trip risk in loop pile carpet than cut pile," one of them observes over their morning tea digestive biscuit, chewed 23 times to avoid choke risk.

"Yes, yes," another agrees, "and with the increased risk of slips on damp or wet man-made fiber carpets we really should be recommending woolen - or at the very least woolen blend carpets."

... A quarter hour later ...

"You're back early!" the Boss gasps, as we roll back into Mission Control. "We were expecting you tomorrow!"

"Yes, we would have been back then except for the accident," the PFY replies.

"Accident?" the Boss asks.

"Yes, it was horrific," I respond. "Third degree carpet burns are nasty!"

"It's the loop pile that does it," the PFY nods.

"I... So... when do you go back?"

"We don't - they tested us and instructor seemed to think that we knew quite a lot about dangers in the workplace."

"You did the multi-choice paper?"

"No, we did the practical," the PFY says pulling a piece of scorched nylon loop pile from his clothing.

"So you're certified?"

"Sure," the PFY says, handing over a couple of hastily-signed papers bearing our names.

"Yes... it all ... seems to be in order..." the Boss murmurs slowly.

"As it is," I respond. "Now, if you don't mind we'd like to get to work. And as it happens, I notice that my desktop monitor is very unstable and should probably be replaced with a plasma version which wouldn't shatter if it were to fall on the floor."

"Yes, but what's the likelihoo.."

>Nudge< >Crash<

"And I have identified a risk in this bulk eraser," the PFY says "Were it to fall off a desk it could do someone a pretty nasty injury to the foot."

"But how on earth would it ever f..."

>Nudge< >Crunch<

"...alaaaaaaaaarrggggh!" the Boss finishes.

"As a matter of fact," I add, "I can spot right here and now several potential trouble spots which could cause extremely painful - possibly fatal injuries, and I'd be honor bound by the health and safety code to point them out to you at the earliest possible convenience. Like now."

"So you're returning the jackets then?" he asks, penny dropped and spent.

"I think it's the safest option - don't you?"

BOFH: Dumping old crap

Your room, your responsibility!

Published Friday 31st March 2006 11:25 GMT

Episode 12 "Are we actually USING this office?" the Boss asks one morning, tapping on the door to the engineers room.

"It's the engineers room!" I reply.

"We don't have an engineer..."

"True," the PFY says. "But why the interest?"

"We're looking for somewhere to house the new Mopier thing. And the A1 plan printer."

"Well we **do** use the room for storing broken stuff."

"Storing it! Why don't we throw it out?"

"We used to, but there was a bit of an incident last year with improper disposal which led to a little bit of legal trouble. That, in turn, led to a new and all-encompassing disposal policy."

"And who set that policy?"

"One of your predecessors."

"And what happened to him?"

"He was disposed of - but don't worry, we followed the policy and he ended up being recycled and now sells ink cartridge refill kits at car boot sales..."

"I...Well what do we do? I need the room!"

"We could get rid of the rubbish I suppose," the PFY says helpfully.

"Get a bin?" the Boss suggests.

"Can't do that - the bin company's getting a little tetchy about us dumping stuff that might have mercury, selenium or other dodgy metals in it. It costs more to dump - **if** they'll let you dump it in the clean/green recycling centers. Sometimes they'll charge you extra to send it off to dismantlers."

"So what do we do?"

"In the old days we'd save cash by giving old kit to some unsuspecting school, telling them that it was reasonable hardware useful to learn off."

"And?"

"They're onto that one now and won't have a bar of it - besides, computers aren't the major capital investment they once were. Of course, on other occasions we'd pack in boxes and ship it to vendors, saying that it was delivered to the wrong place. Or, we'd leave it on street corners, give it to Oxfam, throw small bits of it out the window on the Underground."

"You're kidding!"

"Oh no. The PFY was also fond of slipping it into people's bags at the pub or wrapping it up nicely like a present and leaving it in a rental car or a taxi."

"That's very good, did you think of that?" the Boss chuckles.

"No, I'm afraid we can't claim that. The original idea came from an engineer at one of the vendor sites who was trying to get rid of crap in their store. You'd send a desktop away for repair and it would come back with four 10 meg NICs, three extra 20 meg hard drives and a 'redundant' power supply."

"Desktops have redundant power?"

"No, he'd drill holes in the cabinet and screw it in. Wouldn't connect it or anything."

"Why?"

"Apparently he was pocketing the money they paid him to get them dumped."

"They PAID him to get rid of them?!"

"Oh yeah, there's big money in environmental disposal companies."

"Really? How do they get rid of it?"

"Grinding down, precious and semi-precious metal extraction, then sorting into recyclable compounds."

"Really?"

"Nah, they just dig a big hole and tip it all in. But their customers feel good about themselves."

"I...well I suppose you should give one of them a call. We can use it as a publicity thing."

"Suit yourself."

...

"So that's..." I say, tapping away on the Boss's desktop calculator "...two thousand six hundred and thirty eight quid, 44p."

"What, to take a room full of rubbish away?!!" he gasps.

"Uh-huh. Told you there was big money in it."

"It'll have to come out of your server budget."

"That's for BUYING servers!"

"It's the same thing. Besides the gear was in **your room** so it's **your responsibility** to get rid of it."

"I...guess it's a pleasure doing business with you."

"Business?"

"Yeah, you got me thinking about it and I'd be a fool not to get into the disposals business. Care for a quick drink to celebrate the opening of my latest company?"

"I...No. Promised the wife that I'd pick her up from the airport."

"Really? Ah well, maybe next time."

...

And so it is that the PFY and I are supping a quiet celebratory ale in the pub across from the building as the Boss' car emerges from the parking basement...

"Car's riding a bit low I see," the PFY says.

"Yes, it'll be one of those reactive suspension foibles I guess."

"And not the half ton of crap sitting in the boot?"

"That might have **some effect**, but it's only temporary."

"Temporary?"

"I'm assuming he'll need to clear some luggage space at Heathrow..."

"And don't tell me - you made an anonymous call about Ostama Bin Liner ..."

"Yeah, I need the time to shift all the rest of the crap into the Boss's office"

"His room, his responsibility?"

"You bet!"

BOFH: Headcase

A law unto himself

Published Friday 7th April 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 13 So the Boss wants to know what's been happening with the 'Foolproof Wireless Security' project that the auditors decided should be implemented - a project that's as deliverable as wireless UPS units.

"Oh, we gave that to Steve," the PFY says when the Boss asks.

"Steve?"

"Yeah Steve, down the end of the corridor on the left."

"Is someone IN that office? I thought it was just used for storage!"

"I suppose you could call it that. But no, it's Steve's office."

"What his position?"

"uhhhhhmmmm...Special...Project Coordinator. I think."

"And so why did you pass this job to him?"

"Mainly because of his experience. He read the book on computer security."

"You mean **wrote** the book."

"No, no, read. Well, when I say read, I really mean looked at the pictures."

"So you're saying this guy **isn't** much of a technical person?"

"Not really - but he **has** worked for us for years."

"But you're saying he's not technical?"

"Well, he **used** to be. Only problem was that back in the old days he used to drink the isopropyl alcohol. Then when we switched to clear methylated spirits - to cut costs - without telling him..."

"What?"

"The wheels fell off a bit..."

"So he's useless?"

"Well, **technically** it's classed as a workplace accident and so as long as he manages to turn up to work the Union won't let us fire him. And besides, he's showing massive signs of improvement."

"And by massive you mean?"

"Well, he can **see** now."

"But apart from that he's all there mentally?"

"Welllllll...if you were to compare him to a deck of cards..."

"Yes?"

"He might have enough for a game of Go Fish."

"Against himself," the PFY adds.

"And so he just sits in an office all day doing nothing?"

"In his office or out in the garden," the PFY says.

"The garden?"

"With the other vegetables," the PFY adds unkindly.

"So why the hell did you give him the wireless security project?"

"Easy. There's **always** going to be wireless security problems because you can't control physical access to the medium. If it's not 'hackerz' it'll be some denial-of-service thing that you just can't fix. And, of course, you have to ramp up the risk factor of either scenario by being in the middle of a ginormous city full of geeks with nothing better to do with their time than cruise around with laptops and directional antennas."

"So what are you saying?"

"Everyone involved in this project is doomed to failure. The only way to mitigate the risk is to hand it to someone else to get blamed. We hand it to Steve, it turns to custard, he gets blamed."

"Isn't that a little...cowardly?"

"Yes," I reply without hesitation.

"And you're not concerned about that? You don't feel a little twinge of responsibility?"

"Not at all. Were it you, I or the PFY and something went catastrophically wrong, we'd be gone faster than a supermodel's lunch in a public toilet - but Steve's as safe as houses. They'll **never** fire him - not so long as he keeps turning up."

"So all we need to do is just write some documentation and get him to sign it off?"

"A crayoned **X** usually suffices, but yes."

"And you're sure this will work?"

"As sure as I am about who was responsible for the Smart-ID card fiasco."

"And don't forget the Paperless Office project," the PFY adds.

"Didn't people...complain?"

"About Steve? Never! He's like a company mascot. Besides, the term 'Special Projects' is a corporate dumping ground."

"What do you mean?"

"Who do you think signed off on the new company logo which ended up being a little too near to a certain competitors, causing an expensive legal action?" I ask.

"Steve?" the Boss gasps.

"Yes," the PFY replies. "And every time Manchester bids for a sporting event who do you think it is that submits a memo on company letterhead to the selection committee to show how they're all a bunch of inbred, lard eating hermaphrodites?"

"What, he writes that?"

"Well, he colours in the borders and puts an X at the bottom."

"So someone else writes the memo?" the Boss says, shocked. "Does someone not like Manchester?"

"No one likes Manchester," the PFY says.

"Why not?"

"I think it's probably the lard eating mostly."

"And he's still working here?"

"They're more likely to put Lassie down on live TV!"

"So how do I get a progress report on this?"

"Just write a quick blurb saying everything's going along well and that you need another couple of thousand for.. >flip< >flip< Reflected Infrastructure Impedance...Measurement"

"But the project will go over budget!"

"Of course it'll go over budget! All projects go over budget, so if this one doesn't it'll ring alarm bells!"

"I see...And the budget gets allocated..."

"To us. For incidental expenses," the PFY says, shutting his new Plasma TV catalogue.

"I...don't think that's a good use of comp..."

"Or you could just fess up and say that this is the first occasion you've bothered checking on the project in months and it's not even started..."

"So I just get Steve to sign down the bottom in crayon then?" the Boss says, slinking out to write his memo.

"You realize he's going to go back through the paperwork and find that we spent the cash on a new tape stacker?" the PFY asks.

"Well, he could - but bear in mind we lost all those documents in the fire which started in the tape safe room because Steve was looking after the fire suppression extension project."

"Really, when was that?"

"About 10 minutes after he signs the memo I'm about to write..."

BOFH: Dear Valuable VIP Customer

Licence renewal

Published Thursday 13th April 2006 11:10 GMT

Episode 14 "Have you read the memo from those software people?" the Boss asks, tapping some paper on my desk.

"It's in my In Tray, I just haven't got round to reading it yet."

"It's on your DESK!"

"Yes, and my desk is my In Tray."

>Sigh< "Well can you read it now please?"

"Sure."

"RIGHT now please?"

"It's that urgent?"

"It wasn't **two weeks ago** when I put it.. on your.. In Tray, but it's urgent now."

"Why?"

"Because it's a special offer which expires today and they've just rung me about it and are going to call back in 10 minutes."

"Oh really. Well how's about we have a gander at it then while we wander back to your office for the call.. Blah, blah, secret weapon, blah, blah German spies, blah, blah."

"What the hell are you reading?" the Boss blurts, snatching the paper off me. "Secret weapons!?"

"It's just something I say to myself when wading through weasel words," I say, wresting the paper back from the Boss.

"What does it mean?"

"It means they're trying to shaft us."

"What? You haven't even read it all yet - there's more than one page!"

"Yes, but it starts 'Dear Valuable VIP Customer'. They may as well say 'Please drop your pants and bend over the table by that unnecessarily large hammer action masonry drill'."

"They're one of our software vendors; it's just a renewal notice."

"That remains to be seen," I say, flipping the page. "Blah, blah, blah, royal shafting."

"Where?"

"There," I say, pointing to the last page of the renewal invoice.

"It's just the bill!"

"Yes, but see the little boxes for you to tick the products you want to renew with larger boxes for the number of licenses that you wish to renew?"

"Yes."

"And all the boxes are empty?"

"Yes."

"How do they get filled in?"

"I suppose I fill them in."

"With what?"

"I tick the Boxes and enter the numbers."

"Which boxes and which numbers?" I ask.

"I DON'T BLOODY KNOW!" the Boss snaps, getting a little tired of the interrogation.

"And there's my point. We don't even USE some of this software, so suddenly you'd start paying maintenance on software we don't have. More importantly, after we've been paying for... I dunno... three years, they'll say there's a **major release** and we need to **pay** for that, which we'll do because we're paying maintenance on it so we **must** be using it somewhere. The best bit though, is the number of licenses. We're a Valuable VIP Customer..."

"What does that mean?"

"It means they think we're stupid and have lots of money to spend. If we're that valuable surely they'd REMEMBER the number of licenses we had and just pre-fill in the form for us."

"So they're... ..?"

"Wanting us to do one of two things - mistakenly fill in the form with an overly large number so they make a bit more cash. OR, mistakenly fill in the form with a low number so they wait a couple of months before saying that a routine license review noticed we underestimated our licenses by a certain amount and that because the expiry period has passed these licenses now cost an extortionate amount. *'Which would still be cheaper than involving the legal representatives of our two companies'...*"

"So how many licenses do we use?"

"Who knows? The larger the company the more obscure the number of licenses held. When it's completely impossible you become a Valuable VIP customer."

"So what are we going to do?"

"Well you could go from room to room counting licenses."

"I don't thi..."

"Or we could force an application out to every desktop to report licenses - which would upset the civil libertarians who'd think we were spying on them."

"I..."

"Or you **could** let me talk to the vendor when they call."

"I.. why don't I talk to them?"

"Because you'll get flustered and sign up for 100 of everything."

"I don't think that I'm tha..."

"So you think that you're capable of talking to them without losing your rag?"

"Yes I think I'm qu..."

"And you won't get thrown off by technical speak?"

"No, I thin..."

"Even if they offer you confusing options which actually amount to exactly the same offer reworded?"

"Yes, I'm.."

"Even when you can't get a single question or statement out because they keep interrupting you?"

"I CAN BLOODY DEAL WITH THEM!!!"

"And that, your honor, concludes the case for the prosecution," the PFY mumbles.

So it's decided that I'll talk to them - and not a moment too soon...

>Ring<

"Hi Simon here. Yes, he's here, but I handle our license renewals... Uh huh... Mmm Hmmm... Yes... Well how's about you people come back with the number of licenses **you** think we've got - you must have them in a database somewhere.... . .

You don't? Well in that case we're not using **any** of your products anymore....

. .

Oh, you think you might have **found** some 'historic' documentation of our license purchases... .. Uh-huh... ..

Well I think we **both** know that **those** numbers are slightly inflated... Uh-huh...

I still think *were it to involve our legal representatives* we might find that you're charging us for licenses... Oh, you think there **might** have been a 'spreadsheet error'?... . . .Yes, that's a much more realistic number..

Though it's just occurred to me that if it's happened now it's probably happened in the past - which would mean our *legal representatives* might.... a credit? Yes, that's probably a good idea.... .. Yes, made out to CASH, as in Johnny...

And if you could just send the documentation to me in an email with a new invoice... Bye now."

"How did it go?" the Boss asks.

"They're sending us a revised license estimate and reducing our maintenance fee."

"Did you mention a credit?" the Boss asks.

"No."

"I'm sure you said something about it."

"Please! Would I rip off a Valuable VIP employer like you?"

BOFH: Interview with a CEO

Witnesses, what witnesses?

Published Friday 21st April 2006 10:44 GMT

Episode 15 It's late at night and I'm in the CEO's office rifling through his correspondence for evidence of the much-rumored budget cuts in IT. Apparently, the powers that be have decided that the IT spend isn't reducing as fast as the board would like, so they're just going to hack out a major part of the annual budget and see how we cope with the pain. Or so the document says...

I'm midway through the re-edit of the document on the CEO's laptop (recommending increased investment for future growth, blah, blah) when the man himself walks in. And when I say walk I mean a drunken stagger, assisted by a couple of young women with the aura of professional services delivery about them.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he fumes alcoholically.

"Just doing some, uh, out of hours maintenance work," I say, touch typing the remainder of the sentence about one-off bonus payments for key technical staff and closing the document."

"How'd you get in?"

"With the key?"

"What key?"

"This one," I say, selecting the appropriate key from a large ring on the CEO's desktop.

"Where'd you get them from?" he asks, going for the belligerency heavyweight title.

"Security?"

"How?"

Sigh.

"We have keys to all areas of the building - to fix faults, particularly out of hours."

"My laptop doesn't have a fault!"

"No," I adlib. "I was just using it to DETECT a fault - in the...uh... network connectivity"

"It's not connected to the network!" he slurs.

"I'm using the built-in wireless network," I say, pulling another one out of the adlib bag.

"I disabled that," he counters.

"Yes, but I re-enabled it - to test for coverage patterns, structure penetration, solar flare interference and suchlike."

"Solar flares? At night?"

"When we least expect them," I nod, knowingly.

"You're just nosing through my office aren't you? Trying to find something worth stealing?"

"No no, I took all that weeks ago. Nice brandy by the way"

"So you **admit** you're stealing?"

"Only the good stuff. You'll note that I left the corked wine and the aftershave-quality gin behind. And as for the 'home movies' in your office safe. >shudder< "

"You're for the high jump!" he snarls.

In situations like this, harsh experience has taught me that the best course is usually to admit fault in the first instance and attempt to diffuse the situation in the second.

"You're probably right." I admit, "It does look pretty damning. You caught me red handed in your office, using your laptop, stealing your drinks and about to take a dump in your top drawer - which reminds me can you hand me some paper - the company newsletter will do - there's a photo of you on the front this month isn't there?"

Never could get the hang of that second part...

"I...most certainly will not, you..."

"Oh, well perhaps you could get one of your **nieces** to do it then?"

"They're not my...ah."

CAN ANYONE ELSE SMELL A PERFORMANCE BONUS IN THE NEAR FUTURE?!!

"Yes, I see the similarity between them and your wife," I say, tapping the desktop photo.

"Yes well..." the CEO burbles, going for the suave save.

"...in that all three are women. At least I think she's a woman. A bit on the mannish side, but I'm sure she's all original - no major structural alterations, plumbing refits, etc?"

"Leave my wife out of this - you broke into my office!"

"No, no, I'm here in pursuit of a fault."

"Oh yes, and what fault would that be - I think we'll find there's no wireless network up here at all!"

"Which in itself would be a fault, but no, I was here because...your desktop machine was damaged"

"It's not dama.. >SHOVE< >CRASH!<"

"Looks like it was dropped," I say, "which is a simple replacement job - hardly worth me tackling after hours. Still, better safe than sorry!"

"You just did that!" he gasps,

"No I didn't!"

"You did, and I have witnesses!"

"Witnesses? What witnesses? Ladies, did you see anything?"

"It depends," one of them says astutely.

"On?" the CEO asks.

"The number I'm thinking of," she responds, even more astutely.

"Is it a large number?" I ask. "A large number with something that looks like an L in front of it?"

"That's the one!"

"I'll just have to check my bank balance," I say, grabbing the CEO's phone.

"Whatever you're wanting I'll double it," the Boss says, catching on.

"So let me get this straight," I say, moments later, "you're offering these two ladies of your acquaintance double the amount of money they're thinking of PLUS whatever you were offering them before, to continue your night of debauchery and claim that they saw me push your desktop machine off the desk?"

"Indeed."

"Well, I can't compete with that. I can only offer the amount of money I'm thinking of, which is 200 quid."

"I was already going to pay more than that."

"Well I guess you win. But wait, silly me, did I accidentally press the quick dial number for your home instead of the number to your bank? And is that your wife on the other end of the phone instead of the automated attendant. And is she probably thinking of ringing the bank, reporting your cards as being stolen and locking you out of the house before freezing your communal assets?? Oh...she's rung off!"

>SLAM!< >clatter<

"So ladies, who fancies a rather nasty gin?"

BOFH: That security thang

A journey, not a destination

Published Friday 28th April 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 16 "Excellent work on that security thing" the new Boss burbles happily. "A hacker would be lucky to see our web pages now, let alone hack them, the system is so secure!"

"Security is a journey, not a destination," the PFY nods, exuding a Zen-like vibe.

"Like Slough," I add.

"No, that's 'a craphole, not a destination'," the PFY corrects.

"What?" the boss Burbles, "I'm from Slough!"

"Course you are," the PFY says kindly, patting him on the shoulder.

"I..." the Boss starts, then thinks the better of it. "So, how do we access the online resources that we used to?"

"Which online resources are they then?"

"Oh, just online stuff. Some of my stuff isn't working anymore."

"The online virus downloading site?"

"Eh?"

"The Russian 'shareware movie' site that you watch movies on."

"I...what!?"

"Oh puleese, we monitor peer-to-peer networking like hawks. Mainly to see if there's anything good coming down, but also because it's virus central if you're not too selective about what you download. IF YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN," the PFY says, nudging the boss's arm.

"No, they said that there were no copyright issues because the site's in Turgekenistan!"

"Ah Turgekenistan, one of the more easygoing of the imaginary East European nations."

"But I paid money to see them! They said it was all kosher!"

"As kosher as a ham sandwich with a side order of bacon," I respond. "With pork ice-cream for afters. Incidentally, what's your credit card limit?"

"What? Why?"

"Just want to know what sort of bill you've racked up buying stuff online in the Ukraine?"

"I've not boug... ... >crash!< >rush!< >patter patter< >slam!<"

"Do you think it'll be bad?" the PFY asks.

"As bad as...a large rear-projection TV and a HDD-based DVD recorder in a lockup in Bayswater..."

"You didn't!"

"Course I bloody did! There was blood in the water!"

"But what about me?"

"Don't worry, I got you a selection of DVDs."

"Oh, thanks. But surely he'll cancel the order before it's delivered!" the PFY responds.

"Ordinarily yes, but the secret is to use a multinational company then ring them and tell them that, with the internet being so confusing and all, you think you **might** have accidentally placed your order at the .com site instead of the .co.uk site, and if so it'll take **forever** to get delivered, so could they **possibly** rush the delivery **locally** in time for the wife's birthday - **whatever** the cost, then fix it up with the .com people"

"And you really think it'll work?"

"Oh, yes. In fact, they got here last night."

"Really?! So where's my DVDs?"

"In the box under your desk!" I reply.

I'm hardly back in my chair before the PFY is doing a bit of gift horse dentistry.

"What!? The Sound of bloody Music!?"

"The FIVE STAR remastered version!"

>shuffle<

"BAD BOY BUBBY?!"

"A...classic!" I say, thinking hard to find a euphemistic phrase with no direct link to excrement.

"Driller Killer?! Anne of Green Gables! BLOODY Sheltering BLOODY Sky!!!"

"Oh, I thought I'd ordered the Bertolucci Omnibus!"

>shuffle<

"That's Bloody IT!"

"What?"

"TITANIC! What the hell were you thinking?"

"I...well nothing really. I clicked on the 30 cheapest DVDs - after all I was on a limited budget."

"You bastard!"

The PFY's 10 minute monologue on the genus of my family tree and its reentrancy are interrupted by the Boss' return.

"THEY'VE BLOODY CLEANED ME OUT!" he wails.

"That's terrible," I cry, almost meaning it.

"I talked to the security people and they said..."

"Sorry, you talked to OUR security?"

"Yes, and they..."

"About an electronic transaction?"

"Yes, and..."

"And you know their skills in computing are limited to putting a red card on a black card?"

"Or vice versa," the PFY says.

"No, they ring the helpdesk for that."

"Yes, yes," the Boss snaps. "But they have some contacts and apparently it's been delivered locally all I need to do is find the vending website within 24 hours, ring the credit card company, and they can trace the package delivery and have the police standing by when the culprit arri..."

>KZZZERT!<

"Oh! The Boss has fainted!" I say slipping a couple of sleeping tablets into a glass "I'd best get him some water!"

"But **I** think I've got smelling salts in my desk," the PFY proffers helpfully. "Which I could **probably** find - which would bring him around **before** you got back with the water...unless..."

"Unless?" I say, recognizing my old friend blackmail from a distance.

"Unless my eyesight were to fail (because of the ridiculously small television screen I'm forced to use) and I weren't able to find them in time."

"An eyesight problem which would be rectified by a larger TV screen?" I sigh, knowing the answer already.

"Ja Mein Herr!"

"Ok, it's a deal - but...I'll need a hand keeping him out of the way for a few hours."

"Sorted!"

Quarter of an hour later the PFY is helping the Boss onto a train to Slough with a one-way ticket stub stapled to his jacket (and a half bottle of sherry and a suspicious stain on his groin to ward off the curious).

Finding his second credit card was a bit of a bonus, as was finding the .com website with a sale on B-grade movies...

The PFY's going to be so happy!

BOFH: Power down blues

Averse altruism

Published Friday 19th May 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 17 So I get into work to find out that one of the cleaners has switched my bloody desktop off overnight, **again**, in the interests of power saving. No matter how many times I tell them not to the order is countermanded by the head of the cleaning staff, whose extensive and ongoing work with the intricacies of the Playstation has equipped him with the technical wherewithal to understand the nuances of leaving a computer on while debugging code to the screen.

So the x application I've been running in window for the better part of 72 hours is gone, which is in itself enough to make me want to strangle someone.

"I'm sure they didn't do it on purpose," the Boss says in calming tones, after I make yet another complaint to him.

My annoyance increases when my screen card pops its clogs at power on. Admittedly, it was bound to happen sooner or later - dangerously overclocked as it was - as the cooling fan had been getting slower and noisier for months as the faint burning odor got worse.

I think calming thoughts and go to look through the spares parts boxes.

...

Only there aren't any spares parts boxes.

"Where are the spares boxes?" I ask the PFY.

"In the Tape room?" the PFY responds.

"No..." I reply.

"Well I don't know where they are - they were there last week when I...borrowed...a disk drive for my home machine."

"The BOSS!" I snap.

...seconds later, in the Boss's office...

"Oh I gave them to my kid's school!" he blurts. "They mentioned in their newsletter that they were looking for unwanted equipment"

"So you just took it?"

"No one was using it!"

"It was spares. Hard drives, memory, and cards. Some of it was new!"

"Really? It didn't look like anyone was using it!"

"It was spares!"

"Well, **I** can hardly be expected to know the difference, can I? I mean do I **look** like Stephen Bloody Hawking?"

"Not especially."

"Then it can't be helped. Anyway, it was for a good cause. And anyway, we're getting a certificate of their appreciation."

NGGGGGG!!!! I cut my losses and comfort myself by finding the most expensive graphics card on the market, and ordering one of those.

"Isn't that a little.. uh.. expensive for a graphics card?" the Boss asks.

"It would be if it was just a graphics card, but sadly my motherboard won't support the new style PCI-X card, so I had to buy a new motherboard, including processor and RAM. Then the power supply needed upgrading to cope with it all, which in turn meant the case needed to be upgraded.

"So you bought a whole new machine?" the Boss asks.

"No, I kept the DVD writer, floppy, and hard drive from the old one..."

"How about you just buy a screen card from one of the retailers down the street with petty cash?" the Boss suggests with more than a hint of sarcasm.

"I could, but the failure of the old card may have caused some damage to the motherboard which will in turn break the new card."

"Given the price difference, I think I'll take that risk," the Boss replies sarcastically.

...

"It looks like it's been hit with a hammer!" the boss blurts a couple of hours later, after I show him the remnants of the new card.

"Yes, probably a power fluctuation in the motherboard - so replacing that power supply would have been a good idea after all..."

"I suppose you're right," the boss sighs resignedly - realizing (in a rare moment of clarity) that it won't take too long for my hammer to work its way through his petty cash budget. "Get the new parts - and we'll give anything that's still working to the school - there's too much crap laying about the place!"

Sigh

...The next morning...

"Ok, where's my office furniture gone?!" the Boss snaps, bursting into Mission Control.

"Oh that! I gave that to a school last night. I had to ring around to find one that wanted the stuff, but in the end one of them leapt at the opportunity."

"IT WAS **MY** OFFICE FURNITURE!"

"Yes, but it went to a good cause."

"IT...WAS...MINE!"

"Yeah, but it didn't look like you were using it!"

"I **WAS** USING IT!"

"Well, I can hardly be expected to know that. I mean, do I look like Bruce, the stores guy?"

"Well where are my clothes?"

"Clothes?"

"The two suits hanging behind the door"

"Oh those - well **there** you're in luck. None of the schools I called needed clothes."

"So where are they?"

"I gave them to a homeless bloke outside the building."

"And that's the good news is it?" the Boss fumes.

"No, the good news is he exchanged them for this half bottle of Gin."

"It's...a bit...yellow, isn't it?" the PFY asks.

"Good point, he exchanged them for this half bottle of piss..."

"GET OUT!"

Ah, well...

BOFH: Blast from the past

Old flame ignites trouble

Published Friday 26th May 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 18 "That's...odd..." the PFY says early one morning, looking at his screen distractedly.

"What's odd?" I ask, coming to the point quickly so that I can get back to recounting the story about myself, some raspberry vodka and a handful of female reps from an anti-virus show booth...

"The Financials Database - it's just sent me an email saying it hasn't been backed up for 187 days."

"Ridiculous!" I cry, hastening to the PFY's side as I realise that any problem with this system could impact the paying of my monthly invoice - which might in turn impair my ability to purchase sufficient quantities of raspberry vodka with which to entertain enticing young women from anti-virus show booths....

"It's true," he says, pointing to the screen. "There's a stack of them. And there's some saying that the redo log area hasn't been archived for 187 days, 22 hours."

"It can't be!" I say. "I have a batch job which exception-checks the backup log output - it's seen nothing!"

"Nothing because it isn't running, or nothing because there's no errors?"

"I...No, it's working - it flagged a tape drive that needed cleaning just last week!"

"So what's sending us the errors?"

"I dunno - what was different 187 days ago?"

"I'd only heard the story about the anti-virus women and the vodka about 200 times?" the PFY says unkindly.

"No, what happened around that time in our system? Did it reboot or something?" I ask, ignoring the PFY's sad attempt to ridicule the Everest of my career as a tradeshow attendee.

>clickety< "Uptime on the financials server is 203 days" the PFY says.

"What about before then?"

"Before then it wasn't there - it was a hardware upgrade, remember?"

"So it was," I reply thoughtfully. "But we checked that the backups were running at the time - so the email must be spurious - UNLESS..."

"Unless what?"

"What happened to the old server?"

"Server Graveyard," the PFY says, pointing into the tape safe room.

"You're sure?"

"Put it there myself," the PFY says, opening the door. "Right there in the corner by the..it's gone!"

NGGGAAARGG!

"Check the server info database, get the old hardware address and find out where it's plugged in!" I snap.

...

"Yes?" the Boss asks, as I bounce his door open without knocking.

"Where is it?" I demand.

"Where's what?" he asks, faking innocence.

"The old financials server!"

"What old financials server?"

"The old financials server you took from the tape safe room. The one plugged into port E-145?"

"I don't have a 'port E-145' - whatever that is - and in any case I'm in a meeting - do you mind?"

"Don't mind me," the helldesk geek gasps from behind the door.

"No no, this is an important meeting!" the Boss counters. "We can deal with whatever they're on about later."

"Oh, well I'll just wait outside till you're done then..." I suggest.

"We could be here for some time," the Boss burbles, obviously trying to think up a plan to sneak the machine out of his room while I'm not around. "A couple of hours even."

"Got all the time in the world!" I respond.

"A couple of hours at the **earliest**..."

"Fine by me...although I won't want to miss lunch. They've got Chilli Bhajis on the menu as a Johnny Cash tribute!"

"I can't promise anything," the Boss lies. "We might still be talking..."

"Tell you what, I'll camp out here in case you get finished earlier than lunch, otherwise I'll pop in tomorrow when the old Ring of Fire's died down."

"Ok, fine" the Boss says, pushing the door closed...

...

"Did you find it?" the PFY asks when I get back to Mission Control.

"Nah, he's got it hidden away in his cupboard. I couldn't hear any noise, but I noticed a cable going in there."

"So what do we do, disable the port?"

"That would be at most a temporary fix. Bear in mind that he somehow got E-145 livened."

"You mean to say he's been in the comms room!!!" the PFY gasps.

"It would appear so."

"What do you want me to do?" the PFY asks, realising that this is serious.

"Flip the breaker on the building airconditioning, while I login to the old server and disable one of the power supplies."

"Why?"

"So the redundant supply will switch to double speed - and about quadruple noise."

"Won't he just switch it off?"

"Not when you go in to investigate the 'loud computer noise' in his office and he makes up some lie about his desktop always making that noise."

"And what will you be doing?"

"Getting his desktop and the server to exercise their CPU and disk drives aggressively in an effort to..."

"...raise the room temperature by a degree every three minutes or so.." the PFY nods. "And with the aircon off he'll have heatstroke by...uh...just before morning tea time..."

"Indeed."

"MASTER PLAN!" the PFY chirps.

...

In retrospect, no one could have known the Boss would stash the server beside a stack of papers in the cupboard, or that the thermal cutout in the machine was located in the disabled power supply... Suffice to say that the resulting fire was contained inside of five minutes - although the PFY did leave the firehose running inside the Boss' briefcase for a couple more minutes in case there was a potential 'hotspot' amongst the Boss' cellphone, digital camera, PDA or watch.

Not the way we normally decommission servers, but still, it all worked out well in the end and that's the best we can hope for...

BOFH: Union 'negotiations'

'It's not about the money'

Published Friday 2nd June 2006 10:34 GMT

Episode 19 As fate would have it, I've been asked by the unions to see what I can do about getting the computer support staff an across-the-board salary increase. After lengthy protestations about my unsuitability for the job I'm eventually convinced that I may have something to offer by the impassioned pleas of the union delegate.

The 500 quid up front helped sway me, as did the promise of a full Archer if I can swing more than five per cent.

I decide that the best approach is a full frontal assault against the Boss and the head of IT, so arrange to meet with them both in a secluded meeting room.

"As I'm sure you're aware, I was recently contracted to act as a third party union negotiator," I start.

"No, But you're a **contractor** - you're not even **in** the union!" the Boss protests.

"It's a separate contract."

"But you're contracted to us as well. Isn't that a conflict of interests?" the head of IT blurts.

"Only if I were interested in either party - which I'm not. However, I'm sure that it would be of interest to you to know the complaints that have been brought to my attention"

"Complaints? So this isn't about money?"

"Of course not. No, I have a number of complaints that people have brought to my attention which need addressing."

"Which people?"

"I'm afraid that the people concerned wish to remain anonymous so as not to risk being singled out for some form of retribution."

"All right then, but what are these complaints?"

"Well, as you know, a few months back there was some discussion about Quantum Computing?"

"Vaguely," the head of IT responds.

"Well, the union members would like some assurances about the safety of this as a technology."

"What do you mean safety exactly?"

"We'd like some assurances that anyone using a Quantum Computer won't be - for instance - thrown into the future somehow."

"What?"

"Sent into the future - or the past for that matter."

"What're you talking about?"

"The members would like to be assured that they won't suffer the same fate as that guy on Quantum Leap", I explain.

"QUANTUM LEAP WAS A BLOODY TV PROGRAM!" the Boss shouts, "IT WASN'T REAL!"

"Nevertheless, I think the members would like a written assurance."

"This is ridiculous. Quantum Computing is perfectly safe!"

"Yes, they said that about asbestos."

"This isn't F---ing asbestos!" the head of IT shouts.

"Yes. Item 2, the members would like free access to learning materials to further their knowledge in computing."

"We're not stopping them learning more about computing! **You're** the one putting all the magazines through the shredder as soon as they turn up!"

"Yes...I don't think we should be naming names here, it's just not helpful. Now, I should emphasize that no one here is **blaming** anyone for the poor state of affairs that these individuals have been subjected to in an almost criminal manner."

"YOU'RE THE ONE DOING IT!"

"Once more, we're not here to name names or apportion blame to the people who've been responsible for allowing this sort of thing to go on unchecked in a manner which has created a hostile workplace environment."

"YOU'RE CREATING THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT!"

"Right, well I can see we've reached an impasse on Item 1 and Item 2 so perhaps we'll see if item 3 would be more workable."

"What's that?"

"The members would like some assurance that they won't be affected by the radiation from the mobile phone towers on the building."

"There aren't any mobile phone transceivers on the building?" the head of IT says.

"There aren't any now, but there might be some in the future. So the members would like to get a comprehensive company medical plan should any of them suffer ill effects from radiation."

"WHAT BLOODY RADIATION, THERE'S NO TRANSCEIVERS?!"

"Not at the moment, but at some point in the future there **might** be."

"So what, we'll cross that bridge when we decide to put transceivers up."

"So you admit you're going to install transceivers?"

"I said nothing of the sort!"

"Yes you did, you said WHEN, not IF."

"LOOK, I can't know if the company, at some point in the future, will put up transceivers for cell phones any more than I can tell if they're going to...I don't know.., make the staff all wear company colored uniforms or something. It might happen, it might not"

"So what you're saying is that the company MAY, at some stage in the future, install cell phone transceivers which will emit possibly harmless radiation onto the staff. When combined with the possibility that Quantum Computing could possibly send someone INTO this harmful environment, I think that we should probably be making this medical plan available right now!"

"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT! PEOPLE WON'T BE SENT INTO THE FUTURE AND WE WON'T BE INSTALLING CELL PHONE TRANSCEIVERS!" the head of IT shouts.

"I...think that in this...hostile...environment perhaps a compromise would be the best way forward. Perhaps if management were to...compensate the people most likely to be affected by these changes - in the manner of a token gesture - perhaps the issue would, well, go away."

"So it IS about money," the Boss sighs.

"I think a seven per cent increase across board for the computer support staff would be positively received."

"I don't think so," the head of IT says. "And as for the suggestion that they'd believe any of that nonsense - that's just ludicrous."

"It's not them I'd be worried about - it's the rest of the staff. Once one of two of them start voicing their concerns in the company cafeteria..."

"They'd be out the door so fast their feet wouldn't touch the ground!" the Head snaps.

"And when one of their fellow workers happened to mention that the REAL reason they'd gone is that they'd been sucked into the future and the whole 'firing' thing is just a cover-up..."

"You're serious aren't you?"

"Serious enough to get the support staff to start wearing tinfoil hats..." I say.

"I...I'll give you five per cent."

"Six or nothing"

"I...OK," the head of IT folds. "Six percent it is and not a penny more!"

"OK, I accept on behalf of my members, six percent plus, say a 10 quid a week clothing allowance."

"What clothing allowance?"

"What - you expect them to pay for the company-colored uniform out of their own wages?"

BOFH: Dr Bastard's lab challenge

Mickey Mouse inventions

Published Friday 16th June 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 20 So it's time for the annual challenge between the PFY and I to create the ultimate item for Doctor Bastard's lab. I've been looking forward to this for some time as I have a couple of items that I've been perfecting that are bound to be of use to my fellow bastards in years to come.

"Are we ready?" the PFY asks, cheerfully.

"Go for it" I say, waiting to see what he has for me.

"Item the first!" he cries, pulling out a small plate with a few wires coming out of it "an automatic toilet door opener!"

"For opening toilet doors?" I ask.

"Yes."

"Any toilet door?"

"No - for opening the toilet doors of those 'smart' pay public toilets."

"Uh...don't they open automatically by themselves already?"

"Yes, but there's one small difference..."

"Yes?"

"This one makes the door open when it hears an UUUURRRRRGGGGGHHHH noise."

"...catching the user in an awkward moment," I finish.

"Yes"

"It's a bit...uh...untargeted isn't it?"

"But still a lot of fun!" the PFY says. "Well, what've you got?"

"I present," I cry, waving my hand at my PC. "Interactive focusing!"

"Huh?" the PFY says, looking at my machine.

"Sit down, look at the screen."

"...Nothing" the PFY says, after following my instructions.

"Give it time..."

"Hey, it's going blurry!"

"Now move your eyes."

"It's sharp again!"

"Indeed. I have some software which polls your eye movement and tweaks the display driver when you've stared at the same spot for too long. If you look away or blink more than twice it returns focus to normal."

"What's the point?"

"Well, there's a lot of configurables which can be used to good effect. I can tweak the amount of time you need to wait till focus drifts, the amount of drift, the amount of time till it comes back, etc - which would lead someone to the false assumption that they might need eyeglasses, eye drops, or just a new expensive monitor..."

"Hmmm." the PFY says doubtfully.

"Okay, what else have you got?"

"A business card scanner which translates job titles into what they **really** do," the PFY replies, pointing to a USB device attached to his machine.

"So you put in the business card of a personnel consultant in and..."

"...it magically changes their job title to slave trader."

"And a sales rep?"

"Crap peddler."

"A middle manager?" I ask, as the Boss enters.

"GIT! And it's got dip switches on the bottom to set the offensiveness of the lookup table. At the moment it's only on level one, too, but you can set it right up til..."

"Is that a business card scanner?" the Boss interrupts, blundering into Mission Control. "The head of IT has been looking for one for some time, but I haven't been able to located one for him."

"Well, what the hell, he can have this one," the PFY says magnanimously. "I hardly ever use it. I'll just set all the...uh...high density scanning options."

The boss wanders off happily, while I unveil my next invention.

"Self correcting keyboard," I say "It's got a dictionary built into the ROM."

"What's cool about that?" the PFY asks.

"The cool bit is that you can configure it to the user's IQ. All switches down for a MENSA candidate..."

"And for someone like the boss?"

"Break the switch!"

"It's pretty crap," the PFY says. "My remote control mouse driver is better."

"The one which uses an IR mouse to override the wired one?" I ask. "No, nothing flash there. HOWEVER, when you put it together with my SUITE of tools you've got a goer!!"

"Suite?"

"Indeed, your remote control mouse (with mods) and my self correcting keyboard."

"What mods?" the PFY asks, ignoring my prize creation completely.

"Well, your mouse driver requires someone to be there - my mods don't."

"How do they work then?" the PFY asks sulkily. "And how did you know about my mouse?"

"I see all. As for the mods, there's two basic mods, triggered by a menu activation. When a menu bar comes down the driver, upon getting a mouse click, moves the pointer up or down a random amount, then clicks - selecting a different option."

"Right," the PFY says thoughtfully.

"THEN, if a dialogue box appears, it waits for a mouse click and then moves the pointer a random amount sideways and clicks. It keeps trying till the dialogue box disappears. I call it the mickey mouse driver, although for obvious marketing reasons I'd call it something else."

"And the other mod?"

"When you're typing in a field the driver moves the pointer to another field and activates that - you know, like crap web forms do all the bloody time."

"And that's it - that's your suite?"

"Ok, I was holding this back - my tourettes spell checker. When you spell check your document it replaces personal pronouns with...uh...other words."

"You mean like my business card scanner does? You took my ideas?"

"The focusing thing is all my own work!"

"And you stole all the rest?"

"What can I say, all property is theft!" I say kindly.

"Who said that, Lenin?!"

"Nah, it was probably one of the other Beatles."

BOFH: Double whammy

No time to argue

Published Friday 23rd June 2006 10:53 GMT

Episode 21 "It's a capacitor - uhhh, electrolytic," the PFY says, gazing into space, deep in concentration.

"What?" the Boss asks, looking vacant.

"Nah," I reply. "There was no bang, and besides it's got that siliconny edge to it."

"A Power Transistor?"

"BINGO!" I cry.

"WHAT!?" the Boss snaps.

"That smell. Something's cooked in the machine room and the smell's leaked through the aircon, so we're trying to figure out what it was."

"Can't you just look in the machine room?"

"Where's the fun in that?" the PFY asks.

"Yeah, that's no fun at all. Anyway, I'm thinking power supply," I add.

"If it's a power transistor it's almost certain to be, BUT, for the bonus point question, did it short out or open circuit?" the PFY asks.

"What does that mean?" the Boss interrupts.

"If it's shorted it will have almost certainly taken out a circuit breaker - plus all the power supplies of machines on that breaker - but if it's open circuit it'll just be the one machine."

"How can you tell that from a smell?"

"It's an educated guess thing," I reply. "For instance, older kit tended to have older technology with larger components which generally meant more current required to cook them which in combination meant more smell. Newer kit has such smaller componentry and advanced heatsinking that it often barely makes a sound when it fails - particularly if it's a short circuit failure."

"Huh?"

"If it's an open circuit failure," the PFY explains scribbling vague component diagrams on the whiteboard, "there's likely to be a small component which died meaning a small sound and a small smell, but if it's a short circuit failure there's liable to be a large bang and lots of smell."

"Hadn't you better go and check?"

"No, if there's a system outage we'd be paged and as you can see there's been no..."

BEEP *BEEP* *BEEP*

"..?" the boss implies.

"No, that's just a single page, if it's important there'd be..."

BEEP *BEEP* *BEEP*

"Now will you check?"

"In a moment, the second beep just means that it's an important server, but if it were really urg..."

BEEP *BEEP* *BEEP*

...Seconds later, in the computer room...

"It's alright, no need to panic!" the PFY says. "It's just the salaries payments machine."

"And why shouldn't we panic about that!?" the Boss gasps.

"Because we're contractors, we get paid through accounts receivable," I reply.

"I'm not a contractor!"

"Ah, well in that case forget what I just said," the PFY says.

"So our payroll system is down?" the Boss gasps.

"No, no."

"Oh, it's a redundant system?"

"No, the payroll system is up, it's just the machine that dials up the bank to feed the data about who gets paid what isn't."

"How long will it take to fix?"

"It depends what's wrong with it"

"You just said it was a power supply!"

"Yes, it probably is, but it's not technically our machine - it's the bank's. That being the case we're not permitted to open it. To make it worse, the machine is fitted with a tamper evident high security locking system so we can't open it even if we had discovered that the lock wasn't all that 'high' security."

"Who's got the key then?"

"Finance, possibly - but if the case is opened the High Security BIOS in the machine will lock it from powering on until someone from the bank enters a special enabling number."

"Why?"

"I believe the thinking was that if the box was made super secure then no-one would be able to insert...uh.. extra payments...into the data that was sent to the bank."

"Yes, that probably makes sense," the Boss nods.

"Yeah, you're right," the PFY says sarcastically. "It would be so much more difficult to insert a couple of extra rows into our salaries database just before the data transfer to the payments machine then, delete them immediately after..."

"Or inserting a second machine - like that laptop over there - into the serial line between the salaries database and salaries payments machines and just add a couple of payments to the data stream..." I add.

"I'll...uh... call finance," the Boss mumbles.

...Later that day..

"A dud capacitor," the engineer says pointing into the power supply.

"Really?" the PFY says smugly. "Not something siliconny?"

"Point taken," I admit dryly. "So how long will it take to fix?"

"Hmmmmm" the engineer sighs, in the manner that only engineers and mechanics can manage. "...Tricky."

"How tricky?" the Boss asks.

"Dunno, when do you need it by?" the engineer asks shrewdly.

"As soon as possible," the Boss says, making the proverbial land-war-in-Asia classic blunder.

"Weeeellllll, it'd probably be costly," he says, thinking pound signs.

"What if we have a replacement power supply?" the PFY suggests.

"You'd void the warranty," the engineer warns, countering the PFY's counteroffer.

"Not if an engineer were paid...CASH...to install it," the PFY observes.

...ten seconds later..

"So it's agreed, I'll give you a power supply and you get 50 quid to install it."

"And everyone's pay will go through," the Boss says happily. "I'll just go and sort out the 50 quid."

"A...hundred quid" the PFY says.

"Huh?"

"Fifty quid for installation, and 50 quid for the supply."

"They're our power supplies!"

"No, they're power supplies I rescued before the kit went into the bin!"

"I...guess I don't have time to argue," the Boss blurts, folding at the thought of missing an automatic mortgage payment.

...five minutes later...

"..and here's YOUR 50 quid"

"Thanks," the PFY says graciously. "Fire her up."

"Sure thing," the engineer says, flicking the switch.

>Click< >CRACK!<

"Now **THAT** was a power transistor!" I snap.

"Sure sounded like one," the engineer says. "So what do we do now?"

"Get a replacement power supply from your office before five!" the Boss gasps.

"Get there and back in an hour and install it? You've got to be joking"

"I may have another spare power supply..." the PFY suggests. "...But this one's a little more expensive."

"And there's probably going to be an additional power supply reinstallation charge..." the engineer hints.

Something tells me that's the start of a beautiful friendship...

BOFH: Champion of culture

Get rid of *what* to cut costs?

Published Friday 7th July 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 22 "I don't know what to say," the PFY snuffles as the Boss breaks the sad news to him. "Will it be...quick?"

"It'll over in no time," the Boss reassures him.

"And how is everyone taking it?"

"Apart from you, pretty well actually," the Boss replies.

"But why?" the PFY bleats.

"Its time had come - we all knew that. It's just too expensive to keep."

"Wasn't there some other way? It was a piece of history."

"No, I'm afraid that once the bills started mounting up it was the best thing to do for everyone concerned."

"But it was a classic!"

"It was just a rusty old van!"

"It may have been a rusty old van to you, but to me it was a driving experience!"

"A bad experience," the Boss snaps, losing his hitherto supportive demeanor.

"No, it was great. You could hit a judder bar at 35mph with no problems - except that time we lost the muffler, of course. Not to mention it could get into any parking space - no matter how small - without any damage."

"Without any **further** damage, you mean," I correct.

"Granted, it had some...love bites."

"It was a wreck!" the Boss blurts.

"Only cosmetically. Structurally it was built like a battleship!"

"I hardly think it was all that..."

"He's right," I interrupt. "It **was** built like a battleship - we got it second-hand from the prison service when they privatized their transportation. It was unusually rare."

"And unusually expensive to keep running. Why, the diesel costs alone..."

"Are you sure we can't keep it?" the PFY pleads.

"No, it's going, we had a budget cut last week and we realized it was too costly to run," the Boss snaps.

"That's what they said about the espresso machine!"

"Yes, That's going tomorrow," the Boss mumbles.

"Beg pardon?" I croak.

"The espresso machine - it's going tomorrow."

"You can't do that - it's been part of the company for years!"

"So had the van."

"It means a great deal to people."

"So apparently did the van!"

"It's a landmark!"

"Only in that people knew the fax machine was beside it and that you need a swipe card to get to it!!!"

"It has cultural significance!"

"What culture?" the Boss asks.

"The coffee culture!"

"The 'coffee culture' can drink instant like everyone else!"

"Wash your mouth out with soap," the PFY fizzes. "Do you know how many harmful chemicals are in instant?"

"Next to none?"

"That's right, none! When you're three hours into a system install at midnight and need a caffeine pick-me-up to keep you going an instant's just not going to do it!"

"This is ridiculous!" the Boss snaps. "It's costly, only used by a few privileged people and hard to get to!"

"So's St Paul's Cathedral - are you proposing that should be got rid of to save costs too?"

"Now you're just being silly. It's going, tomorrow, so you'll have to make other plans to get your coffee. Perhaps you can get it delivered - at your expense - if you need it that badly."

"I'm telling you, you can't get rid of it," I say. "Or the van either for that matter. They're part of the company now!"

"They're already sold!" the Boss snaps, exiting.

..

"So what do we do?" the PFY asks. "Break them enough that the sale falls through but not so much that we can't repair them later?"

"That wouldn't work - once we'd repaired them the Boss would sneak in and take them. No, what we need is something truly original...Hmmm...I think I have it."

...The next day...

"WHAT THE F*** IS THIS?!" the Boss shouts angrily, crashing into Mission Control full tilt.

"What's what?" I ask.

"This!" he cries, thrusting a couple of sheaves of paper at me.

"Uh...it's what it says," I reply.

"YOU APPLIED FOR HERITAGE PROTECTION FOR A VAN AND A COFFEE MACHINE!!!" he shouts.

"Oh that! Yes, I did," I say.

"You don't stand a chance of getting this approved!" he seethes.

"Why not, we agreed the landmark status and cultural significance?"

"You can't be serious."

"Of course we can. Both items are iconic and have a rich and significant history."

"It'll never get approved!" the Boss repeats.

"No, but then it doesn't have to be," I say.

"What do you mean?"

"Until their eligibility for heritage status is decided they're protected by law - you can't touch them."

"So you've really only protected them for... >shuffle< 15 days till the next hearing."

"Fifteen more days of coffee and driving," I counter.

"...if it even gets to the hearing," the PFY adds.

"What do you mean," the boss asks suspiciously.

"What if the submission got mislaid on the way to the hearing? We might need an extension till the next hearing date. Then the next...then there's the convoluted and escalating appeals process, which is bound to cost the company a lot more than the running costs of an old van and an espresso machine..."

"I...You...A...oh.." the Boss says, wandering out of Mission Control with defeat stenciled all over him.

"Should we tell him about the application to make the pub across the road an official place of worship?"

"Nah, let's leave that till we can muddy up the definition of 'religious observance' in our contracts..."

BOFH: Go on then, subcontract us...

But pay the price

Published Friday 14th July 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 23 "I have a little job for you," the Boss burbles handing a wadge of paper to the PFY.

"A...computer room fit out," the PFY says with disdain, eyeing the papers in the manner generally reserved for the observance of dog excrement on one's footwear. "What's the catch?"

"No catch - I thought you'd find it interesting."

"I didn't think the company had the money to fix the **current** computer room, let alone build a new one - and from scratch on a green fields site if I'm not mistaken," I add, giving the documents the once over.

"That's because it isn't our company building this computer room," the Boss replies.

"But you want us to design it?" the PFY asks.

"Yes."

"Even though we're not contracted to them?"

"No, no, we are contracted to them," the Boss says.

"I meant the Bastard 'we'"

"The Bastard 'we'?"

"It's like the Royal 'we' but far more dangerous," I add helpfully.

"Traffic tunnels in Paris excepted," the PFY adds.

"I...What do you mean not contracted?" the Boss asks.

"THIS company has a contract with ANOTHER company," the PFY explains slowly. "But WE do not."

"Yes, but YOU have a contract with THIS COMPANY," the Boss says equally slowly.

"But not to work for other companies, just to work for this one."

"And this company is subcontracting you to the other company," the Boss replies smugly.

"I think you'll find that our contract..."

"...mentions nothing about subcontracting your services to another company," he counters smartly. "I know - I had the company solicitors give your contract the once-over. As impressed as they were about the numerous strange clauses in your contract - their favourite being the extortionate penalty payment for remaining at work after a UFO sighting in the vicinity of the building - they believe that there's nothing to stop us using you to provide services to other companies."

"I..." the PFY says, looking to me for support.

"He's probably right," I admit grudgingly. "I doubt I ever thought of that contingency."

"It's not like you're not getting PAID for it," the Boss snaps nastily. "So anyway, how long do you think it'll take?"

"To write up a full specification for tender purposes?" I ask.

"Yes"

"Three days or so, depending on interruptions..."

"Ok, get to it then!!" the Boss chirps happily as he trundles out.

...Three days later...

"So this is it then?" the Boss asks, fingering an impressively large pile of paper.

"It is," I say. "The first 10 pages or so are a definition of terms so that some dodgy outfit can't reinterpret, for instance, the words CAT-6 as something other than that intended by a reputable standards body. After that there is a chapter each on power+lighting, generator+UPS, air-conditioning, structured cabling, acceptable cable ducting and feeding methods, underfloor and ceiling space provision, earthquake and flood protection, environmental monitoring and alarms, security systems + access + alarms, secure on and offsite data storage requirements and finally 24x7 services."

"24x7 services?"

"Espresso machine, sofa, TV, fridge, microwave, telephone with pizza company on speed-dial, etc."

"I think we might perhaps leave that one out, but the rest sounds fairly comprehensive."

"As indeed it is. It'll be a couple of weeks of someone's time wading through the responses to that baby," the PFY says, patting the pile of paper happily.

"Which reminds me of another little job I had for you..." the Boss adds smugly.

...

"...and the response we've decided to accept is this one," the PFY says, fingering the successful candidate.

"Why?" the head of IT asks, beating the Boss to the punch.

"They're inexpensive but not cheap, their response was clear and readable, they've got a good track record of putting machine rooms together in the past **and** they use reputable products and people," I say. "It's not often you see all that in one package."

"Well, I have to say that I'm both pleased and surprised," the Boss says cheerfully. "You appear to have done a thorough job of it."

"We **are** professionals, and after all, we were getting PAID to do it," the PFY says, handing this month's invoices to the head of IT.

"Who was it?" the head of IT sighs sadly.

"Him," the PFY says, pointing at the Boss.

"What?" the Boss asks.

"When?" the head of IT asks, ignoring the Boss.

"Moments after we got the word that we had to write up a spec," the PFY adds happily.

"WHAT?" the Boss asks.

"You would have been standing by a window," the head of IT says bitterly, a painful memory of his first week in the company rising to the surface. "And one of these two would have said something like 'look at that, is it an Airbus 320 or an Airbus 340'?"

"The **actual** question was 'is that a 747-200F or a 747-200C'?" the PFY says.

"Yes?" the Boss says.

"And you said something like 'I dunno' didn't you?" the head asks.

"Well, I don't know anything about planes," he replies defensively.

"And what do we call a flying object that you can't identify?" the PFY asks.

"Oh..." the Boss says. "I'll get me coat..."

BOFH: Lawsuit ahoy!

You can't sue us!

Published Friday 21st July 2006 11:23 GMT

Episode 24 "Whew," the PFY says wiping the tears from his eyes as he steps into Mission Control. "I don't think I've laughed so much since you slapped an old scanner on top of our shredder and convinced one of the Bosses that it was a self-feeding photocopier."

"Yes," I nod. "Who could have known he'd slip in late at night to copy some share certificates? He went through half his portfolio before he wondered why no paper was coming out..."

"But then in the morning you convinced him it was a paper jam AND HE PUT THE REST IN!!!" the PFY weeps, shaking his head happily.

"Yes, I have to admit it was a triumph of stupidity..." I reply. "So what was so funny?"

"He shredded his shares!!" the PFY explains.

"Yes, yes, but what was so funny today that reminded you of that?"

"Oh that!" he gasps. "We're being sued!"

"WE are, or the company is?"

"The company of course!"

"Why?"

"BECAUSE," the Head of IT says, pushing into both the office and conversation, "the specification we provided for a server room build wasn't quite kosher."

"Not kosher?!" I cry, preparing to defend my good name.

"Yes, apparently a basement housing 10 Vax 11/780s isn't a commonplace thing anymore."

"That was a joke, just delete it!" I sigh.

"And what about Thick-Wire Ethernet cabling TO THE DESKTOP?"

"That was different - that was a GOOD joke, but just delete that as well."

"They can't delete it because they presented it for tender and accepted a proposal."

"In a week!" the PFY chuckles, "without even reading the document!"

"Well no-one's going to be able to supply 10 Vaxes or that much thickwire cabling, so why don't they just retender?"

"On the strength of the tender acceptance someone HAS sourced the computers and cabling AND contracted some VMS specialists out of retirement to install them - and now that the company wants to pull the pin on the project they're suing them. As a result that they're suing us and WE, in turn, are suing YOU!" the Head of IT snaps, just as the Head of HR enters Mission Control to provide moral support.

"You can't sue us!" the PFY snaps.

"Yes we can. We can sue you for malpractice."

"You could try, but you'd fail," I reply.

"Why?" the Head of HR responds.

"Here's the hidden bonus," I respond. "You'll note that this company entered into a supply contract with another company but that **our** contract was solely with (as was pointed out to us) this company. And **our** contract specifically states that we're liable for damages to company property that result from our work, not other damages or damages to another company. So in effect this company is the liable party."

"Is he right?" the Boss asks the HR bloke.

"I'd have to look over the contract but I fear that he might be correct," the Head of HR burbles, ducking out.

... ten minutes later ...

"He's right, they aren't liable," the Head of HR says.

"Told you," I chuckle.

"...Under the **original** contract," the Head of HR says. "But under a **revision** you signed six months ago - to get a performance bonus - it only mentions damages to the company, and not just its property."

!!!

Woopsy!

"So we're stuffed then?" the PFY says.

"I think so," the Head of HR smirks cheerfully.

"I'm not so sure," I say. "I don't recall signing any revision..."

"It's all here in black and white - and blue, where the signatures are..."

"Hmm. You don't mind if I take a copy for my solicitor?"

"I don't think so..."

"We'd get a copy during discovery anyway."

"Ok, I suppo..."

>SHRED< >SHRED<

"Oh dear, there's been a paper jam in the photocopier," I gasp.

"So you've accidentally destroyed the only evidence of an agreement mentioning our liability?" the PFY asks.

"I'm afraid so," I sigh. "Bloody technology!"

"So we're in the clear?"

"It... would seem so," the Head of HR seethes.

"Well to show there's no hard feelings, here's a possible solution: Instead of being sued why not just approach the successful tenderer and offer to pay them for the Vaxes and cabling plus some dumping costs as well as paying off their Vax specialists for doing nothing. It won't involve solicitors which will mean it'll be about one quarter of the expense"

"I... Hmmm," the HR Head says looking to the Head of IT for agreement. "I suppose it's probably our only option."

...

"That was a sneaky trick," the PFY says, tapping the shredding scanner benevolently.

"Which bit, the shredding of our contract or tendering to supply 10 Vaxes, three miles of thickwire and a couple of VMS experts?"

"I... You didn't! ... Isn't that a little, well, venal?"

"So you're not interested in being one of the VMS experts then?"

"I... Well I didn't say that..."

"I didn't think so..."

BOFH: Office politics

A disturbance in the force

Published Friday 28th July 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 25 So, I'm approaching Mission Control one morning and can't help noticing a disturbance in...the force...It's almost as if a million souls were suddenly installing OS2. Ignoring the feeling, I slip inside to find the Boss and PFY discussing something heatedly.

"...so if you could just reinstall Office on his machine that would be good."

"There's nothing **wrong** with his Office install - outside of the whole selling-your-soul-to-Lucifer thing," the PFY argues.

"His Word documents aren't displaying properly, so it must be broken!" the Boss explains carefully.

"It's not Word that's broken, it's the archaic document he uses as a template which doesn't look like it used to when he was using the original years-ago version. If he just got off his arse and created a new, REAL template file he'd stop having problems!" the PFY snaps.

"I **think** you'll find these Office products are always backwards compatible, so it must be the program that's broken."

"Backwards compatible just means that people who are backwards can use them!"

"?"

"My assistant is simply suggesting Word's for wissies who can't manage vi," I say, realising that I'm not really interested in calming this situation down any...

"I **want** you to go and reinstall it," the Boss directs.

"It's just a waste of time," the PFY says, tapping away on his keyboard. "Look!"

I join the Boss as he takes a quick shufti at the PFY's screen, which shows a picture of the user in question picking his nose and eating it.

"What's this?" the Boss asks.

"This is live from his webcam," the PFY says. "We pushed some software around the building to allow us to activate webcams when desired to...uh - aid us in...debugging applications!"

"Shouldn't it be pointed at the screen then?" the Boss asks.

"No, we know what's on the screen from the remote help software - this is so we can see them using their keyboard."

"You can't even see their keyboard!" the Boss protests.

"Obviously, you can't see their keyboard now, but if we **ever** needed to we'd get them to move their camera."

"So you're saying you rarely need to see the keyboard?"

"No - you can tell he's an idiot just by looking at his face!"

"Wellll...perhaps you should do a reinstall anyway, just to be sure..." the Boss wheedles.

"I'm telling you, there's nothing wrong!"

"I think you should still go down there and reinstall it," the Boss sighs. "He's been complaining all week, and you know what they say about the squeaky wheel."

"Needs a good bash with a hammer?" the PFY asks.

"No, it gets the oil," the Boss answers.

"So you want me to grease up our user?"

"I want you to reinstall Office!"

The PFY resigns himself to the process and wanders off...

"There he is!" the Boss blurts a few minutes later as the PFY appears in the picture. "What's he doing?"

"Just shutting the office door - standard operating procedure for users who have become...a liability."

"Ay?" the Boss repeats. "I'm telling you, the problem isn't the user, it's Office! In fact, the way this is going we should probably install **all** our user's Office products - just to be on the safe side!"

"All our users. Reinstall every machine? It would take weeks! We'd have to listen to them talk about how it's not as good as what they used to use years ago."

"Yes, but it'll be for the best."

"I see..." I sigh, reaching into the drawer for some gaffer tape. "Could you... uhmmm.. just pop the door of Mission Control closed?"

>slam!<

"What's he saying?" the Boss asks, returning from the doorway.

"The Mic's off - he's probably just asking the usual support questions."

"Like what version of Word he's using?"

"No. More likely it's whether the office is soundproof, if he's got any important meetings this afternoon that he'd be missed at, whether he's got a large roll of carpet or a big duffel bag handy..."

"Why?" the Boss asks.

"I'm not sure, it's just something he does. I could ring him and ask, but it might take a while to get hold of him and you'll have meetings to get to..."

"No, no, miles of time! I'd like to see how this pans out first hand."

"Really? Oh well, in that case, I think I can help you. Can you do us a favour while I ring him and unroll that large sheet of plastic?"

"That black stuff with 'HAZARDOUS WASTE, DO NOT OPEN' on it?"

"Yeah, that's the one. It's actually an antistatic pad that we've been trying out which I thought you might want to look at while you're here."

"Oh, ok. Where do you want it?"

"Where you're standing will be fine"

>shuffle< >shuffle<

"What's he doing now!?" the Boss snaps angrily, peering back at the screen "I thought I told him to reinstall Office, not rewire his bloody machine! What's he handing to the user? Oh look! The screen's gone blank, that's just lovely!"

"It's just a static problem on the monitor," I say, plugging a lead into the wallsocket. "Just needs a degauss. Hang on to this...degaussing wand...for a second will you?"

"What? Oh sure"

>CLICK< >KZZZZEEERT!<

And suddenly the force is back to normal, shaken, but not disturbed...

BOFH: Bastard gets fired

An undocumented bonus

Published Friday 4th August 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 26 "BUT I DILIGENTLY BACKED MY FILES UP!" the user wails.

"TWO YEARS AGO!" I respond, not feeling the slightest bit of sympathy for my caller.

"It's still a backup!"

"No, what you wanted was an **archive**, not a backup."

"But the system let me backup the files and didn't warn me not to!"

"The *system* would also let you send your picture and contact details to a rough trade gay contact mailing list saying you like to be surprised with power tools in a non-consensual role play scenario – but that doesn't mean you **SHOULD** do it.!

"I'm hardly likely to do that," he snaps.

>clickety< >clickety<

"I suppose not, but you can't blame the system for you **not** selecting the ARCHIVE option"

"How's a Backup different from an Archive?"

"A *Backup* is when we keep a file for *six months* because our users might need it, and an *Archive* is when we keep a copy *indefinitely* because our user is a prat."

"I beg your pardon?"

"And a pardon freely given," I respond benevolently.

"Are you aware of who you're talking to?"

"Strangely enough, no. The phone line detail database got corrupted a few nights ago and I've not got round to recovering it from the Archive."

"I thought you said you only used archives if the user is, as you say, a prat?" he chips in snidely.

"**All** our users are prats. So we use an archive!!!"

A click resounds in my ear with no further bluster, which smells distinctly like trouble brewing to me. Brewing like the six-day-old pot of coffee in the roadside cafe of the highway to hell, I'm guessing. And, based on the tone of the conversation, the coffee grinds in question are probably

brewed by someone on the 4th floor, and judging by their command of the English language, a board member.

Bugger.

That's the problem with caller-id technology – you become dependent on it, then it lets you down. While searching the online phonebook for the owner of the number, I give the PFY a quick briefing on events so he's prepared for when the excreta encounters the cooling device - ie. the Boss gets involved.

And just in the nick of time as the Boss, looking slightly puffed, stumbles into the office at what passes for high speed.

"Who was just on the phone to the company auditor?" the demands angrily – answering my unasked question about the sort of person who leaves six months between backups.

"That would be me," I cry.

"YOU CALLED THE COMPANY AUDITOR A PRAT!?" he shouts.

"Not at all!" I gasp defensively.

"Oh."

"I called anyone who doesn't backup their files within six months a prat. No offence."

"Are you TRYING to get me fired!?" the boss snaps.

"To tell you the truth, I hadn't thought about it. I don't think so. Though that would be a bit of an undocumented bonus.

"Bet ya ten quid you can do it!" the PFY chirps.

"Done!"

"Sorry, you're having a wager about me getting fired?"

"Yep!" the PFY replies.

"For 10 quid."

"Uh-huh."

"You'd seriously try and get me fired, just to earn 10 quid?"

"I'd do it for five," the PFY adds.

"It's not the amount, it's the challenge," I add.

"I...It'll never happen. In any case, you can't talk to users like that!"

"Well technically, he already did - which proves it IS possible," the PFY adds helpfully.

"RIGHT!" the boss shouts, about-turning, and storming out.

"Looks like YOU'RE for the high jump!" the PFY murmurs, rubbing his chin thoughtfully.

"Yeesss," I concur. "There's only one thing for it then..."

"PUB TRIP!" we both cry in unison, great minds thinking alike.

As it IS my unofficial leaving do, I stop at a few ports of call on the way out to notify some friends and useful contacts of my impending departure. Stopping briefly at security, cleaning and stores, I collect three more people for the Trip a la Pub.

...two hours later...

"So you haven't ACTUALLY been fired then?" George, my cleaner acquaintance asks.

"Not as such, but it looks imminent."

"And that robot isn't going to go ballistic again?" one of George's offsidiers asks, remembering all too well the mess the last time caused.

"No, I decommissioned it with a Gas Axe and a hammer months ago. But...I...don't know what to say," I blurt, while the PFY gets another round in at the Bar. "I feel like some sort of speech is required.."

"Do that one about 'Ask not what you company can do to you but what you can do to your company'," George suggests.

"And exactly what **can** you do to your company?" the Boss asks, appearing from nowhere.

"I...don't think any of that will be necessary," the PFY interrupts, returning from the bar. "I've just been watching the news."

"And?" the Boss asks.

"Uh...apparently someone attacked the company auditor outside the building when he left for lunch - with a battery drill."

"Oh dear," I gasp, trying to avoid the mental picture. "I thought that list was a joke."

"So we'll be rushing back to the company to get back to work?" the PFY suggests.

"If by 'work' you mean zapping our mail logs with a nine-pass erase algorithm, changing the IP addresses of our mail gateways and removing any history of phone calls, then yes." "I think

you're forgetting that more people involved in this than just the company auditor," the Boss chips in.

"You mean **you** sent email to that mailing list too?" the PFY gasps.

"No."

"And you're **sure** of that, given that there's 15 quid riding on this?" the PFY asks fingering his wireless PDA.

...

The Bastard and the Mouse

BOFH's guide to procurement

Published Saturday 12th August 2006 08:02 GMT

Episode 27 "... and so I'd like to get one of those new five button mice," The Boss finishes, after what seems like an eternity of blather.

"Sorry, I think I slipped into a coma - why did you want one again?" I ask.

"Because they can do so much!"

"Yeah, that's where I'm a bit in the grey. I mean a one button mouse - I can see the shortcomings; and a two button mouse might be a little limited. I can even understand a scroll wheel mouse, but why would you need a five button mouse?"

"I can do more!"

"What?"

"I could program it with all the functions I most commonly do!"

"Yes but Sleep, Eat, and Crap aren't computer functions," The PFY chips in.

"**ANY**way," The Boss says, ignoring the unsolicited input. "I got to thinking that we should replace all the rolly mice in the company with those optical ones which don't get all gunked up, and **THEN** I thought if we're going to change people's mice, why not let them choose which mouse they would like?"

"You're suggesting you give users a choice in their hardware?!" The PFY asks, shocked. "You realise what that would do to our 'small items' budget?"

"It's just a mouse and we're going to replace them anyway, so why not let people choose the mouse that they want? It can't be that bad!"

"Wouldn't it be more efficient just to burn a large portion of our 'small items' money?" I ask.

"I..."

"We'll just go to the bank, withdraw a pile of cash, and burn it. Burn it in the cafeteria, even - so that everyone can see. And we'll tell them it was the Mouse Replacement Project."

"I really do think that people should be able to choose their own mouse," The Boss says.

"But it'll cost a fortune!"

"I'm not so sure. I've been reading a magazine article about some new research that if people feel they can exercise even small amounts of control over their workplace they're happier for it. And when people are happier, they're more productive. They also say that if you treat people with respect they'll respect you for it!"

"So we should tip money down the toilet to make people happy?"

"I don't really think it's that much of a waste."

"Of course it is! Someone's bound to order the most expensive mouse they can find - the project will either run out of money or the online small item purchasing form will reject the purchase of the really expensive mice - which will actually damage morale!"

"I think you'll find you're wrong but I'll make a note to get a change to the form in this case."

"But you'll strip our budget!" I cry unhappily. "We won't even be able to buy backup media!"

"Even if one or two people do go over the top I doubt you'll lose all your money - and then we'll find that people are happier working here - and that's a small price to pay."

"No it's not, it's a high price."

"Well we're doing it!" The Boss snaps.

. . . Two days later . . .

"So, how are things on the front line of mouse replacement?" The Boss asks, happily entering Mission Control.

"**FANTASTIC**," the PFY says. "I thought the idea was a bunch of huggy feely crap, but I bought myself a new mouse and you know what - I feel really good!"

"What did I tell you!? It's the small things that make people feel appreciated. Now what did you get - a five button wirele.... **IS THAT GOLD?!?!?**"

"It is!" the PFY says. "I got it on eBay! A bargain at four thousand, five hundred quid."

"**FOUR THOUSAND FIVE HUNDRED POUNDS.**"

"Yeah, it was a bit of a bidding war!"

"You bought a solid gold mouse!?!"

"It looked so nice."

"I.... Is the gold.. ..wearing off onto your mouse pad?!"

"I'm not sure - I was playing some games for a few hours last night and noticed a tinge of yellow on the pad."

"You... you're wearing out your mouse?!?!"

"Oh I shouldn't worry - at the rate the gold price is going up the mouse is actually holding it's value quite nicely," The PFY says.

"You'll have to sell it, we can't afford that!"

"But what about my freedom to choose, my exercising of control - my morale."

"**STUFF THAT**, just sell the mouse and put the money back!!"

"But.."

"**DO IT** - and quickly, before someone finds out!"

. . . The next day . . .

"I thought I told you to sell that!" The Boss gasps as he comes in to find me using the PFY's mouse.

"I did!" the PFY sniffs.

"And it was a **BARGAIN!**," I blurt. "Picked it up on eBay for a quid!"

"**YOU SOLD IT TO HIM FOR ONE POUND!**" The Boss screeches.

"Well yeah," the PFY replies. "You wanted it sold in a hurry so I put it on a one day auction."

"And as luck would have it, I spotted it," I add. "Of course the five thousand quid delivery and handling fee probably put most people off, but I got it cheap because I could pick it up"

>thud<

"Oh look at that" The PFY says "he's fainted. Probably heatstroke!"

. . . ten minutes later . . .

"Well, **YOU** can sell it - and this time, get more money for it!"

"Ah, but I bought the mouse with my own money," I said, "because our small items budget had run out - like I told you."

"I...."

"I shouldn't worry, though," I say to The Boss. "It's not as bad as it seems - it's just a plastic mouse painted gold with some lead weights in it."

"You paid 4500 quid for a plastic mouse?" the Boss gasps to The PFY.

"Yeah, well, it looked like it was solid gold"

"Caveat Emptor," I blurt. "I mean if you can't be bothered verifying the things you're buying from me before you make a bid..."

"It was your mouse in the first place?!?" The Boss asks me.

"Well yeah."

"And you sold it for £4,500 and bought it back for one."

"Yeah, I missed it. And I'd agree with The PFY, I feel a lot happier too!!"

>thud<

"Best open a window - I need to tell him about my new keyboard in a minute..." the PFY sighs.

BOFH: The computer whisperer

Hex-eptional sense

Published Friday 18th August 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 28 "I can't believe it, I've been trying to get that thing to boot for hours!" the Boss says, shaking his head as the PFY steps back from his desktop.

"Yes," I respond. "I have to admit the PFY has a bit of a silicon thumb when it comes to dodgy hardware - in fact, we call him the computer whisperer."

"The computer whisperer?"

"Yeah, like the horse whisperer except you don't have to show a horse a dogfood tin that needs filling..."

"But **you** did point out where the problem started..." the PFY adds graciously.

"Yes, how did you work that out so quickly?" the Boss asks suspiciously.

"I just read the crash dump on the blue screen."

"You mean that actually means something?" the Boss blurts.

"To the right people, sometimes, yes. You know how in *The Matrix* the guy can look at all the numbers on the screen and it makes sense to him? Well, that's what a dump looks like to me. Or, for that matter, what the hex values of porn image are to the PFY here - he's got a sixth sense for it. Why, he could sniff a breast out of a compressed zip file in about 10 seconds!"

"It's true," the PFY admits. "They think it's some autistic thing, I've pretty much always been able to do it. Like yesterday I was looking at a 'data file' and noticed #FFDAB96432FF127F43434378A19F76A166A1321F! The dirty slappers!"

"I..." the Boss asks, before deciding not to pursue this conversation. "So what was wrong?"

"It's faulty memory", the PFY says, undoing the screws on the lid of the Boss' desktop. "I disabled most of it and the machine started, which tends to indicate that some of it is faulty, so what we'll do is just start removing blocks of it till it boots ok.

"But how can it be faulty? How can memory **fail**?"

"Things fail," I say to him. "Washing machines fail, cars fail, searches for weapons of mass destruction fail, it's inevitable!"

"Yes, but it's failed four times!"

"Four times?" the PFY asks, looking up from his work. "What do you mean four times? You've never called about problems before!"

"No, well, I...uh...one of the accountant people was in the office when it crashed recently and he helped me."

"You got a **beancounter** to fix your machine?!"

"Yeah, well he'd done it a couple of times before."

"Of course he'd done it a couple of times before, he's never done it properly! He's a beancounter! What a beancounter knows about computers you could tattoo on a DIMM with a jackhammer! So what did he say was wrong with it?"

"He said I needed more memory, so he took some out of some old machines of theirs."

"You used old F***ing memory?!" the PFY snaps.

"It wasn't being used anymore."

"Neither are underpants at a thrift shop but you don't slap them on!"

"He said it'd be ok - and he **did** seem to know what he was doing!"

"Yuh," the PFY nods. "Next time someone seems to know what they're doing, get them to tune your car..."

. . . >creak<

"Ohmigoodness" the PFY gasps as he opens the box.

"What?" I ask looking over his shoulder "What's the ma...Oh! I...It's not even matched! You're using about four different types of memory!"

"It's a miracle it ever booted!" the PFY adds. "What an amateur!"

"That's what he said about you buying expensive memory all the time."

"Who cares what he thinks about me, he's a bloody **cowboy**!" the PFY shouts angrily.

"Look, it's all ok, no real harm done" the Boss says soothingly. "I'll get you some petty cash, you can replace the memory and we'll get the accountant down here so you can tell him what the problem was, what you've done to fix it, and generally bury the hatchet"

"I...I...uh...ok!" the PFY stutters. "Givvus 20 quid."

"Really, is that all memory costs?"

"No, that's what a hatchet costs," I add as the PFY stamps off, being abreast of the price fluctuations in certain retail hardware lines...

...10 minutes later...

"He's hasn't really gone to buy a hatchet has he?" the Boss asks as we kill time waiting for the PFY's return by rebuilding the disk on his desktop machine.

"Nah!" I reply happily.

"Oh good."

"No, there's a perfectly good hatchet in his top drawer."

"You can't be serious!"

"Of course not, he wouldn't do anything like that!"

"Oh, you really had me going there" he sighs.

>CLACK!<

"Now **that** is more like what he'd do."

"Why's it gone dark?"

"You need the power off when you install some things."

"What things?"

"Hatchets mainly..."

"I..."

>CLACK!<

"And there was light!" I blurt. "And your machine's booting sans extra memory...and it's crashed again because the disk is corrupt from the...uh...power failure"

"So what does it mean?" the boss asks.

"Strangely, that doesn't mean anything to me - it's just a bunch of hex."

"Ooooh" the PFY says, returning to the Boss's office. "Where'd you get the dirty pictures?!"

BOFH: Out on the lash

Smooth operators

Published Friday 1st September 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 29 And so it is - as circumstance would have it - that the PFY and I find ourselves single and bored on a Friday afternoon.

"Pub?" the PFY asks as the clock approaches 4pm.

"To prime ourselves in expectation of the Friday evening female advertising executive onslaught?" I ask. "I like the way you think!"

"DENNY CRANE!" the PFY replies, grabbing his coat.

"So let's get our stories straight," the PFY says carefully. "I'm a solicitor's assistant, specialising in the environment - and the current case I'm working on is how to save the baby seals from oil spills."

"A greeny caring so much he wants to look after baby seals..." I say. "Smooth!"

"Denny Crane," the PFY repeats. "And you?"

"I thought I'd just go with the truth, that I'm a moderately senior IT support professional."

"So what are you really going as?" the PFY asks, after we'd stopped in the foyer for a good laugh - knowing as we do that the IT profession holds about as much mystique 'with the ladies' as a cup of cold vomit with a hair in it."

"Airline Pilot..." I say

"Sticking to the old faithfuls," the PFY sighs, shaking his head. "I tell you, women today want more than a fancy uniform and the possibility of a cheap overse..."

"Airline Pilot who's been suspended for two weeks for...smuggling orphan babies out of war torn...somewhere...so they can have a real future...in the West."

"Almost makes me want to weep," the PFY says as he waves to the Barman and orders a couple of pints.

...Two hours later...

"...and what do you do?" one of the women we're chatting to asks the PFY.

"What do I NORMALLY do you mean?" the PFY asks. "Normally, I'm a pilot, but at the moment I'm under suspension."

"Oh? Why?" the woman asks.

"It's a long story," the PFY says, forgetting to add that it was someone ELSE'S career only moments earlier. His long-winded account of how he had his hand luggage modified to save two babies per flight has gilded the lily a little too much and I'm starting to see doubt in their eyes...

"And what do you do?" her friend asks me.

"I'm an astronaut" I say, pulling the ripcord on my backup career option to the PFY's surprise and disgust.

Well, it is a much better story.

"An...astronaut..." she responds dubiously, while the PFY gets a slight green patina.

"Yes."

"For...who?"

"The British Space program," I respond with just a hint of indignation.

"What British Space program? You mean the Beagle thing?"

"Nah, the Beagle thing was just a diversion so we could send the real spacecraft up under the pretence of it being a booster unit. You know, like the Yanks faked the moon landing so they could open up a McDonalds in Russia."

"I...You don't **really** believe that America faked the moon landings do you?"

"Of course they did! You've got a better computer in your toaster than the spaceships had back then, and it can't even land a piece of toast on your plate!"

"So is there **really** a British space program?" the PFY's friend asks me, avoiding computer talk like the plague.

"Well," I say, looking around the pub "I could tell you, but then I'd have to have sex with you."

"Don't you mean kill her?" the PFY snaps in nastily.

"No, no, I'm not that good," I tell the women. "But obviously you'd be taking your chances as I can't make any guarantees...Perhaps you should write down your medical insurance number and next of kin just to be on the safe side."

So things are going pretty well all things considered, and while no one's buying the astronaut story it's still better than admitting you're a furry toothed geek who spends half his day writing Perl scripts and the other half browsing porn...

...

Just as the glow of sweet success overtakes me I realise that the Boss has just entered the pub with a couple of beancounters and that the game is about to be up. Sure, I might be able to steer the conversation away from why we install service packs or something equally dull, but once the beancounters wade into the conversation it'll be duller than a hardware install guide.

HAVE TO THINK FAST!

"Isn't that those mental patients?" the PFY says, going for the save.

"No," one of our acquaintances says. "Those two work in our department - they're Accounts too."

"Sorry, you're accountants?" the PFY says, feeling the kryptonite-like effects already.

"Yes!" one responds "We specialise in tax accounting and are working on a plan to estimate VAT returns by looking at the previous quarters..."

"WE WORK IN IT!" the PFY blurts. "AND I'D LIKE TO TALK ABOUT THE IP V6 PROTOCOL. DO YOU KNOW IT"

"That was a close one!" I say to the PFY as we return to the bar alone. "For a moment I thought we were done for. Good call on the IPV6 stuff, that even scares me!"

"DENNY CRANE!" the PFY says, handing over a new pint.

BOFH: Retirement plan

It's as easy as ones and zeros

Published Friday 8th September 2006 11:25 GMT

Episode 30 So the PFY and I are having a quick three hour lunch at the pub across the road when George, our faithful cleaner, walks in looking a little bit despondent.

"Everything all right George?" the PFY asks, noticing his unhappy visage.

"What? Oh, no, not really."

"What's the matter?"

"They're, uh, forcing me to retire," he mumbles sadly.

"WHAT?!" the PFY and I cry in unison.

"They say I'm past the mandatory retirement age."

"They can't do that!" the PFY gasps. "You're indispensable. You're the sane voice in an insane world - our ear to the ground and eye in the sky - the Alfred to our Batman and Robin!"

"I don't have a lot of choice," George sighs sadly. "My contract says I retire at 65."

"Well can't we lie about your age?" the PFY asks, firing up his laptop and connecting to the company's wireless network. "I mean, you don't look a day over...well...73."

"Seventy-four actually," George admits. "I lied about my age when I started and told them I was 53."

"Did you suggest that their data was wrong - as indeed it is...?"

"Yes, but they just said that it's on the computer now so it must be right. Then they said that I'd have to bring in supporting documents if I wanted anything changed."

"Hmm," the PFY says, poring through George's personnel entry. "It **looks** like you're only >tappity< >click< sixty >click< three"

"I...Really? Can you do that?"

"Do what?" the PFY asks, looking around innocently.

"So I can work here for another couple of years?" he asks.

"Unless the company can 'bring in supporting documents' to say that you're not, as I checked the box saying 'documents sighted'."

"So it's that easy?" George asks.

"Possibly," I reply, "but the couple of years we've just bought you is a good stop-gap - I think the real issue here is the company persecuting you for being a woman in what is traditionally a traditional male role."

"I'm not a woman!"

"You're only 1 bit away from being one. In fact, you are one >click< now." the PFY replies, looking up from his work long enough to drag deeply on his pint. "Obviously you didn't disclose this information in your original application because (a) there was no question on the form requesting such information and (b) gender reassignment had its stigmas back then and you felt that you might be unduly handicapped by revealing it."

"So you're saying I'm a woman so they won't fire me?"

"No, no, it's not **that** easy. Positive discrimination is a thing of the past."

"But they'll never buy it, I've got children!"

"...and you remain ever appreciative to the sperm donor programs," the PFY adds tapping away on his keyboard some more.

"So why won't they just fire me?"

"Because we're going to put you into the sort of niche where no HR person would dare **force** you to retire. We'll marginalise you to such an extent that the head of HR will lay awake nights hoping you'll die peacefully in your sleep."

"How?"

"I'm guessing my faithful assistant here has been ticking a broad selection of boxes in your HR record so as to make you one in a million person."

"One in several million," the PFY says. "Unless you know of any other 63 year old former women with a hip replacement, dyslexia, a 25 per cent share of four different ethnicities who has sustained multiple workplace injuries in the course of his work, has 15 dependants, and votes communist every election."

"Do they have voting information?" George asks.

"No, it's a note I added at the bottom alongside the one about the company suspecting you've had intimate relations with a board member. If you ever have to subpoena your record it'll look like they were out to get you."

"But how can you do this?"

"Easy, it's just data, 1s and 0s." the PFY says, forgoing the lesson on binary. "Change the right 1 to a 0 and you change sex. Slap in the right mix of ones and zeros and suddenly your ethnicity changes."

"Surely they'll get me to verify this information?"

"Not once you've visited your local Union official and authorise him up take a copy of all the information the company has on you."

"I...well...I...thank you!"

"Don't thank me, buy my something - small and inexpensive in the shape of a pint."

"I would lads, but I don't want to be late back."

"Late back? It's only 11:45!"

"No, it's 1:15!"

"No, >clickety< I think you'll find the company clock says it's 11:45, and will till 5pm."

"Ones and Zeros again?" George asks.

"Indeed. Now, who wants to see the head of HR reach mandatory retirement age in the space of half an hour???"

...

BOFH: Unconventional interview

How many pints did you say you can drink?

Published Friday 22nd September 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 31 "Ah, could we borrow you for a couple of minutes?" the Boss asks quietly, interrupting the PFY's riveting (if somewhat longwinded and one-sided) discussion of RS6000 boot flags.

"Of course," I yawn, getting up quickly for fear that the PFY will mistake my patience for interest and tell me what each of the hundreds of associated boot codes means. "How can I help?"

"Well, I...must say I appreciate your enthusiasm," the Boss says. "But it's just a simple thing. We're interviewing for the new senior management IT support person role..."

"Oh yes, after the previous person left on medical grounds."

"He tripped carrying a PC down a stairwell and was subsequently hit by a 19" monitor!" the Boss says recalling the tragedy.

"Nasty," the PFY adds.

"Yes, although he did claim the monitor had been **thrown** down on him after he had been **pushed** down the stairwell."

"I think you'll find that that was just the concussion talking," I add. "My theory is that he put the monitor at the top of the stairs to save two journeys back to the original office, then tripped over the cable when he was carrying the base unit..."

"I..." the Boss replies, thinking about it for a bit. "Hmm, well I still think it was a little unfair of you to press the company to make him pay for the damaged machine."

"It was all entirely avoidable!" I say, neglecting to mention that the way to avoid such an accident was to ensure you didn't mention to an easily-led board member that outsourcing IT was cheaper than contractors...

"In any case, he didn't leave on medical grounds - he was taken to hospital!"

"And where are hospitals located?"

"?"

"ON MEDICAL GROUNDS!" the PFY chuckles.

"!"

"So anyway, you're interviewing for this person," I say. "And you need our help how?"

"We have two candidates and we can't really pick between them because they both seem to be equally qualified."

"Just pick one at random then," the PFY suggests.

"We can't do that, it's not right. Anyway we called them both in and thought we'd have a face to face with them both."

"So you've got them both in the same room?"

"Yes, we thought it would be fair for them to see who they were up against."

"And HR okayed this?" the PFY asks dubiously.

"We didn't ask, it's really just another type of interview process."

"I see. And so where would you see us fitting into this...process?"

"We thought that some form of testing might help."

"You want us to test them?"

"Yes."

"What on?"

"On their suitability for the support role."

"To be quite honest," the PFY chips in. "If you want an **accurate** assessment of their abilities you'd probably want to opt for a less formal environment where they're unlikely to be on their guard."

"What are you suggesting?"

"I dunno, something less rigidly structured and more aimed at finding out their strengths and weaknesses - while at the same time giving us a chance to gauge their technical abilities."

"And this could be achieved how?"

...Later, at the pub...

"So you realise that while this is a less formal environment it still constitutes part of the interview process?" the PFY asks.

"Yes," both the candidates respond.

"So, who fancies a pint?"

"I'll just have a water," contestant number one says.

"Shandy for me," contestant number two says.

"Good choice," the PFY replies, sarcastically.

"Actually, make mine a lager," number one counters.

"A pint of extra strength heavy!" number two responds.

...

...10 triple tequila slammers later...

"So why do you want the job?" the PFY asks.

"What job?" number two asks.

"The IT support job at our company."

"Oh, that job," number one replies. "It looked like it paid well."

"IS THE RIGHT ANSWER!" the PFY blurts.

"Is that it?" number two gasps.

"Of course not, we'll have to do second interviews with you both, same time, same place tomorrow - the company's paying."

"Oh, ok then. But won't you just pick him again?"

"It's possible, but then you get to appeal the decision because your comments were made under duress and you can't be judged for suitability based solely on your ability to drink..."

"...although that's obviously an important feature in an IT support person," the PFY adds.

"...and after that you'll get to do the whole interview process again!" I cry.

...

"Actually, I don't want the job, come to think of it," number one says. "It sounded like a lot of work."

"Me either," number two says. "Those senior managers sound like a hassle."

"True, but remember the job pays well," the PFY adds.

"Nah, I think I'll stay where I am," number two slurs.

"Me too."

"But the interview's only half over - there's hours to go to till closing time," the PFY whimpers at the exiting figures.

"Bugger," I blurt from the bar. "Two pints of lager and a packet of salt and vinegar crisps, and...Have you considered a role in IT - you'd be a shoe-in with your ability to put up with idiots!!!"

BOFH: Pulling a computer survey swift

Five grand for your silence

Published Friday 29th September 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 32 "Look at this," the Boss says, handing me a well-fingered computer rag.

"What, the magazine?"

"No, the survey they mention on the front cover."

"The Top 500 IT-savvy companies in the UK for 2005?"

"Yes."

"And what should I be looking for?"

"Our company, of course."

"In there?" I ask dubiously.

"EXACTLY!" the Boss says.

"Exactly what?"

"We're NOT in there!"

"I know," I counter.

"But we should be - we've got a lot of machines!"

"More than large internet cafe companies?"

"No, not more than them, obviously."

"Or larger than the huge multi-national beancounters?"

"No, I suppose not."

"The large insurance companies?"

"I..."

"What about large universities?"

"I DON'T KNOW - But we **should** be listed there!"

"Why?"

"Because we're a large company!"

"That's hardly a **compelling** reason is it?"

"But we should be listed! Investors rate companies by their technical ability."

"So you're saying that an investor would be happier if they knew we spend a lot of money buying large numbers of machines?"

"No, but they'd feel happier knowing that we have a lot of computing power behind us!"

"And why exactly are you talking to us about this?" the PFY asks.

"Because they've sent us a form for this year's survey which we'd like you to fill out so that we make the top 500," the head of IT says, entering Mission Control.

"But these surveys are pointless and only used to boost magazine circulation figures!"

"How?" the Boss asks. "They send each of the top 500 companies a free copy!"

"At which time they all buy up a stack of copies to leave strategically in their waiting rooms, send to their investors, etc."

"It's still worth doing," the Boss says.

"So what are you suggesting we do, buy two machines for every person - or I suppose for five grand we could just say we have?"

"Why would that cost five grand" the head of IT asks.

"To shut people up," I say, nodding towards the PFY.

...Two days later...

>RING<

"Ah Simon," the Boss mumbles nervously over handsfree.

"Mmm?"

"I've just got an email from the publishing company - saying they'd like to come and verify the data we supplied."

"Of course they do," I say. "And we should applaud them in that. Reply, saying we'd be most happy to take them around our sites at their earliest convenience."

"But surely they'll find out that we've been...uh...economical with the truth?" the Boss asks.

"Not if that five grand in fifties arrives as requested...Besides if they sent someone out to verify every respondent they'd never get the bloody thing published! Just tell them you're looking forward to showing them our sub-sub basement state of the art super-secure computing bunker."

"What bunker?" the Boss asks, ignoring the five grand question yet again.

"If it **sounds** like we've got stuff that we're gagging to show them they'll be less suspicious," the PFY says over my shoulder.

"Oh I see, righto then, I'll do that."

...Two days later...

"Ah Simon," the Boss mumbles - once again nervously - as he leads a geeky beancounter type into Mission Control. "This is David, from the publishing company, he's here to verify our computer equipment and check out our...bunker."

"Excellent!" I say getting up from my desk. "And might I just say how five grand it is to meet you!"

"Five grand?" David says.

"What?"

"You just said 'how five grand it is to see me'?"

"Really, how odd," I say, staring pointedly at the Boss till he leaves to make a quick petty cash transaction - returning scant moments later with a cardboard box.

Given the rapid arrival of the cash a less trusting person might think that the Boss had received this money earlier and had simply conspired with himself to remain in possession of it...

"Uh...your current rating is 303rd, but not all the survey numbers are in just at the moment, so that's subject to change."

"So where would you like to start?" I ask.

"With the Bunker," David responds.

"The Bunker it is!" I say as the Boss's eyes widen.

...Two minutes later, in the basement...

"And there you have it," I say, pointing at a section of floor.

"What?" David asks.

"The bunker!"

"That's not a bunker, it's just a section of concrete!"

"No," I sigh, "That's the door to the bunker."

"Uh.. .can you open it then?"

"Of course not, it's a super secure server room!"

"So I'm supposed to take your word that there's a bunker under there."

"I...You could wait till shift change!" I suggest.

"And when's that?"

"A week from Wednesday - It's a fortnight on a fortnight off thing, two crews."

"You don't seriously expect me to believe that?"

"Of course."

"In that case I'll be wanting to see invoices for the equipment supposedly housed in the bunker," David says.

"Hmmmmmm," I say, the game up. "I don't have those, but I do have this box of non-sequentially numbered fifty pound notes..."

"Oh why didn't you **tell** me it was a 2000 host supercluster grid facility with a million terabytes of storage!" David gasps, grabbing the box.

...Later, at the pub...

"That was a close thing" the PFY says as he finishes his fourth lager.

"You're telling me," I say.

"Yeah, I thought he'd never buy the publishing company auditor story," David adds.

"Cheers!"

BOFH: The mystery of the impenetrable data safe

Impenetrable? Yeah right

Published Friday 6th October 2006 10:44 GMT

Episode 33 "Check it out," the PFY says, pointing at the pair of fat blokes who are levering a large crate into the Boss's office on a heavy duty trolley. "What do you think it is?"

"I'm not sure - It's carefully packaged and very heavy so whatever it is is probably bloody expensive," I reply.

No sooner is it in the Boss's office than the door is closed, blinds wound shut and the sounds of hammering are heard.

"Curiouser and curiouser," the PFY mumbles.

"To the Batcave!" I blurt as we both make a dash for Mission Control.

"I can't see, the Boss is in the way!" the PFY snaps once he's activated the hidden camera on the Boss' bookshelf, strategically placed where it'll never be touched (inside the spine of a volume of *The VAX/VMS Architecture Planning Guide*).

"Plan B," I say, as the PFY taps away furiously.

"...No, there's a fatbloke blocking...everything!" the PFY seethes as its vantage point (the spine of *Improving your Management style*) proves useless.

"Ok, easy," I say. "We'll catch the fat blokes as they leave and offer them some pikey cider if they spill the beans."

"Sorted!" the PFY says, preceding me out the door. "Bugger!"

"What?"

"They've gone!" he says, pointing at the Boss' office, which is now open and empty.

"Weird," I say. "I didn't know they could move the fast, unless..."

"...Someone else offered them some pikey cider to make themselves scarce!" the PFY finishes.

"Ok, well lets just strike while the iron's hot," I say, making a move for the empty office.

...

"Armourworth 3000 Intelligent Datasafe," the PFY reads off the front panel.

"Hmmm," I say. "No dial, no keypad no external cabling. It's either wireless, a timelock or has some fancy mechanism inside it which determines the opening criteria. But how 'intelligent' can it be?"

"Smarter than me," the Boss burbles, entering through the doorway.

"Yeah, I've got an intelligent paperweight like that," the PFY responds.

"Is it computerised?" the Boss asks.

"No it's a brick," the PFY replies.

Sadly, the Boss' attention span expired between the PFY's sentences so the Boss probably now thinks the PFY has computerised brick.

Sigh

"Yes, this is the Armourworth Intelligent safe!" the Boss says. "Top of the line for storing data. In fact, it's a safe within a safe. The outside safe talks to my laptop through a special webpage which talks via a special short range network which is encrypted to 512 thingies."

"512 thingies," the PFY gasps. "That sounds pretty secure!"

"It is! I had to take my laptop to the dealer to get it setup for this safe, and it would apparently take ALL the computers in the world over TEN YEARS to break into this safe."

"Well, no time to lose then!" I say, making to leave.

"Are you suggesting you could break into this safe?" the Boss asks. "They use these to store Government secrets!"

"You mean secrets like how the Weapons of Mass Destruction disappeared?"

"I... .. It's impenetrable!" the Boss states ignoring the PFY's outburst.

"You're on!" I say.

...

"So what's our plan?"

"Spend a couple of days printing safe manuals and looking frustrated till the Boss gets complacent"

...two days later...

"So, who fancies a couple of drinks after work - my shout - to celebrate the PFY's birthday?" I ask.

No sooner had the Boss heard free beers than he was up for it. I make a mental note to suggest he attends a Richard Stallman talk about GPL sometime.

...Later that night...

"Ok, so he's left his laptop at work," the PFY whispers, "but you've still got to get into it"

>tappity< >tap<

"How did you..."

"Keystroke logger," I reply. "And we open up his browser and check his favourites and...lookee, Armourworth Login"

"It'll be password protected!" the PFY says. "And the password's bound to be..."

"SAVED IN THE BROWSER!" I blurt happily, seeing the prefilled fields. "Bonus!"

>click<

>CLUNK< >CLICK< >WHIRRRRRRRRRRR< >CLACK<

"You little dancer!" the PFY says opening the door. "Who'd have thought it'd be so eas.."

"Uh-oh," I say, recognising the internal safe from our recent documentation downloads. "Now THAT is a serious safe. 12 digits, with three successive failures initiating a lockout requiring a serviceperson reset."

"So we'd better get it right then." the PFY says. "What do we think, birthday, twice?"

"Bound to be. So first of April, but what year??"

"'54." the PFY says. "Same as my Dad's."

>BUZZ<

"One down," I say. "Home phone number?"

"With international prefix," the PFY adds.

"Of course!"

>BUZZ<

"Bugger, one try left, what could it be?"

"The factory default?" the PFY suggests.

"He wouldn't!"

..Twelve zeros later...

>CLACK< >WHIRRR<

"He would," the PFY sighs. "So what's he hiding???"

"....." I say

"What?!" the PFY says, pushing past "...."

...

"Why would you keep nothing in an expensive safe like that?" the PFY wonders out loud.

"Because he has nothing of any value," I say, opening my backpack. "Which is why I've bought along this expensive item of my own to store."

"What?" the PFY says as I pull my present out. "Is that a...salmon?"

"Oh yes," I say, slapping the fish in the safe, pulling the airtight seal off the internal door and slamming it shut.

"That's just cruel!" the PFY says.

"No," I say, tapping away at the keypad. "Cruel is entering the wrong number in three times."

"Oh."

"Cruel," I continue. "Is breaking off the wireless antenna connection."

>SLAM!< >WHIRRRR<

"Cruel," I add. "Is chucking your housekeys into the safe before I close it."

"I... Y... You BASTARD!" the PFY gasps.

"Yeah I know," I chuckle happily.

BOFH: Let the games begin

'Building the perfect games beast on the company dime'

Published Friday 13th October 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 34 "Mmmm?" the PFY asks as the Boss hovers for another stretch in front of his desk.

"It's this purchase order," the Boss says.

"Mmmm?" the PFY repeats.

"You spent 400 quid on your desktop to buy a...er...graphics card...with ...dual...head capability."

"Yes, a Tasmanian graphics card, that's right."

"I was under the impression that your machine had a...graphics card...built into it."

"It had a graphics card, yes, but not a very good one. This was a top line model with the ability to drive two screens."

"But you're only using one screen!"

"Yes, I wanted to buy one with the *capability* to run two screens. Much the same as you buy trainers with the *capability* of being run on," the PFY says, pointing at the Boss' casual Friday footwear. "It doesn't mean that you'll actually *do* any running on them though, just that at some point in the future you might. Anyway, why the sudden interest in our desktop hardware?"

"It's this printout I found on the printer last week," the Boss replies holding up - if I'm not mistaken - a copy of "Building the Perfect Games Beast on the Company dime" which the PFY downloaded recently - a copy of which must have got mislaid when the Print Server "packed a mental", to use the PFY's technical description, late last week. "And it touches on several recent upgrades you've requested - like faster disk and extra memory."

"I think you'll find that the resource needs of the workplace often bear a striking resemblance to those of the advanced gamer," the PFY counters.

"And the joystick?"

"AH! Now **that** is to control the security cameras as I shall now demonstrate. Hang on, I'll just save my space shuttle simulator."

"So you *are* playing games!"

"Calibrating my reflexes, yes," the PFY sniffs. "You need to get used to the pan and zoom activities otherwise you spend all your time searching for a video target instead of following them..."

"And so how is this...calibration...going?" the Boss asks dryly.

"I'm coming along nicely!" the PFY chirps. "Here's some footage I shot with the external cameras earlier in the morning. And here we see a young woman walking outside the building...and she drops her purse...and here's a test of the zoom...a closer zoom...a wide shot...then back to Zoom...and she's moving on."

"And this wouldn't be referred to in here..." the Boss asks, shuffling a few sheets of paper from the bottom of the Games Beast report. "...Violating the public's privacy for fun and website profit."

"The time will come," the PFY says. "When we're going to need someone to track suspicious individuals outside the building, and when that time comes we're going to want to be sure that someone can capture a stable and focused image to be used as evidence. Here, you try, see how hard it is."

"I'm sure it can't be...woah!"

"See, the joystick runs away on you and requires a *very* gentle hand," the PFY says.

"That still doesn't mean that you need a...Tasmanian graphics card!" the Boss says, returning to his main point. "And I think you should return it and use the on-board one."

"It doesn't even do proper 3-D rendering!" the PFY blurts. "Anyway, there's licensing to worry about."

"What licensing?"

"The two head thing. If two people are looking at the screen - like now - you need a dual head license which comes with the card."

"That's preposterous!" The boss snaps. "What if I looked over your shoulder when two of you were working on your machine."

"We'd have to spend another 400 quid," I say. "But luckily the licenses are transferable, so you could just get me a dual head graphics card and we'd be sweet."

"Ridiculous, I sometimes have four or five people looking at my PowerPoints!"

"Then you're violating the license!" the PFY gasps. "You could go to prison for that!"

"But only if someone talks," I add.

"Is this some form of blackmail to let me keep your screen card?" the Boss asks. "Because if it is, it's not working."

"What?" the PFY asks, suppressing disappointment at a plan spoiled. "Of course not!"

"No," I add. "We were just advising you of some legal considerations. It's up to you what you choose to do. But if you don't mind we won't be a party to the crime - time for a couple of quick lunchtime lagers..."

"Well, if that's the case I should be able to use your newfound 'tool' to keep an eye on you from here to see that you get back in on time," the Boss adds.

...

"It's my fault," the PFY gasps. "I didn't realise what he'd actually want to use the cameras for."

"No, it's my fault," I say. "I should have realised that he couldn't be trusted."

"So what you're saying," the head of security says, "Is that you believe your manager has been...filming individuals in unguarded moments and sending them to a website?"

"...a candid film website," the PFY says. "The one we saw was of him zooming in on some poor woman's bum when she dropped her purse outside the building."

"And you believe that he's doing it right now?"

"Sure to be," the PFY sighs. "Don't you just hate seeing people go off the deep end like that."

"It's a bloody tragedy," I concur.

BOFH: Armageddon

MoD pays a visit in computer bunker hunt

Published Friday 20th October 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 35 "We've, ah, got a bit of a problem," the head of IT says, entering Mission Control.

"What's that then?" I ask, always willing to help management out - particularly if they've just come in.

"It's about that Top 500 IT-Savvy company's survey we did a few weeks back."

"What's that then?"

"The editor of the magazine would like to see the room."

"I'm sure he would."

"And so would dozens of readers of the IT Survey, apparently," the head adds.

"Of course, you told them that as a secure underground facility we couldn't possibly let just anyone have access?"

"They said they'd be happy with photos."

"Well why didn't you ask sooner!"

...quarter of an hour of the PFY's time later...

"So what do you think - too many Crays?" I ask, handing over an image to the head of IT.

"Perhaps...10 is a little over the top - and you can tell that one's just a mirror image of that one because the label's back to front."

"Good point - we'll drop the Crays down to...three and add a few more racks of 1U machines. And don't worry; I'll put you in the background somewhere checking the dipstick of a machine."

"Thank you."

"Don't thank me, thank the PFY and the good folk at Adobe!"

...Later that day in the head of IT's office...

"A problem with the photo we sent," the head murmurs with his hand over the handset.

"Yes?"

"They say that by their calculations the facility is about three times larger than our building."

"Of course it is," I say. "It's a bunker!"

"Under our building..."

"Yes."

I take a seat while this information is relayed with the relevant hint of indignation.

"And they say the local council records don't show any consents for the building of this facility?" the Head asks, getting a little worried.

"They wouldn't would they - it's...uhmmm...one the ex Ministry of Defense Cold War command shelters!" I ad lib. "No records were ever kept - uh...for security reasons."

...

"Now they want to know how we managed to get those large Cray computers down there."

"Down the missile shafts," I say, wondering if I'm going a BIT far...

...Later that week...

"Uh Simon...Could we have a word?" the head of IT asks, looking slightly pale.

"Mmm?" I ask, noticing a couple of suited figures behind him.

"This is...Mr...uhm...John and David from the Ministry of...Defense."

"And how can we help you?" the PFY asks, entering the conversation from the Tape Safe room.

"It's about your computer bunker" Mr...uhm...John says. "We were contacted by a magazine publisher interested in the details of our disused site..."

"Yes?"

"I think we all know that it doesn't exist."

"Have you not seen the photos?" the PFY asks. "That's some of my best work."

"And highly imaginative. But still not real."

"What's your point?" the PFY asks.

"The point is you can't go around fabricating ex-MOD sites."

"So fabrication can only be used for Weapons of Mass Destruction purposes?" the PFY asks.

"I..."

"What is the real problem?" I ask, before things can turn nasty.

"You said you had an ex-MOD site."

"Yes..."

"And you referred to a missile silo."

"A missile shaft."

"Which has caused some concerns about missiles sites in inner London."

"Just tell them it was a Cold War plan which was never put into effect," the PFY suggests.

"And there's the crux of the matter - why should we lie just to support your lie?"

"Two reasons," I say. "One, because there's always going to be some people who'll think there was a site here - even if you excavated the ground to prove there wasn't, and two, with a 'neither confirm nor deny policy' you could make a small fortune selling fictitious ex-MOD bunkers."

"I think you'll need to expand a bit why people would believe the bunker," John says.

"Actually, I'd rather hear about the small fortune stuff," David says.

...a day later...

"...so I've lined up a couple of companies, one who'd like to be number 200 or so, and the other who'd like to be in the 400s somewhere," I say. "...so what have you got?"

"Trafalgar and Russell Squares," David says.

"The place is riddled with underground stations!" the PFY comments.

"These are very deep installations - made to survive even the heaviest bombings," David says.

"And there might be a bit of a problem given that one of the sites is on the other side of the Thames."

"Linked to the site by a tunnel similar to the one which links MI5 and MI6," David adds.

"You've pretty much got it all sewn up then...apart from the finder's fee," I say.

"How about we waive that given that your company is getting your facility for nothing. After all, we'd hate to have a disastrous structural failure."

Bugger, Checkmate!

"How about 10 pints and a curry then?" the PFY suggests - always the peacemaker.

"That'll do nicely!"

BOFH: Goes virtual

Why not to put all your blades in one basket

Published Friday 27th October 2006 11:02 GMT

Episode 36 "Why," the boss asks us early one morning, looking thoughtful "don't we use virtual servers?"

"What do you mean?" I ask, dreading the possible problems the Boss is about to bestow on us.

"Virtual Servers - you know, ones which aren't real."

"Oh, we've got a stack of those," the PFY adds. "Downstairs in the virtual bunker, remember."

"I..." the Boss says, trying to avoid a topic that upsets him. "I mean that we should be able to use...virtual servers on a...blade...er...platform...to deliver thin client...uh solutions."

I take a moment from wondering who the Boss has been speaking to in order to be impressed by his almost faultless delivery. Ordinarily, a sentence like that with its multiple technical terms and seeming logic should have given someone of his mental capacity a couple of fatal memory errors trying to get that all out, but not this time...

It's almost like he's been practicing.

"In theory it's a workable solution," the PFY responds. "But in practice we haven't got any thin clients."

"Really?" the Boss asks.

"Nah, they're a bunch of fat bastards who complain about the speed of the Mail server or how we won't let them keep all their MP3s in the content management system. Whiney salad dodgers to a man!"

"I was talking about a thin **server** clients," the Boss adds dryly.

Honestly, it's almost like he knows what he's talking about!!!! While I'm looking out the window for one of the other signs of the apocalypse the PFY decides to get to the root of the problem.

"Oh right," the PFY responds, faking a misunderstanding. "So why would we be wanting to install them?"

"To make more use of our servers, of course!" the Boss explains.

"We already make a lot of use of them."

"Yes, but it seems to me that we just keep on buying machines!" he says.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, this for instance. You want me to sign off two new mail servers and yet I notice that my predecessors have approved over 20 new servers in this financial year alone!"

"That's about normal," I say. "It's something to do with the fiscal advantages of an accelerated depreciation program. Apparently, it *saves* us money if we have a lowered expectation of server life due to the amount of work they do."

"But it *costs* us money in buying new machines."

"Well, I don't pretend to understand the workings of high finance," I say. "But what with that and the ongoing growth in use of all our services..."

"But you already replaced the two email servers in the servers you bought earlier in the year!" the Boss gasps.

I think quickly while mentally cursing the PFY for his poor research into a back story...

"Again, nothing out of the ordinary in that - we're simply maximizing the use of the machines by replacing them on the same schedule as the original machines were purchased - two in the first quarter and two in the third quarter. Replacing them all at the same time would mean outages and possible loss of communication channels which could affect our business reputation - and we definitely wouldn't want that."

"No, I suppose you're right," the Boss sighs. "But surely we could consolidate all these servers into a single...uh...blade server and save ourselves some money?"

"We could, but then we have service redundancy to consider and putting all our eggs in one blade basket, so to speak, could lead to a complete disaster. So it pays to have our services scattered on various servers in what appears - to the casual observer - to be a random and ad-hoc manner designed to increase our spend with a computing vendor so as to qualify for free conferences at holiday destinations."

"Did you say free holidays?" the Boss asks, shucking off the dead weight of his principles.

"Free conferences, at holiday destinations, yes."

"Destinations like?"

"Well, there's a conference coming up on the Spanish Coast in a couple of weeks - but I don't think our spend currently qualifies us for attendance."

"What about with the two email servers?" he asks.

"Almost, but I don't think it'll push us over the edge."

"You could get a third one for...uh...redundancy," the Boss hints.

"Yes, you're probably right," the PFY says, taking the order form from the Boss' hand and making some alterations.

"Right, well, I'm glad we cleared that up," the Boss Pinocchio's, shakedown complete. "So I'll just pass this through to our financials people then. When do you think they'll be delivered?"

"I think they've got some in stock," the PFY says, opening the Blade configurator. "In fact, I think they'll be here quicker than you can say Jack Robinson."

"I don't think so!" the Boss chortles "Jack >CLICK< >CLICK< Robinson."

...

BOFH: Data wiping hell

Operation computer clean up

Published Friday 3rd November 2006 11:50 GMT

Episode 37 It's early-ish morning and the Boss is stalking around the workplace on a mission. What that mission entails is anyone's guess but his stalking is purposeful, which means sooner or later he's going to end up here. The PFY and I know it's only a matter of time, but why rush into confrontation?

I quietly lock the door of Mission Control, turn the lights out and fire up a quick game of FEAR against the PFY...

Two hours later we're obliged to emerge due of the effects of the four cups of early morning coffee we downed. If we'd been thinking we'd have had a toilet installed in Mission Control ages ago, but the nearest we ever came to that was when the CEO brought his nephew's Archimedes in to have some software installed. In the PFY's defence what he installed was soft, just not exactly software...

No sooner am I back than the Boss is in Mission Control ferreting around under tables and in cupboards.

"Looking for something?" the PFY asks noticing the Boss crawling around under his desk.

"No, no, I think I've found what I'm looking for," he says.

"What's that then?" I ask.

"This machine here," he says, pointing at an ancient desktop that the PFY uses as a footrest.

"Yes."

"What's it doing?"

"It's a footrest," the PFY says.

"And what's it used for?"

"Resting my feet on?" the PFY sighs.

"And when you've finished with it, what happens to it?"

"You mean when it wears down to the ground?" I ask.

"When it's no longer fit for use, what happens to it?"

"It goes into the bin?" the PFY asks.

"AH HAH!" the Boss shouts triumphantly. "So you DON'T ensure that the hard drive is erased or destroyed?"

"It doesn't have a hard drive," the PFY says. "It's ancient."

"Oh," the Boss says, slightly deflated. "So what do you do with your old machines then?"

"We give them to schools," I lie. "...After first erasing drives with a bootable CD which kicks off an aggressive erase utility."

Truth be known we sell them to the PFY's cousin who onells them out of a car boot after "erasing" them with the latest pirated XP install, but we **could** do it properly if we wanted...

"What about the rest of the company's machines?"

"Each area is responsible for their own equipment disposals," the PFY says knowingly.

"Just as I thought!" the Boss responds smugly, pulling a video tape out of his pocket and plugging it into our player.

The video turns out to be a "news" item about corporate data being recovered from old hard drives.

"Oh that," the PFY says dryly. "Has it been six months already?"

"Six months?" the Boss asks.

"Yeah," I respond. "Every six months or so on a slow news day they get a guy in a lab coat to buy a couple of machines off eBay and recover data off them and imply that it's some newly discovered threat to security."

"But it IS real risk?" the Boss asks.

"Only if you don't erase your disks properly"

"And would each area in the company be erasing their data properly?"

"They don't do **anything** properly..." the PFY replies.

Quicker than you can say "we should have a company policy on this" the Boss has said: "We should have a company policy on this" to a number of people.

...

"So what will happen is that everyone will ship their machines to you here," the Boss burbles. "You will erase them, then send them on for disposal."

"But..." the PFY whimpers, echoing my own sentiments. "We replace a crapload of machines every year - we'll be inundated!"

"I'm sure you'll cope," the Boss remarks dryly.

...three days later...

"What's all this?!" the Boss asks as he navigates his way through the piles of old kit blocking up Mission Control.

"It's all the replaced kit that you've said we're going to erase!"

"Can't you store it in... the tape safe room?" the Boss suggests.

"We filled that up yesterday," the PFY snaps.

"So...I...was actually coming to see if you could install Service Pack 2 on my home laptop. I would do it from home but my dialup line is so slow that..."

"You're kidding aren't you?" the PFY gasps.

"I... No"

"Here, I'll take care of this," I say to the PFY before he has a conniption, turning my attention to the Boss. "We've got no time so you'll have to do the install yourself. We're going to be spending most of the afternoon just clearing a path through to the tapes so that we can load the backup library."

"Is it...complicated?" the Boss asks.

"Nah, just boot your machine from this CD, say yes to the first question and yes when it asks you if you're sure."

"And there's no other questions?"

"Nope, it'll be off and running - takes a couple of hours."

"Excellent!" the Boss burbles, wandering off happily.

...

"So" I say to the PFY, "I seem to have accidentally mislaid that Auto-erasing boot CD of ours - where can it be?"

"No idea," the PFY adds woodenly. "And we have such a lot of machines to get through. Should we do the responsible thing and call in a contractor to do the erasure for us."

"Good idea," I respond. "You ring your cousin and I'll lock the door and fire up the FEAR server..."

...

BOFH: Dessert storm

Guerrilla warfare

Published Friday 10th November 2006 12:02 GMT

Episode 38 "Oh this is bad," the PFY says.

"Yep, this is bad," I concur, looking at the pile of rubble a floor below what used to be the floor of our 'Operations Rest and Recreation facility' - or to be more technically correct, the cleaner's room the floor below Mission Control that we had walled in by an accommodating builder when the former occupant retired.

Admittedly, the room wasn't optimal, being a floor below Mission Control and all, but another cash job got a set of stairs installed and a tape safe door installed as the entranceway...

"My magazines!" the PFY sniffs, seeing his almost complete collection of *Playboys* in amongst the rubble. "I...I'd just completed the 1950s - including the March '55 Issue."

"I thought you said there wasn't one," I say, tapping a bit of rubble into the hole.

"That's what they want you to think," the PFY says, tapping his nose. "But how did this happen?"

"You mean how did a cleaner's room built to sustain the weight of a couple of people, a couple of vacuum cleaners, 1,000 bars of tiny soap and 200 packages of greaseproof toilet paper **fail** under the weight of almost all the *Playboys* ever printed - including several shelves of non-English editions..."

"I was going to work on them next," the PFY sniffs.

"...a large TV stolen from the boardroom, two armchairs stolen from the boardroom atrium, a bar fridge stolen from the CEO's office, and the contents of the boardroom bar?"

"I..."

"Perhaps if you hadn't piled all your to-be-sorted magazines in the centre of the room?"

"I..."

"Be that as it may, I think we have a real problem. It looks like the room's collapsed into...the visitor's toilets on the ground floor? So we're going to have to lock those and come up with something to divert company attention till we can get that mess tidied up."

"Fire Alarm?" the PFY suggests.

"I think we're going to need more than an hour..."

"What do you suggest?"

"I'm thinking of a two-pronged operation," I say, thinking cap on. "The first, Operation Just Desserts, we tell the head of IT that we think the beancounters have a bulk eraser!"

"Weren't **we** going to get one for them - because their old one failed - which we'd supplied them in the first place?"

"Yes, yes, but we convince the head that it poses a threat to the whole company - that they could erase data at a whim!"

"And?"

"And that we need to go into beancounter central and look for it!"

"Why do we need to go in?"

"It's all part of the plan - so we can steal their office supplies."

"Why?"

"Unbeknownst to you we're all out of printer paper and our budget is spent - so we steal theirs while diverting attention from the cave in. It's Win-Win!"

"I..."

"Hang on...I've got another idea - while we're looking for the bulk eraser, we trash all their desktops so they'll have to get us to fix them when it's all over. We can **bill** them for our time - and take office supplies instead of money!!! Win-Win-Win!"

"The head of IT won't back that!"

"Of course he will! No one likes the head beancounter, and half the departments in the company have run out of stationery budget. We'll get a few of them on board and they'll demand we go in to 'find the bulk eraser'."

"But what happens when we don't find a bulk eraser?"

"We have a 'mission successful' party to say we've made the company safe, then hold the head beancounter responsible for all the data he's destroyed in the past..."

"With the eraser that we sold him and showed him how to use?"

"Yes."

"And won't the beancounters get a little irate at us stealing all their office supplies, shafting their Boss and trashing their machines? Won't they want some sort of...revenge?"

"Which is where the second phase, Operation...uh...Cannon Fodder comes in."

"How about a better idea?" the PFY interrupts.

"Which is?"

"Let's see..." the PFY says thoughtfully. "How about: We nip over to the sewer inspection company that does our drains and steal the head off an underwater camera and leave it sticking out of one of the women's toilets..."

"So it looks like we've got a pervert in the building!!!" I cry.

"And when the you know what hits the fan..."

"We leap in saying all toilets should be secured until we can check them over with our...camera detector!!" I finish. "I suppose it has a sort of...elegance."

...Three hours, a loud scream from the fourth floor and some running around later...

"I find it hard to believe that someone would use something like this to...spy...on people," the head of IT says to the head of security as they look the device over in Mission Control.

"Yeah," the head of security admits. "It's very unlikely. We checked our camera logs to see if anyone was carrying one of these around, but there was nothing. It's probably someone's idea of a joke - so we'll just check the other toilets, just in case."

"No camera records at all?" the PFY asks.

"Nothing."

"So it's almost as if the camera data had been...erased?"

I REPEAT!!!OPERATION JUST DESSERTS IS A GO!!!

BOFH: When non-IT people make IT decisions

Brace for impact

Published Friday 17th November 2006 12:02 GMT

Episode 39 It's going to be a bad day, I can just feel it. All it'd take is the Boss to walk in with...

"Hi, could you cast your eye over this?" the Boss asks, placing a large folder on the desk in front of me.

"I...I'm rather busy," I lie.

"But I told the guy we'd look over it," the Boss says.

"And everyone loves a man of his word," I comment noncommittally.

"It does look pretty good..." the boss wheedles.

"No it doesn't," I respond, seeing the huge pile of paper entitled *Pinnacle of Content Management Devices*.

"It does. And anyway, the guy's coming to see you after lunch," the boss blurts, moving back a couple of steps.

"What?!"

"Well he wanted to explain some of the technical details of it to someone."

"And the cleaner was busy?" I sigh.

...

And wouldn't you know it, the guy, justcallmejohn, is so bloody nice and the product's so crap I almost feel like I'm kicking a puppy as I pop his business card into the shredder...

...just as he walks back into the office to offer me a one time discount.

"?!" he says wordlessly.

"Ahhhhh, I was just...uhm...using the first thing that came to hand to clear a paper jam," I say.

"Oh," he says helpfully. "You can just press the reverse button. >prod<"

...as the last half of his shredded brochure slides out

"That was... ah...the first thing I used to try and clear the jam, but unfortunately..."

"It's okay," he sighs, sitting down brokenly. "It's crap. We both know it's crap. The manufacturer knows it's crap - but they went out of business, so we bought all their stock and rebadged it - and it's still crap. You'd have to be an absolute idiot to buy it!"

"But the brochure says..."

"The brochure's crap too. We just reworded and reformatted a competitor's blurb. The only technical spec that our guys could work out was that it runs on 110V."

"Not 240?"

"No - it took a machine to find that out."

"Well, I have to say while I appreciate your frankness I can't see how it will help with sales."

"I think we both know there's not going to be any sales," he sniffs.

"Sooner or later you're bound to get someone who's keen," I say, trying to cheer him up.

"It's unlikely."

"Well, my Boss was keen!"

"That's just because your CEO and my sales director went to school together."

And it all starts to make sense - the Boss's wheedling, his saying how good it looked from the brochure. One truth of computing is that the crapness of a product is proportional to how high up in the organisation they start to market it. This really is a chunk of...

"We'll take two," I say, awaking from my thoughts.

"They're expensive," John warns.

"Yes, you're right, better make it three."

"But they're crap!"

"Even better," I say as the PFY wanders in.

"What have we bought?"

"Something the Boss was keen on," I say. "Two of them...plus uh...one for... redundancy!"

"What is it?"

"This," I say, handing over half shredded brochure.

"Ohh looks nasty. Hey, it only runs on 110! Why are we buying it again?"

"The CEO is keen, and he's expressed his keenness to the head of IT, who's expressed his keenness to the Boss, who's expressed both this keenness and the virtue of this product to us."

"But it's a piece of crap!" the PFY says.

"It is," John concurs.

"Yes. but every now and then you have to buy a piece of crap - or three - as an example of what happens when non-IT people make IT decisions. So I'll just say mildly disparaging things about the product and meantime the CEO will pressure the head of IT who will in turn pressure the Boss who will in turn pressure us. We'll buy and install them, they'll fail within weeks - if not days - and we'll move them into the basement with all the other foolish IT purchases including the non-upgradeable SAN device, the 100+ brand new 10 Meg 24 port hubs and the automatic potato peeler."

"Potato peeler?" John asks.

"Don't ask," the PFY sighs.

...three days later...

"My, but that was a quick delivery!" the Boss gushes as the three boxes arrive. "Shouldn't we install them straight away?"

"No, I thought we'd run some checks on them first - you know H&S and all that," the PFY says, executing stage one of the great setup.

"Nonsense, plug one in and lets see what it does!"

"It's a box with a switch, a couple of network ports and a green LED - what are you hoping to see??" the PFY asks.

"Just plug it in!"

>plug< >click< >CLACK<

Stage One Complete...

"What was that?" the Boss asks.

"That was the power going off to this set of desks," the PFY says.

"Oh - do you think it's using too much power?"

"More than 10 amps?"

"Yes."

"Yes, that'll be it." the PFY says, disguising his sarcasm well. "Hang on, we've got the UPS tap which is rated at 80 Amps continuous - should we run it off that?"

"Why not?" the Boss says, still caught up in the excitement.

"We could plug them all in at the same time?" the PFY suggests evilly.

"Sure."

"I think I'll just get the tester," the PFY says.

"Just do it!" the Boss Nikes.

Stage Two complete!

>plug< >rustle< >plug< >rustle< >plug<

"Ready?"

"Yes"

>click<

>CLACK< >CLACKETY< >CLACK< >CLACKETY< >CLACK<

"What was that?" the Boss asks from the darkness.

"Well, I could be wrong" the PFY says. "But I'm guessing it was the unfused tap to the UPS back-EMFing the mains with an unsynchronised phase - tripping the building breaker."

>woop!< >woop!<

"And **that** will be the smoke from the blown 110 volt supplies in this expensive, un-safety tested, destroyed kit, tripping the oxidation detectors in the smoke alarms, in turn causing a building evacuation."

"And **that**," I continue, "will cause the inquisition into who signed off the purchase and authorised the untested installation."

>Slam!<

Stage Three complete!

BOFH: IT services review

'Lending a hand' to the CEO

Published Friday 1st December 2006 12:02 GMT

Episode 40 "What's this about?" the PFY asks, tapping his screen curiously.

"What?" I ask, looking up from the internals of my desktop machine mid-harddrive installation.

"The review of IT services."

"**What** review of IT services?"

"There's a review of IT services across the company," the PFY says. "What does it mean?"

"Ahhhh..", I say. "It could mean a number of things."

"Like?"

"The company wants to try to improve the quality of the IT experienc..."

"Or?"

"The company wants to save money and IT is the 'low hanging fruit' of expenditure..."

"Or?"

"They want to get rid of someone. Or two."

"So it's about us?"

"Could be. How's the memo worded?"

"What d'you mean?"

"Well, if it says something huggy feely like looking for innovative answers and future directions, then it's about improving IT."

"No.."

"Didn't think so - that never happens. Ok, if it says something about centralisation, recognising efficiencies, or anything at all about total cost of ownership, it's about saving money."

"Nope.."

"Ok, in that case I'm betting it says something about 'right-tasking', 'examining organisational structure' and identifying roles and the people best suited to them."

"Yeah, sort of."

"Then yes, they want to get rid of someone."

"They're saying they want to ensure key business areas receive tailored support - which they suggest may involve rationalisations."

"Oooh, that means they're REALLY want to get rid of someone. Does it mention any specific areas?"

"uhmm...they mention their aim is to improve the reporting and tracking of service problems."

"Reporting and tracking - So it's someone from the helpdesk. Oooh!!! It'll be the new guy who spent all that time installing ADSL at the CEO's place!"

"Because he took so long?"

"Partly."

"And the other part."

"He had to make several visits - usually at short notice when the CEO was involved in some high level meetings. Surely you listen to the rumour mill?"

"So he had problems getting into the CEO's house?"

"It wasn't the CEO's house that he was apparently getting into."

"?"

"Let me spell it out for you. It took him three hours a time, seven times in two weeks. Returning to work slightly dishevelled with lipstick garnish..."

"You mean that he's hitting the CEO's Mrs?"

"If by *Mrs* you mean the silicon enhanced chunk of trophyware 20 years his junior who used to be his executive assistant and by *hit* you mean consensual extramarital sexual activity, then yes."

"You're suggesting she's... promiscuous?"

"Promiscuous - such a quaint term. But to use your vernacular, I believe she's probably been *hit* more times than [Return]. But let's get an expert opinion..."

I make a quick call to the head of IT and fabricate a story of Union disquiet at the review...within minutes the head of IT and the review consultant, Geoff, are in Mission Control...

"I can assure you that this review will be conducted in full consultation with the staff," the head of IT burbles along sagely.

"Yes, I'll be going through the terms of reference to ensure that all relevant areas are discussed and covered," Geoff adds.

"The **most** relevant area concerned being which staff member we want to axe."

"Look" the Head of IT snaps. "Just keep your head down and it'll all be ok. It's not you they're after."

"So it **IS** the helpdesk guy!" the PFY says.

"Who told you that?!" the Head asks.

"I did," I respond.

"How did you find out?" he gasps.

"What? Half the building knows! But let me get this straight - the plan is to *review* the place and find - through due process - that ONE helpdesk person is for the high jump?

"I..."

"Yes," Geoff interjects. "He'll never work in the IT industry again!"

"Oh, so we're taking him on as a consultant!" the PFY chips.

"It'll never work - he'll get a lawyer in and you'll be forced to pay out for an unfair dismissal."

"The CEO... doesn't care," the head of IT says, nodding at Geoff. "He wants him gone."

"But paying him an unfair dismissal penalty plus redundancy - it all seems so wrong," I say. "Why don't you just pay us to find one of the three Ps?"

"The three Ps?" Geoff and the head ask.

"Yeah, porn, piracy or phishing - on his desktop machine - then he can be down the road by the end of the day!"

"You can do that?" Geoff asks.

"Please, the PFY will have C\$ mounted, one or more of the Ps installed and appropriate timestamps forged in no time. And just think of the money you'll save on Geoff's fees!"

"I think you'll find I have a fixed one month contract," Geoff replies smugly.

"Not with >clickety< a hard drive full of Ps you don't!" the PFY says.

"Look what I found on Geoff's machine!!!" I gasp - pointing at the PFY's hastily prepared handiwork.

...

One day later its official, the helldesk is one man down, Geoff has disappeared, and the PFY and I have a couple of hundred quid of the CEO's dosh to spend at the pub this afternoon...

"So..." I say to the PFY. "Fancy 20 or 30 large ones?"

"I...'d like to," the PFY says.

"But?"

"I have a little job to do - won't take more than a couple of hours. Today anyway."

"What, working during drinking time?!?!?"

"Well, the CEO's ADSL isn't going to fix itself..."

The Bastard and the IT training budget

Viral marketing

Published Saturday 9th December 2006 22:01 GMT

Episode 41 "I... what?" the PFY snuffles, reading through his email.

"Hmm?" I ask.

"My attendance at a Linux forum has been canceled because.. the IT Training budget for this quarter has been exceeded?!"

"That's ridiculous," I counter. "It's about 10 grand a quarter and we haven't used any of it!"

"Well that's what it says," The PFY replies, tapping his screen.

"Let's just have a little look, then," I say, using the DBA credentials to rifle through our financials database.

>clickety<

"Hmmm, how much was your course worth?"

"108 quid plus VAT," The PFY says

">clickety<

Ah, well in that case they're right, there isn't sufficient funds to pay for it."

"Why?" The PFY asks, getting a little whiny.

"Because... 9972 quid was spent on a.. >clickety<..... >clickety clickety<..... >clickety<, >tap< >tap<.. >clickety< Hierarchical Storage and Collocated Data Expo."

"A what?"

"Hierarchical Storage and Collocated Data Expo."

"You're going to an Expo?" The PFY asks.

"No."

"Who else could manage to slip a 10 grand junket past the Head of IT?"

"Ahmm, let's see... >clickety< Ah. The Boss. Oh! **AND** the Head of IT!"

"So they've wangled themselves a top-shelf junket?"

"It would appear so."

"Where is it?"

">Clickety< Where isn't it would be the better question," I say. "It's a cruise ship, stopping in The Hague, Paris, Lisbon, Morocco..."

"A cruise ship, stopping in... Paris?" the PFY says, dubiously.

"That's what it says!" I say, tapping the query results.

"Who's running it?" the PFY asks.

"Let's see. The company's called... Can you pronounce that?"

"I can't even read it, it's 8-bit characters!"

"Look it up on the web?" The PFY suggests.

And no sooner suggested than done. The 'course' is just a top-shelf junket complete with bus tours, hotels, drinks and meals included.

"It's good," the PFY says, looking over my shoulder. "Looks to be completely content free - as if they just pasted photos of Disk Devices and Tape Libraries from Vendor websites to make it legit."

"Hmmm," I concur. "And I'm guessing that the technical content of it will come in a faux leather folder at the end of the tour."

"Just a show bag to prove you went..." The PFY nods.

"Indeed."

"I'm a little surprised The Boss invited The Head of IT, though"

"Nothing's more likely to get a junket approved than getting your boss to go as well - to 'familiarise themselves with the technology'."

"But why would The Head of IT want to spend a week in the company of The Boss?!"

"I'm betting he doesn't. I think he's got a cunning plan to create an unexpected vacancy just before the ship sails - a vacancy which can be filled by Natasha, his new PA. And her even newer fake tan."

"When does it leave??" The PFY asks, looking over my shoulder.

"Tomorrow."

"Ah," The PFY nods. "So a particularly vigorous case of salmonella...."

"Would really upset The Boss's holiday plans. However, The Boss has been spending rather a lot of time in the company of the secretary, so I'd also take a bet that he has his own cunning plan which would see the Head of IT unable to attend."

"So whatever happens my Linux forum's a goner?"

"Perhaps you could always **WIN** the 108 quid in a small wager?"

"How?"

"By correctly guessing the junket-goer."

"Okay, 108 quid says it'll be The Boss!"

"True, he's sneaky, but perhaps you forget that the Head of IT was handing out homemade savory nibbles earlier this morning..."

"*I* had some of those!" The PFY gasps, downing several glasses of water from the cooler in an effort to wash away the germs.

"Yeah I know," I chuckle. "I would've too if you hadn't pushed to the front of the line."

"I... Okay, I've changed my mind, it's The Head of IT who'll be going."

"You're sure now? After all, it was The Boss who changed the bottle on the water cooler this morning - when the old one was still half full."

"But I just bloody drank some of that!!"

"Yeah, I know," I smirk. "So it's The Boss - or the Head of IT...tell me now, quickly, before you go and get your stomach pumped."

"The Boss" The PFY gasps.

. . . The next day. . .

"So that will be 108 quid you owe me," I say to the PFY from my cell phone as I scan the small crowd beside the ship for a familiar face. "The Boss was taken distressingly ill on the Tube on his way home last night. It broke my heart to have to pass on his apologies to the secretary."

"So it was the Head of IT!"

"As it happened he came down with a nasty case of Giardia - much the same as you, I'm guessing - before he'd left the building."

"So no one's going?"

"Well that's what I was ringing about. It would be a shame to just waste the trip, and an even bigger shame if Natasha were unable to exercise that new tan of hers, so I guess I'll bring you back some brochures."

"You Ba.." the PFY says, as I ring off, just as Natasha appears.

Stunning tan.

BOFH: The most important user in the world...

Is that a rocking horse in your bedroom?

Published Saturday 16th December 2006 08:02 GMT

Episode 42 "I... what?" the PFY snuffles, reading through his email.

Once in a while - not very often mind - I could swear the PFY had been to a customer service course or maybe worked in one of those soulless fast food chains. Like today for instance:

"Hi there, I need someone to come up and change the toner cartridge in my machine."

"Well, I can probably make it up there after lunch," the PFY says nicely. "Where's the replacement cartridge held?"

"Nowhere, you'll have to bring one with you."

"Ah. I'm sorry, but we don't have spare cartridges because of the number of varieties of printers out there. You'll need to order one and give us a call when it comes in," the PFY says.

"I don't have time to do that!"

"Well in the interim you might try rocking the cartridge from side to side to stir up the remaining toner - that might buy you a few pages," the PFY suggests helpfully.

"No, I really do think I'll need a replacement cartridge!" the user insists.

"As I said, if you don't have one we can't replace it," the PFY repeats.

"Surely you can order it!?"

"Yes, but that will probably take a number of days and then I'd have to bill you through our convoluted internal charging system - it'd be quicker for you to just order it yourself."

"Can't you just run down to the shop and pick one up?"

"Oh, and pay for it myself, claim the money back through petty cash after filling in several forms including the one about why I got something outside of the procurement procedure - finally being reimbursed weeks later? I think I'll give it a miss..."

"Do you know who I am?" the user says, uttering the words most guaranteed to get on my wick.

"I ... No" the PFY says

"Just a minute!" I cry, dashing over to the PFY's desk and interrupting the conversation. "It's you isn't it?!?!?!?"

"Who?" the PFY and the caller say simultaneously.

"You... THE MOST IMPORTANT USER IN THE WORLD!!! I'm very sorry, I didn't recognise your voice at first - I thought you were someone else."

"I... Who did you think I was?"

"For a minute there I thought you were... EVERY BLOODY USER WHO RINGS US! So how's about you get off your arse and call stores for a replacement cartridge?"

>Click<

"Well," the PFY says. "That was effective. Think we'll hear from him again?"

"Bound to," I say.

. . Half an hour later . .

"Ok," the Boss sighs wearily "Which of you was talking to the new Head of Financial Services?"

"There's a new Head Beancounter?" the PFY says "Since when?"

"Since the last one found a horse's head in his bed," the Boss says, staring at the PFY.

"It wasn't a real horse!" the PFY says defensively. "It was just the head of his kid's rocking horse."

"And you think that was appropriate?"

"Which circumstances were these?"

"He rejected an expenses claim for a meal I had on a conference."

"And that made it appropriate for you to sneak into the man's house, saw the head of his child's rocking horse and pop it between him and his wife while he slept?"

"I... uhmm.. yes. It was an expensive dinner," the PFY blusters.

"Well anyway, the new guy isn't impressed and has demanded that someone come up and fix his printer."

"It's not broken, it's just out of toner," the PFY says. "And he doesn't have a replacement cartridge."

"I have a replacement cartridge," the Boss says. "I went down the road and bought one."

"Oh," the PFY says.

"And I'd like you to go and replace it, now if you don't mind."

"Fair enough," the PFY says graciously.

This I just have to see!

...

And what a disappointment it is. I was expecting the PFY to 'accidentally' drop the cartridge in such a manner that the toner reservoir became damaged, filling the printer with toner, but no. Whereas I expected him to get a heat gun to make sure the toner got nice and stuck to every part of the inside of the printer he instead did a perfect 10/10 install - even putting all the parts back in the box for recycling. Could the young man be getting jaded?

"About time too," the new Head Beancounter says, creeping up behind us when the job is done. "Is it ready to go?"

"Yep," the PFY says. "Should be all go. You can do that urgent printing now."

"Oh, it wasn't urgent, it was just a couple of black and white prints of our new home that I wanted to send to the wife's parents."

"I..." the PFY says, lost for words.

"But I suppose I should send them through - if only to test the printer."

>Click< >Whirrrr< >Whirrrrr< >Whirr<

>Ring<

"Hello," the PFY says, picking up the printer room phone in a dedicated service professionals manner. "...Sure"

"What?" I ask.

"He wants me to bring his printouts to him," the PFY says, grabbing the printouts and heading towards the door - WITHOUT picking up some blunt instrument!!!

... 30 seconds later in the Head Beancounters office ...

"Here you go," the PFY says handing the printouts over. "Nice house."

"Yes," the Head Beancounter says. "We like it."

"And is that your family?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, that's Peter and that's Nigel."

"Lovely kids," the PFY chirps. "Oh... and is that a rocking horse in the background?"

Uh-oh...

BOFH: Looting Christmas treasure

Foiled

Published Friday 22nd December 2006 12:02 GMT

Episode 43 "Check it out!" the PFY gasps, pointing at a large basket of goodies sitting on the secretary's desk.

"Bonus!" I cry, looking for a card. "Is it for us?"

"No, it's for the Boss," Cathy the secretary sighs before putting the basket into a large cardboard box beside her desk. "The third present he's got today."

"But he's only been in the job a month!" the PFY blurts.

"I know, but that's the tip of the iceberg if you compare it to the head of IT's goodies," Cathy replies, "He got an iPod, a digital camera, some tickets to..."

"An iPod!" the PFY interrupts. "He won't know how to use it!"

"His PA said he thought it was a remote control," Cathy sniggers.

"He can't keep it!" the PFY snaps. "I predict...an emergency disciplinary action."

"Pardon?" Cathy says.

"Disciplinary action," I say. "You know, when we find unspeakable amounts of porn on his machine. Or when he emails the CEO and explains just how much he hates him."

"I was thinking more along the lines of photoshopping him and the CEO's wife in some form of athletic encounter," the PFY says.

"You're...going to get him...fired...at Christmas...for an iPod?"

"The PFY would have him bounced on his birthday for a bread roll," I say.

"Because it's Christmas!" the PFY adds, in so much of a hurry to get his creative work done that he crashes into me on the way to Mission Control.

"No!" Cathy gasps, horrified.

"Sure. He once shut a group of beancounters in the lift for three hours just to make sure he'd get two helpings of Onion Bhajis at the cafeteria. He knows no shame. Who knows what he'd do for an iPod!"

"So I shouldn't tell him about the portable DVD players which were delivered for both the Boss and the head of IT this morning?" Cathy asks, pointing at a couple of Christmas wrapped boxes.

"No, best I take a look at them and check them for...electrical safety," I say, pulling the cards off the boxes and leaving them on the counter.

"But won't they miss them?"

"No, customers rarely know what vendors are going to send them so I'm sure the cards will suffice."

"But won't **you** miss one?" Cathy asks pointedly.

"No, I wasn't expecting them so I...Oh, I see," I say, handing a player back to Cathy. "Did I...I mean we get anything else?"

"Uhhmmm," Cathy says, browsing through a large cardboard box beside my desk. "Some bottles of port, a couple of posh corkscrews, and some tickets to a riverboat cruise, some calendars and a couple of...remote controlled cars?"

"Did you say remote controlled cars?" I gasp, suppressing what might otherwise have been an expression of excitement.

"Yes."

"They're here then?"

"They're **your** cars?"

"**Technically** they're mine and the PFY's because between us we made the company the largest purchaser of Serial ATA disks in November."

"But in reality...?"

"I told him we missed out by five drives and what he doesn't know can't hurt me."

"I...So are you're just going to take them?"

"Oh yes. And in my position I'm sure he'd do the same thing - after all It's CHRISTMAS!!!"

"I see," Cathy says, watching the descent of man with disgust. "And you're going to get them now?"

"Uh-huh, while my assistant's otherwise occupied..."

"Can you pick up my chocolate?" she asks sweetly, handing over a large bucket.

"What's the bucket for?"

"To carry 73 bars of chocolate."

"73 bars of chocolate?"

"The packaging burst," she says. "I think security took some, there was supposed to be 100."

"And the bottled water?" I ask, pointing to the flagon of bottled water in the bucket.

"A bribe for security."

"Fair enough," I say, making for the lifts as soon as the coast is clear and the PFY's busy with Photoshop.

...

I can't help sparing a thought for Cathy's naiveté. I mean who'd entrust 73 chocolate bars to me? In fact, who'd entrust them to security!? Especially at Christmas!

I'm still thinking these thoughts when the lift panel goes dead.

...and the lift stops.

...and the emergency light goes out.

..

It's only then that I realize that there **are** no chocolate bars - and by the time I get out of here, no remote controlled cars either.

And then I realize what the bucket and water are for...

And >rustle< that the PFY lifted my cell phone when he bumped into me...

And that someone's removed the lift call button...

...

And then I start wondering if the lift camera is an infra red one or not - and if so whether the ensuing hours and what the entail will be all streamed live to the web...

...because that's what I'd do.

...because it's Christmas.

The Bastard's guide to airport security

PFY plays guinea pig

Published Thursday 28th December 2006 10:46 GMT

Episode 44 Ah, the strange twists of fate which conspire both for and against us.

Against us when I believed that my trusty co-worker would treat me with the respect I deserved from my years at the coal face of IT and cut me a little slack when it came to me [stealing his Christmas presents](#). And locking me in a lift. And for us when The Boss, supposedly the victim of a convoluted Photoshop inspired blackmail scheme, instead calls lift maintenance because he doesn't want to carry his presents down three flights of stairs.

And so it is that I am free from my elevator prison...

... and seeking revenge.

First stop, Mission Control - but The PFY has long gone. Second stop, the secretary's desk because it's more than apparent that the PFY and Cathy are acting in collusion - but she too has departed hastily. A brief ferret around her desk reveals nothing however a couple of moments thought (plus those hours trapped in a lift) have given me a plan...

I dash off a quick email to Cathy, ostensibly ordering a batch of new paper-clips or something, and quick as a flash her out-of-office message pops back to say that she's off to Spain for a week and won't be contactable over the break. I shove a Knoppix disk into The PFY's machine and peruse the contents of his hard drive until I hit paydirt in his webcache. A set of transactions with an online travel agency. Interesting...

A further disk scrape or two reveals a deleted PDF file containing the e-ticket receipt and flight information including departure time - and joy of joys - it's not going to depart for another couple of hours!

While the PFY and Cathy no doubt spend a couple of hours sampling the fare of a Heathrow drinking establishment I work a little magic on the airline's telephony server... It is criminal how little care and attention is paid to proper security on these machines. A quick rummage through the information therein gives me a couple of suitable names, numbers and locations. A few quick modifications later and I'm on the tube rattling my way to Heathrow...

I get there about 10 minutes after the plane's departed, which suits me just fine. It's a timing game this - too soon and they'd never get on the plane and too late and it'll never work. I search for the public phone I'm after and bash out the first number I'm after, departure control..

“Hello?”

“Hi Jim in baggage handling. We've got a burst case here and I need to know if the flight's gone?”

"Which flight?" I'm asked without further query - given that the guy's phone caller-ID tells him I'm ringing from baggage handling.

I blurt out The PFY's flight number, only to be told that the flight has just left.

"We can let the owner know when he gets in. Just tell me the barcode number," Control says, helpfully.

"I can't," I sigh. "The bag got caught in a conveyor mechanism and it's been pulled to bits. There's part of his luggage label though, so I can give you the guy's name?"

"Sure, that'll do."

I rattle off the PFY's name before going off onto a tangent about the unreliability of the model C17-A conveyor system and how they never should have replaced the Bristol 12s which were so reliable they actually used them in the first Gulf War to aid in the loading of munitions, etc., etc., etc., until the guy cuts me off.

"Okay, I'll send a note through to the other side letting them know and they'll tell the passenger when he arrives. Can you bag up the contents and send them on?"

"Well that's the thing," I say, getting into the whole 'Jim' role. "I can package up most of it in a 3T4 bag, although they're not as robust as the 3F4s but their cost per unit's about twice that of the 3T4, but we're not allowed to package drugs in transparent packaging..."

"Drugs?!" the guy snaps.

"Yeah, flu medication."

"Oh," the guy says, almost sounding disappointed.

"Yeah, it's just those anti-contestant tablets - the ones they make poor-man's-Speed out of. There must be 10 cartons of them."

"**TEN CARTONS!**" he gasps.

"Yeah, and condoms, lots of condoms. Although it looks like he's used about three packs of them, the lucky bastard!"

Before Jim can tangent off onto the subject of the Spanish package holiday him and the little woman had back in '74, I'm put on hold while the guy has a quick chat on the other line to someone from HM Customs...

"Okay, that's all sorted, they're going to contact Spanish Customs, but they want you to get the bag up here, ASAP."

"You've got to be joking!" I gasp. "We're two men down and one of the C17-A's is on the fritz. I've rung a couple of the on call guys and I can probably get one of them to drop it off to you in about an hour or so..." I say.

";Hang on... Yeah, they say that'll be OK -they'll hold the guy at the other end...";

"Right then!" Jim says, and I hang up and wander back to the Tube entrance.

Looks like the PFY will be getting a little more sex than he bargained on this trip...

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BOFH plays Pass the Password

Resolution time

Published Saturday 6th January 2007 09:02 GMT

Episode 1 2007, what a landmark year! A time for striving onward in the pursuit of excellence and a time for putting behind us the upsets of the past year. Upsets like me getting [trapped in a lift](#) and having to spend several hours contemplating a bucket-based toilet system in full view of the CCTV camera...

...And [upsets](#) like The PFY suffering the indignity of a cavity search so aggressive it took him ten minutes to walk properly and ten pints to get the taste of rubber off the back of his tongue... My getting his luggage 'lost' in Heathrow on the return leg 'because of fog' was really just kicking the man when he was down, but experience has taught me that if you've got to kick someone that's the best time to do it...

Still, it's water under the bridge now and The PFY has agreed to bury the hatchet (Although as there's one in the building somewhere, I'm keeping my wits about me) and we've forged a truce in the spirit of the New Year. In fact, The PFY and I have made so much positive progress that we've made a New Year's resolution to even treat our callers better. And no sooner have we taken a suck on the peace pipe of double-espresso shots than one of our users calls us.

"Password problem?" I predict as The PFY reaches for the hands free button.

"No bet," The PFY replies.

"Hi there, I've just come back from holiday and I seem to have..."

"...forgotten your password over the break?" The PFY suggests helpfully.

"Yes – but only because that stupid expiry made me change it in the last week of work," she snaps.

"No problem," the PFY says ignoring the sarcasm. "What's your username – I'll reset your password so you can change it when you log in."

"Can't you just set it to my normal password?"

"The one that expired?"

"Yes"

"No, sorry, it's expired. But I could reset it and you can choose a new one," the PFY says,

"Couldn't you just unexpire my old password?" she says, firing up the old whiney interface.

"Not really. Why not choose a password that's easy to remember, like the license plate of your first car?"

"Oh I can't possibly remember that."

"The name of your favourite beer plus your year of birth?"

"I don't drink beer."

"Of course not. The address you lived in when you were a kid," the PFY says, with just a touch of testiness.

"We moved around a lot."

"Your first boyfriend's name," The PFY seethes, really starting to lose the plot as far as password security is concerned.

"Ted - but that's too short."

"What about setting it to the reason that he dumped you?"

"What do you mean?"

"Well 'difficult' is nine letters long and..."

"Excuse me," I interject, before The PFY can suggest using the names he may have called her or concatenating the words pain-in-the-arse "Why not set your password to a person's first name and their birthday. You must know someone else's birthday?"

"I do... but wouldn't it be easier to just use my old password?"

"Easier - yes, more secure - no. And we do like to keep you people safe from internet crime," I reply, using the old faithful excuse.

"Wouldn't it be better if you made our network more secure so that it wouldn't matter if we used the same passwords?" she asks, twisting the problem around so it's our fault now...

"We could, but then the systems security would be so secure you'd spend half your time on the phone to us to give you access to it," I respond.

"Isn't that what I'm doing now anyway?" she asks.

"Perhaps I should just mention at this point that while my assistant and I appreciate that liberal use of sarcasm may have served you well in the past, it's our position that we can't compromise the security of the company systems to save you the trouble of having to remember something new."

"I..."

"And so I'm going to get my assistant to change your password to 'security' and have it expire when you login. Is there anything else we can help you with?"

"I... no."

"Excellent, you should be able to login in a couple of minutes."

>click<

"What time is it?" I ask the PFY.

"9:13am."

"So, it's just another 359 days and about 7 hours to go. No problems. We can do it."

>ring<

"Password Problem?" I predict as The PFY reaches for the hands free button.

"No bet," he says as mentally prepares himself for the IT Support version of Groundhog Day.

...

You know, I almost feel bad about offering a hundred quid to the person who can drive The PFY over the edge on the first day. But I did organise it before our truce, so technically my conscience is clear...

BOFH: It's a funny old world isn't it?

Adventure time!

Published Friday 12th January 2007 15:35 GMT

Episode 2 It's a funny old world isn't it? Strange the way things pan out. Take for instance the New Year's truce forged between the PFY and myself. On one hand we reached a landmark accord which allowed us to work in harmony with each other and the users and on the other hand I'm now locked in a dark basement room that the PFY tricked me into visiting by saying that the PR people's expensive new kit had been misdelivered there - all because he found out that I'd arranged for people to harass him mercilessly on the first day.

I'd have explained to the PFY that this was all organised before the truce between us had been struck, only I was in a bit of a hurry to get my hands on the 25-inch LCD monitors that the PFY had said had just appeared in the basement...

The newly installed large electronic lock on the door of the room should have been a dead giveaway but the PFY had also mentioned in passing that he thought the monitors came with 5.1 surround satellite speakers and I may have been a little overexcited - which goes to show that I just don't learn from my mistakes. George Santayana would be ashamed of me.

The dodgy lighting in the room - which failed once the door slammed shut - also should have rung alarm bells but in my rush to the supposed new kit I didn't think about it.

So now I'm trapped in a room which is almost certainly been hand-picked by the PFY for the density of the concrete and remoteness from human contact...

What would MacGyver do?

Unfortunately I don't have the couple of rubber bands, alarm clock and six feet of galvanised drainpipe which he'd use to create a working masonry drill so I'm going to have to switch into geek mode.

Hmm... It's dark, I'm in a basement... ...

>ADVENTURE MODE ON!<

It's pitch dark, and you can't see a thing.

> I

You have: a small bag, a half consumed chocolate bar.

The bag contains: a lifebook p1000 ultraportable, a Philips head screwdriver, a flat blade screwdriver, a piece of wire.

What I wouldn't give for a shiny brass lamp.... Hmmm...

> OPEN BAG

The bag is open.

> TAKE LIFEBOOK

I don't know what that is.

> TAKE P1000

Taken.

> TURN P1000 ON

I don't know how to do that.

> P1000 ON

The laptop turns powers up and floods part of the room in light. You have 6 hours of battery life remaining.

> EXAMINE DOOR

The door is made of solid wood with steel reinforcing. The steel looks new. The backplate of a large electronic lock is embedded in the wood.

> UNSCREW BACKPLATE

The backplate cannot be unscrewed.

> EXAMINE HINGES

The hinges are the high security, autoclosing welded pin type.

The bloody PFY thinks of everything...

> LOOK

You are in a small room with concrete walls, floor and roof.

There are some empty wooden computer crates here.

You have 5.45 hours of battery life remaining.

> EXAMINE WALLS

The walls are made of steel reinforced concrete and are very thick.

> EXAMINE FLOOR

The floor is made of steel reinforced concrete and is very thick

> EXAMINE ROOF

The roof is made of steel reinforced concrete and is very thick. There is a thermal fire detector on the roof.

> HIT DETECTOR

You can't reach!

> STACK CRATES

The crates are now stacked in an easily climbable pile.

> U

You are at roof level. There is a thermal fire detector here.

> HIT DETECTOR

With what?

> HIT DETECTOR WITH P1000

You hit the detector with your lifebook, partly to damage it and partly because getting a battery and recovery disks for it is proving to be such a royal pain to do.

The detector breaks and you feel slightly better about running XP on a machine with only 128M of memory.

> WAIT

Time passes. You have 4.5 hours of battery time remaining.

> WAIT

Time passes. You have 7 hours of battery life remaining.

> WAIT

Your P1000 switches off - possibly because the battery life has never worked properly with a dud battery or possibly because you used it as a hammer.

It's pitch dark, and you can't see a thing.

> WAIT

It's pitch dark, and you can't see a thing. You hear sounds outside the door.

> BANG ON DOOR

The sounds outside the door get much louder, as if someone were hitting it with a large axe.

> WAIT

The door is open, there is a fireman here.

> QUIT

"That was a lucky call," the fireman says to me as I exit through the wreckage of the door. Ordinarily we don't respond to sensor faults, but the monitoring company said that they'd had someone tampering with your company's config this morning so they wanted to be on the safe side."

"And I'm so pleased they did!" I say.

"Yeah, apparently the person who did the tampering did reset the service-mode switch, which trips an alarm after 4 hours."

"The service-mode switch you say?" I ask. "And how does one reset that then - not that I'd ever need to use it to isolate a room which I would subsequently lock my assistant into."

"Pardon?"

"Nothing, thanks again, and if you'll just excuse me I have to go and see my assistant..."

>F.E.A.R MODE ON!<

BOFH: The mystery of the vandalised office

Sherlockian

Published Friday 19th January 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 3 It is a cold morning when my assistant and I arrive at our rooms to commence yet another day of solving the problems of the masses.

"Good Lord," Watson cries upon entering Mission Control. "Whatever has happened?!?"

Entering after him I note overturned chairs, upended drawers and tabletops cleared to the floor...

"Curious," I respond. "It's as if the room has been struck by person or persons engaged in a senseless act of vandalism and bears all the hallmarks of a random disorganised attack."

"I suppose so," my assistant nods thoughtfully, "but...?"

"But first impressions are often deceiving. The casual observer might immediately think vandalism, however, I see a pattern to the damage."

"Which is Sherlock?" Watson asks.

"You will note the contents of my desktop have landed on the floor prior the contents of yours, evidenced by the number of items of yours laying on top of mine."

"Yes, yes, now you mention it, I do," my assistant responds.

"And note also that a path appears to be cleared between the two desks subsequent to the damage which in turn suggests that the culprit started at my desk, went to yours, then returned to mine - which goes to prove my longstanding truth that a criminal will always return to the scene of the crime."

"Ah, isn't that supposed to be much LATER?"

"Could be later, could be sooner - who can tell the mind of a disorganised criminal? And look, over here on my display, an unsent email message of some sort, the text of which would appear to be in some code..."

"Yes, I see - but what does the code say?"

"It's a mystery to me, but could be something simple like a random substitution cipher - note how there are word boundaries and differently sized words - In fact it could be a simple key registration shift cipher."

"A key register shift cipher?"

"Yes, where the letter **Q** is replaced by **W**, **W** is replaced by **E**, **E** by **R** and so on, wrapping around at the end of the keypad. You will recall my case of the dancing men?"

"Ah yes, where we encountered strange drawings of figures which was in fact a simple semaphore based code?"

"No, I mean the time we encountered those men Morris dancing."

"What's the mystery in that?"

"Why they'd do it, how they keep their disgusting pastime secret from their friends, why it's not illegal, er, etc."

"No, I don't recall that, but what has it to do with our current case?" my assistant asks.

"Nothing, I just like recalling my triumphs from time to time - like the mystery of the Rubenesque maiden."

"The time you couldn't figure out how the large barmaid from the plough ended up in your bed?"

"Yes."

"After a night of heavy drinking with some vendors at the pub?"

"Yes."

"Some mysteries are just unexplainable," my assistant responds - and do my delicate senses detect a hint of sarcasm??

"However, back to the case in hand. First, eliminate suspects - where were you last night?"

"At a vendor bash with you?" my assistant answers.

"Indeed you were, and I can corroborate that myself - for part of the night at least. And what time did you leave?"

"About 10 - and you were leaving shortly thereafter to get to the station well before the last tube ran in case you mislaid your tube pass again."

"Indeed I was - which leaves only one possible culprit!" I cry.

"Who?"

"Martians!"

"Martians?!"

"Yes, living for years below the surface of the planet to avoid detection they have finally broken cover to come here and steal our advanced technology."

"Ridiculous!"

"Not so! As I have often said, when you eliminate all possible solutions what remains - however improbable - must be the solution!"

"If Martians had the technology to get here surely they'd have more advanced technology than us earthlings - who can't even land on the moon?"

"You're suggesting we haven't reached the moon?"

"If we HAVE reached the moon, why don't we ever see pictures of the lunar rover from telescopes?"

"Simple! They parked it on the Dark Side of the moon so as not to attract undue attention from the wrong people. Dodgy neighborhoods and all that."

"I think it's all a little farfetched Holmes," my assistant says dubiously. "And there simply must be a more reasonable explanation that doesn't involve extra terrestrials, which we could uncover with a bit more legwork."

"And that explanation is?"

"I'm not sure, but I'm positive we could find something which would shed a littl...But wait! I think I've uncovered a clue!!!"

"What?"

"In the bin, four empty cans of Tennants Extra!!!"

"TRAMPJUICE!" I cry. "So you're suggesting tramps broke into our offices to steal our advanced technology?"

"No."

"They broke in to use our bin?"

"No."

"So they broke in for no reason at all? I suppose it's plausible..."

"How about something a little more plausible?" my assistant suggests.

"Yes?"

"The culprit was attending a vendor drinking session and left without the accompaniment of a barmaid. Feeling lowly he stopped in at a friendly off license for a couple of cans of cheap booze to take the edge off the tube ride home. Realizing he left his tube pass in his office, the culprit returned to search the office for it, making a mess in the process. Ring any bells?"

"What, you're suggesting I did this?"

"Of course. You do it every six months or so Holmes."

"Really."

"Yes, and remember, you always have vague memories of being in a large waiting room filled with computer equipment?"

"Oh yes, it's all becoming clear to me now!" I sigh. "But how do you explain the coded message."

"I checked the keyboard registration thingy," the PFY replies. "It's you trying to tell me you'll probably be in late."

"Ah!"

"Case closed?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, I think you're right - although I wouldn't open your top drawer if I were you?"

"Why not?"

"I seem to recall using the bathroom. Number twos"

>Sigh<

BOFH: Immortalised in print

A little white lie never hurt anyone...

Published Friday 26th January 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 4 "I...uh...was wondering if you'd check this over for...uh...accuracy," the head of IT says, handing over a stack of about two inches of paper.

"What is it?" I gasp, fearing the worst - that it's a business case for a new and inventive way for the company to flush its IT spend down the proverbial crapper.

"It's a personal thing - my autobiography."

"Your...autobiography."

"Yes, it's called *Press return to continue* and is about my life in computing from the early 60s till now."

"Didn't you used to work in an insurance company?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, and they were one of the earliest adopters of computing! We used to code people's information onto punch cards, then send them off to the central office for them to be batch processed overnight, and the cards with errors were marked and sent back to us, and then we'd have to use a lookup table to find out what the error was with the data that had been..."

"I'm sorry," the PFY gasps. "I think I just went into an insulin coma."

"Oh, are you a diabetic?" the head gasps.

"No, but I think I know what it feels like when the darkness closes in," the PFY sighs.

"Anyway," the Head continues. "Because of the cost of repunching cards I recommended we change to Mark Sense cards which meant that we could simply use a pencil and an eraser and reuse..."

"Wait!" I cry, before the head can continue. "Don't spoil it for me, I'd like to read it for myself!"

"Oh, of course, good point. It's a bit of a read, if I say so myself!"

Which is what worries me...

"You don't mind if I take myself off somewhere quiet to run over a couple of chapters?"

"And I could look at a couple too so we can get back to you quicker," the PFY offers.

"I...I don't see why not - you've nothing important on?"

"Nah, a database recovery, some system tuning and a couple of helpdesk calls - nothing that can't wait..."

"Excellent."

...Later at the pub...

"Listen to this," the PFY says, moving his pint aside and pointing to a chunk of text "...and it turned out that the engineer had installed the 380-B1 backplane instead of the 380-B2, which took us almost two days to discover because although the 380-B1 was an eight bit bus it had a parity complement option, which the engineer hadn't noticed'."

"Riveting stuff," I concur. "But I think I can top that with three pages of a stack dump that once came off a console printer - which he proceeds to diagnose instruction by instruction..."

...Later that same day...

"So what did you think?" the head asks excitedly as he catches us trying to sneak back into the office to get our coats and leave...

"Well, overall..." the PFY starts.

"..it's a page turner," I say.

"Yes, you can't wait to see how it ends," the PFY adds.

"Anything I should change?"

"Well, maybe go a little lighter on the technical detail and a bit more into funny anecdotes?" I suggest.

"Oh you mean like the system 380 backplane mixup?" he chuckles.

"Not exactly. I think you should be aiming more at funny-ha-ha then funny-I-want-to-kill-myself."

"What are you saying?"

"That the mainstream buyers would probably like to hear more about you pushing a pie into Bill Gate's face," I say.

"Or the time you got rat-arsed at a trade show, hijacked a segway and drove it into a swimming pool," the PFY suggests.

"Or when you gave Richard Stallman a free beer..."

"But I've never done those things?!"

"It's an IT autobiography - you're expected to lie about things," I say. "You know, how you discovered the 'byte' while you were working with some Christmas tree lights one day or how you had a vision for the internet which you accidentally disclosed over drinks at a University pub one day."

"Yeah," the PFY adds. "And when you write about yourself you have to imply that the so-called technologists were really as thick as a VAX architecture guide and how **YOU** played **THE** pivotal role in guiding them to their discovery."

"But people know who discovered things!"

"They **THINK** they do - but once you release your book 'HOW JOBS, GATES, WOZ and ELLISON SCREWED MY KIDS OUT OF THEIR INHERITANCE' people will start wondering..."

"I haven't got any kids!"

"Of course you don't," I say. "Because you didn't have enough royalties from your stolen intellectual property to pay for their lifesaving operations!"

"Put that in the book!" the PFY advises "...then steal some photos of kids off MySpace - ones with a cute dog in the picture work best - and age the image up a bit with Photoshop."

"So you're suggesting I lie?"

"A)It's computing, and B) It's an autobiography," the PFY says. "People know they're going to be lied to."

"And you think it'll sell?"

"Better than you'd think," the PFY predicts. "But publish a couple of chapters on the web first to get a bit of interest going..."

...

Three days later the amount of paper on the head's desk has grown astronomically - and that's just the lawsuits! Who could have guessed the man would embrace the idea of lying so totally.

"And to think," I say to the PFY. "We worked with the man who wrote DOS."

"And C."

"And Fortran. And helped invent the transistor, the microchip and wrote most of Vista in his spare time."

"Ah well," the PFY sighs. "They can't all be winners."

The Bastard guide to work from work

Like working from home, but different

Published Friday 2nd February 2007 21:29 GMT

Episode 5 "What's your opinion of this?" The Boss asks, handing over a brochure for a laptop.

"Seems OK to me," the PFY says "Reasonably cheap, good enough specs. I'm surprised you're looking at getting one though as there's no fancy bells as whistles."

"Oh it's not for me!" The Boss gasps, digging out yet another brochure from his briefcase. "Heavens no! Anyway, what do you think of this?"

"Hmmm, a 64 seat 56k Modem pool - how... er.. last century," The PFY says.

"Last century?! But it's got data compression!" The Boss adds defensively.

"So do most of my smutty pictures," The PFY says, without missing a beat. "But surely we should be living in the Now?"

"Meaning?"

"Meaning we'd expect our people to be using ADSL or broadband of some sort, not dialup."

"And isn't 64 seats a little bit overkill don't you think?" I add. "I mean we'd be lucky to get ten people using the existing pool."

"Yes, but if we implement the new work-from-home scheme those numbers would rise," The Boss burbles with a measure of triumph.

"Work from home?"

"Yes. The company's been considering it for a while now and the Head of IT's asked me to implement it."

"Really, why?"

"It seems that a lot of current research suggests that companies like ours can actually achieve performance gains and associated savings by allowing staff to work from home one or two days a week."

"But surely that research could be reinterpreted to mean that companies like ours have a high proportion of staff who just arse around at work?" I ask.

"I don't think so. The numbers are very positive - In fact in some cases productivity was seen to double!"

"Twice nothing is still nothing," The PFY adds sagely.

"HEY!" I cry, having a brainstorm. "What about if we implemented a work from work scheme?"

"What do you mean by 'twice nothing'?" the Boss asks, ignoring me.

"He means that some of our staff don't do anything anyway - but to look on the bright side at least with the work-from-home scheme they wouldn't take up office space."

"And that's the main point," The Boss says. "We're paying very high rentals for our office space, power, cleaning, etc, and if we got staff to work from home for a day a week and implemented a deskless office we'd be cable to consolidate the office space and relinquish an entire floor"

"Deskless office?" the PFY says

"Ah" I respond before the Boss can get involved "An office where no one has a specific desk and people use available space combined with mobile & follow-me phone technology. It's very huggy feely with everyone being friends and sharing resources"

"So it'll never work," the PFY says.

"Not a chance."

"But it makes perfect financial sense," the Boss Heimi Hendersons.

"Suit yourself," I say.

"So you're not actually averse to the ideal of trialling a work-from-home?"

"On the contrary. I think it's a fantastic idea," I say.

"Really?" the Boss chirps, happy that he's not going to have to defend the idea to anyone.

"Sure! I mean if we get some of the deadwood working from home there's the distinct possibility their wives will catch them browsing porn for half the day and they'll get the kicking they so richly deserve!!!"

"And everyone wins!" The PFY says.

"I doubt that people waste that much of the day," The Boss says.

"I think you'd be surprised. Some of our staff spend about three hours a day posting to a Hi-Tech audio blogsite."

"There's nothing dodgy about that!" The Boss gasps.

"It could be argued that there is when you spend about several hours every working day commenting on Class A & B amplifier design theory!" The PFY says.

"But that's just a hobby, not pornography!"

"Using that reasoning, if I called pornography a hobby could I spend three hours a day on it?"
The PFY asks.

"Of course not!"

"Ah well, never mind. But back to the issue at hand. The company wants this to save money on rent, yes?" I ask.

"Yes."

"And they have no problem spending stacks of cash on the deskless office idea, laptops, mobile phone calling and ADSL subscriptions?"

"No."

"Which would still work out at less than they're spending on rent?"

"Considerably less."

"And it's better than just firing people?"

"We can't do that and you know it. The unions would be all over us."

"What about - and this is just off the top of my head - forming an offshoot company and giving everyone the option of 'transferring' to the new 'work-from-home' company which will lease out one of the floors we vacate."

"The deadwood would be in there like a rat up a drainpipe," The PFY adds.

"Then, in three months time say, just send the company bankrupt - or alternatively just let our beancounters run it into the ground..."

"And as a result...we've saved rent and...reduced our non-performing workforce?" The Boss asks.
"Hmm. How many people do you think we'll be able to get to go?"

"I'm guessing most of the Beancounters, all of PR and Marketing, about half of the PAs and some business analysts. Maybe 50."

"So we're talking 50 laptops," The Boss mumbles wandering off quickly to get the order in.

"Fifty?" The PFY says dubiously.

"Not a chance, so many middle and upper middle managers will apply that the idea'll be canned quicker than you can say constructive dismissal. Sure, we'll end up with a stockpile of brand new laptops which we will be unable to return because they'll be...shop-soiled..."

"I swear it shall be done!" The PFY chirps.

"Which just leaves..."

"Listing them on eBay with a ridiculously low reserve," The PFY adds, grabbing the brochure the Boss left behind. "I'll get right onto it!"

"Right then, if anyone wants me I'll be... "

"Working from home?"

"Exactly!" I say, leaving for the pub.

BOFH: The craptop

A geek's gotta do what a geek's gotta do

Published Friday 9th February 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 6 One of the stranger urban legends that people harbour about geeks is that we have a deep seated enthusiasm for all problems technical - that the thought of a non-booting PC is our equivalent of a three pipe problem and that we're silently chomping at the bit to discover some problem to pit our skills against.

True, I enjoy a challenge as much as the next card-carrying furry tooth with low social skills, but in my case the challenge tends to be more like: "How do I shoot the armoured guy in FEAR using only a pistol, without slowmo, at advanced difficulty?"

And as a result it always comes as a little bit of a disappointment when the Boss rolls up with some 'challenge' for me to have a look at....

"Have I got a problem for you!" the Boss burbles happily.

"I'm not sure, do you?"

"Yes!"

"In that case, it seems you do."

"Don't you want to hear about it?" he asks.

"..."

"It's my daughter's laptop!"

"Your **daughter's** laptop?"

"Yes."

"So not a **work** laptop then?"

"No. Well yes, it used to be. It was my old work one which the company sold me."

"But you've only worked here a couple of months..."

"My old company."

"So you want me to look at a machine that's not work related, not for a worker, and didn't even originate here?"

"Yes."

"Sure bring it in - I'm sure we can do something with it," the PFY says. "And your toaster - is that working good too?"

"Why?"

"We may as well fix that at the same time!"

"No, it's fine," the Boss says, missing the sarcasm. "But I will bring the laptop in - although it's not that portable."

"It's a laptop!"

"Yes, but it's heavy."

"How heavy can a laptop be?"

...

The next day dawns and the boss drags the machine in. At first glance it looks like your normal ancient oversized laptop (thankfully not one of those awful luggables with a CRT inside) but a closer inspection reveals a machine made in a time when robustness and impressive weight meant something to a manufacturer.

"Honestly, this thing weighs about 35 pounds!" the PFY gasps, levering it up onto his desk. "What's it made of, lead?!"

"I... don't know" the Boss says, still getting his breath back after the walk from the lift.

"Oooh, inbuilt power supply," I say, stroking the case lovingly. "Always good for an extra pound or so - or ten as it's a transformer based one."

"You're joking," the PFY blurts, looking down the vent holes. "Wow!"

"Yeeees," I say, pushing the power button. "Ooooooh, A P2 with 2 memory banks containing... 64 Meg."

"A scorcher - oh, and is that the battery warning light?"

"And after just 12 minutes - I bet it's lead acid".

"Or just lead," the PFY nods. "What are you running 98?"

"Windows XP," the Boss replies.

"Slower than a 5 day cricket test is it?"

"I..."

"You should go to Vista."

"So you like Vista?"

"Not really, no. I run a Vista simulator."

"Virtual Server?" the Boss asks.

"Nah, I just turned on all the flashy crap in XP, changed the background image, took some memory out of my box and clocked down the CPU. Then broke Media player. Works like a charm."

"So you don't like it?"

"No. But it has does have one advantage."

"What's that?"

"It causes a clean reinstall of XP which is generally good from a defrag point of view."

"So you're not really suggesting I install Vista?"

"No. Even if you could you shouldn't - not with this baby/"

"So I should keep XP?"

"No."

"Downgrade to 2000?"

"No."

"Windows 98?"

"No."

"95?"

"No."

"What am I supposed to do with it then?"

"Take my advice," the PFY says. "Nail a couple of planks to either side and use it as a bedside table."

"But... I thought you could do something with it."

"Yeah - the bedside table idea!"

"But it's a perfectly good laptop."

"No, it's a craptop - there's a subtle difference."

"What?"

"About 30 pounds."

"But it's perfectly good."

"Okay, tell you what. Pop it on the front seat of your car, wind the window down and take a walk around the block. I'll bet you **50 quid** it's still there when you get back!"

"50 quid?" he echoes.

"50 Quid!" the PFY responds, taking the aforementioned sum out of his wallet and handing it to me.

. . . Two hours later . . .

"It was still there wasn't it?" the PFY says, reaching for his cash.

"Yes," the Boss sighs. "But my car stereo and internal door handles weren't. The stereo's useless to anyone as it's coded to the door key - and who the hell needs door handles?"

"It's a strange world," the PFY agrees as the Boss exits Mission Control shaking his head.

"So this is worthless then?" I say, tossing the Boss's car stereo into the bin. "But why did you want the door handles?"

"Just for the chuckle when he gets home."

"I... Oh! ...So that's why you wanted the fuse for the electric windows."

"Electric Windows Vista - just like the real thing!" the PFY smirks, chucking the handles after the stereo.

BOFH: The Brotherhood

Vendor benders and lost weekends

Published Friday 16th February 2007 12:08 GMT

Episode 7 The boss is late and everyone's noticed.

And when I say everyone's noticed I really mean no one's noticed, but it **has** been two days and when someone's been on a weekend junket then doesn't show within a day or so word gets around...

...

It's day three before the boss finally wanders into work with the unpressed clothes and vacant expression that can only mean one thing...

"Lost weekend syndrome!" I murmur to the PFY while the Boss works out which office is his.

"Lost weekend syndrome?"

"Yeah. It's such a beginner's mistake!" I comment, shaking my head sadly.

"Going on a junket at a vendor's expense is a mistake?" the PFY asks, surprised.

"In some cases, yes. Rule one of going on a Vendor Bender is always play on your home ground so you know how to get home - or at least where home is. At the VERY least you should be in a place where you can ask a local where your hotel is. Rule two, three and four are **Never, EVER go to Amsterdam with a Vendor!**"

"I don't see how it would..."

"Ok, so you're out with vendors. What are they going to do?"

"Buy you drinks!"

"Yes. And it's overseas, so they're going to buy you..."

"...A LOT of drinks."

"Right. And it's a weekend, so they're going to buy you..."

"...An OBSCENE amount of drinks."

"And when you've had a lot of drinks, what are you going to want to do?"

"Chat up women?"

"Yes...And..."

"Go to the toilet?"

"Excellent, one more bodily function to go..."

"Have a curry!"

"Precisely. So you're at a curry house - what will you need?"

"Kingfishers!"

"More drinks, right. And somewhere along the way, you're going to pay up and go back to your hotel. Only you won't remember where it was."

"True..."

"Or what its name was."

"Right..."

"And you're in Amsterdam, so you'll run into some kindly person who will mention the coffee shop just down the street, and you will think...?"

"I could go for a coffee!"

"Indeed. Three days later when your money runs out you'll leave the coffee shop and lie to the person at the airport about the family emergency that caused you to miss your flight and you'll get to Heathrow."

"With no money."

"Indeed. And you'll bludge a phone to call to the Mrs to pick you up and on the way home she'll ask how it went, you'll make up some pathetically unbelievable story because you can't remember, which will inevitably lead to..."

"A fight!"

"Yes, and she'll make up some equally unbelievable story about hearing some funny engine noise and pull over. You'll get out to check the engine and she'll drive off, leaving you on the M25 with tons of time to make up your mind about where you're going to walk to - work or home.

"And work is nearer, and everyone there doesn't hate you at the moment for whatever it was you did in Amsterdam that you felt it necessary to lie about," the PFY finishes.

"Correct."

"And you can tell all this from his appearance Holmes?" the PFY asks.

"Nah, he rang in to say he'd be late and it all came out. Still, it's a familiar story. Which is why I keep this on hand," I say, pulling a sports bag out of my cupboard.

"?"

"A towel, shaving kit, hotel toiletries, aspirin, a bottle of IRNBRU, 100 quid and the key to the sick room. Enough to clean yourself up, buy a cheap shirt and trousers, and get yourself into work state," I say, to the Boss, as I hand it over.

...three hours later...

"That was a bit good of you. I have to admit I had you pegged as a kick-a-man-when-he's-down sort of person," the Boss admits.

"Don't get me wrong," I respond. "If you're going to be kicking a man, then when he's down is probably one of the better times..."

"Then why...?"

"Because I've been there. I too went on an overseas junket which turned to custard, if I'm not mixing my desserts."

"You?"

"Yes, a Berlin 'Wall shout'. Started going pear shaped when the Absinthe came out just before lunch," I say, recounting all I know.

"So we're okay?"

"Indeed, welcome to the Brotherhood."

"The Brotherhood?"

"The Brotherhood of the lost weekend. It's your duty to refill the bag and hand it to the next person who needs it."

"The next person?"

"Yeah," I say, dropping my voice to a whisper. "I've booked the PFY onto a tour of a PC assembly company in Luton tomorrow which has a large number of shares in an Absinthe company in France."

"Oooh," the Boss says. "So I'd better get a move on!"

"Nah, five days should just about do it..."

BOFH: The takeover

Who's your Daddy?

Published Friday 23rd February 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 8 "It's a takeover," the PFY murmurs, entering Mission Control after his recce of the top floor - or more accurately, the spade work he's been putting in with the CEO's PA.

"A takeover, I should have guessed," I say, thinking back to the feverish activity which has been occurring in Beancounter and PR Centrals. "Who?"

"No idea," the PFY says. "It's all very hush hush and she won't tell me."

"Hmmm - I think you'll need to break out the big guns. Do you know if we're Mummy or Daddy?"

"Hmm?"

"Giving or getting the shaft?"

"Oh, you mean are **we** taking over **them** or **they** taking over **us**?"

"Uh-huh."

"NEITHER!" the Boss interrupts, appearing at the door.

"Neither?"

"No, it's going to be a *MERGER*."

"Ah. So **we're** Mummy."

"No, we're going to *MERGE* both companies and form one big company."

"One big company with too many staff and too many office buildings..."

"No, we're just going to merge together and continue as a larger company," the Boss argues.

Sigh.

"Which company name are we going to use?"

"That's not been decided yet!"

"Big guns!" I nod to the PFY, who wordlessly cracks a four pack of Diamond White Cider from the fridge and heads back up to the CEO's PA's office.

...

"We'll probably just keep on going as we have done as separate entities," the Boss suggests.

"Oh, the Compaq myth."

Forty-one minutes later the PFY's back.

"Mummy," he says.

"What, we're being taken over?!" the Boss gasps as people slowly start gathering in the doorway having witnessed the PFY's Diamond White dash and knowing that there's a crisis...

"Yep. Meetings at high levels about severance packages for senior managers..."

"Does that include me?" the Boss snuffles.

"Survey says...Bom-Bommmmm," the PFY says.

"So that's it then, we're down the road!!?"

"Remaining middle management typically gets cut by about 40 per cent," I say, quoting some statistics I recently perused. "But I doubt they'll get rid of any of the technical staff till they know how our systems and networks work - which could take years!!!"

"Call centre?" the helpdesk supervisor asks, from outside the door.

"Bom-Bommmmmmm," the PFY responds.

"What about database people," a voice from the background asks.

"When we're all integrated into Daddy's existing database?" I ask.

"Telephonists?" another voice asks.

"The ones that were merged into the call centre in the first week? Bom-Bommmmm," I respond.

"And you're not worried?"

"Nah, like I said it'll take years for them to figure out how our systems work."

"So...what do **we** do?" yet another voice asks.

"Well..."

"What?!" someone demands.

"Job security by job obscurity is the key. Burn all documentation so no one can figure out what you do. Fabricate and post-date memos from HR guaranteeing you 52 week severance payouts as

amendments to your employment contracts - keeping a copy for yourself obviously - then get a friendly HR person to sign them and insert them into your file."

"What, they'll just do that for us?"

"I suspect they inserted 104 week amendments as soon as they heard of a 'merger'."

"And that will save our jobs?"

"No, but the thought of large severance packages and huge integration hurdles will give them a few moments of pause..."

"And then?"

"**By** then my assistant and I will have worked our magic."

"?"

"We get some acquaintances in the City to circulate rumors that the company's taking us over just to get out of their asbestos riddled building before the class-action lawsuit is filed."

"Really?"

"Who cares? If the company denies the rumors it'll start a whole new round of rumors of cover-ups - either way the share price will dip, their investment capital will disappear and suddenly the takeover becomes less likely..."

"And...we'll still have our jobs?"

"Oh yeah."

"So will you do it?"

"It'll cost you a pint."

"Each," the PFY says.

...Later, after an extended lager lunch...

"So are you really going to do it?" the PFY slurs as we stumble back to work.

"Already made the calls. And just before lunch I'm going to 'leak' some 'memos' indicating the company knew the asbestos was there and estimating their liability to be in the billions - 'IF anyone finds out'."

"Why?"

"To ensure the most favorable share price when I start buying just before close of business tonight."

...late morning the next day...

"What are the odds?" the PFY asks, suppressing a chuckle.

"I know," I sigh.

"Yes," the PFY says. "Who could've known they really **had** covered up asbestos in the building?"

"No one could have known," I concur. "You didn't buy shares then?"

"No, I was too busy posting those comments saying the shareholders should be made liable for investing in a morally bankrupt business."

"What? When?"

"Yesterday afternoon. Last night. 10 minutes ago."

"But you knew I'd invested. You knew I'd put all my available cash in there!!!" I gasp.

"Yeah, but I got to thinking about how much I like that little holiday place of yours in Spain with the potentially unserviceable mortgage..."

"You?"

"Oh yes," the PFY says. "Who's your Daddy?"

BOFH: The wild porn chase

Ensuring data safety

Published Friday 9th March 2007 11:43 GMT

Episode 9 Scene: The rooftop of the building at dusk

"Ahhhh smell that," I say to the PFY as we look out at the London skyline. "The fresh London air tinged with a touch of diesel, a hint of autumn chill, and a liberal dash of the kebab shop down the road."

"Greatest city in the world!" the PFY says.

"And you know, standing up here, I can't help but think of the fateful words that Hillary said all those years ago."

"What's Monica doing?"

"No, EDMUND Hillary."

"Oh HIM," the PFY nods.

"Yes, the words he spoke as he at last reached the summit of Everest."

"Oh, you mean 'Pop down and get me a roll of bog paper will you Norgay, I think the devil's brew you whipped up has given me the runs'?"

"No, now you're thinking of Prince Philip. No, when he said those words, 'One small step for man, one giant leap for mankind!'"

"I think you'll find that's Armstrong."

"Louis Armstrong said that?!"

"JUST GET ON WITH IT!" the PFY snaps.

>toss<

.. .. .

.....

>crash!< >weeoh< >weeoh< >weeoh< >weeoh< >weeoh< ...

"You were right, the thing just vapourises!" I say, looking at the debris of the laptop six floors below.

"Told you," the PFY says. "Pay up."

I hand £10 over and we go back to the office...

...The next day...

"I'm sorry," I tell the Boss. "We were running some tests on your laptop and it failed."

"Oh, well I suppose I can make a warranty claim!" he responds.

"I think you'll find the warranty was voided when you tampered with the protective devices from the machine."

"I didn't remove any protective devices!"

"You mean you didn't take the plastic layer off the screen?"

"The protective layer?" the Boss asks.

"Exactly."

"But you can't see the screen properly otherwise!!"

"Still, a void is a void."

"Can it be repaired?"

"Uhhmmmmmm, not really," the PFY says, handing over a shopping bag with the pieces we retrieved.

"What the hell did you do to it?"

"We tossed it off the building."

"WHY?"

"Because it had to be fully tested."

"That's not a real test!"

"Of course it is - it's a test to see if your device would survive being tossed off the top of a building - as we're now required to do because of the new 'Security of Workplace Data' directive which requires us to ensure that machines don't fail during normal work practices and/or lose data which may be of value to the company."

"It's not a normal work practice for me to throw my machine off a roof!"

"Ah, but isn't it?" the PFY counters.

"It's NOT!"

"What about in the situation where a zealous operational type was taking a backup of your machine - in line with the 'Security of Workplace Data' directive' - and notices that there is a file locking error in the backup. Being the professional that he is, he investigates the error and finds that the affected file is a video and that the cheap playback system installed on the machine - presumably because it's one of the few that doesn't report back what you're looking at - has locked the file for read. Say this professional, having not seen the video hotchickbj.mpg PRESUMES that it's a workplace safety video for instance and remotely forces the application to close so that he can get the backup system to open the file before it's viewed again. Say all that happens, and this zealous operational type realises that an offsite backup of this user's data would be a good option and sends the DVD backup to the person's home address. And maybe his wife chucks it in the DVD player thinking it's a movie and the only thing renderable on their DVD player is the safety video. And she decided to confront you at work and look at your laptop."

"Fair enough," the Boss says, realising he's both cornered and busted. "In THAT situation, MAYBE I would want to test my laptop for it's ability to fall from the roof of a building, but that's hardly li.."

"Oooh look, it's your Mrs!" I say, pointing behind the Boss. "...Made you look."

"Did you send a DVD to my home."

"Of course I did, I was ensuring data safety. What time does the post come round your way?"

>SLAM!<

...two hours later...

"You're for it now!" the Boss wheezes, all pretence gone after his cross town dash. "Why the hell would you want to take a copy of my porn - it's not data of value to the company?"

"It is if they want to fire you," the PFY says.

"Not when I do THIS," he says, snapping a DVD sized envelope in half.

"Why?"

"Because now there's no evidence - no laptop, no backup."

"What about the onsite backup?" the PFY asks.

"What onsite backup?"

"Well there's two really - the one we keep in the tape safe and the one that I must have accidentally put in the Head of IT's DVD drive..."

>SLAM!<

"...or was it the AV system in the boardroom - I can't remember exactly."

"Never mind about that now," I say. "I need your help testing the duplexing Multifunction printer with the additional stapling and perfect binding unit."

"Is that a computer?"

"It has a hard drive..."

"Oh yeah..."

"And get a jiggle on, the Boss is in the 30 minute parking zone."

BOFH: The new geek on the block

Defending the sanctity of the computer room

Published Friday 16th March 2007 11:55 GMT

Episode 10 >Swipe< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >BEEP-BEEP-BEEEEEP!<

>Swipe< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >BEEP-BEEP-BEEEEEP!<

>Swipe< >bip< ... >bip< ... >bip< >bip< >BEEP-BEEP-BEEEEEP!<

"There's something wrong with the door," the Boss announces.

"Which door?" the PFY asks, apparently oblivious to the fact that the Boss is standing outside the entrance to the computer room.

"THIS door."

"What's the matter with it?"

"Cards don't work on it."

"Really?" the PFY says, wandering over. >SWIPE< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >Clack!< >SLAM!< "No, seems to be fine..."

"It doesn't work with my card!"

"Ah, so it's more of a card problem than a door one. It's probably just that you're not permitted access to the computer room."

"Ridiculous! Why wouldn't I have access to the computer room?"

"Let's rephrase that as why WOULD you have access to the computer room?" I ask, weighing into the conversation. "Given that your IT 'expertise' is about 15 years old and involved changing PABX batteries?"

"I..." the Boss says, realising that at least ONE person at the company can read between the lines of his CV.

"And so you see there really isn't any real reason why you would need to have access..." the PFY adds.

"Well I would LIKE access anyway!"

"And I would like unbreakable Oracle, but you have to pick your battles..."

"I'll just get security to do it!"

"The inline filter in the door control circuit that rejects certain updates..."

"Why would you put a filter in?!"

"Because we've had issues with people doing inappropriate things in the computer room."

"What do you mean?"

"Running, eating, drinking," the PFY says reading from the 'unacceptable activities' list."

"I'm hardly likely to do any of those things."

"Not with no access."

"I...This isn't finished!" he snaps storming out.

Three days later the Boss attacks on a new front by rolling on up accompanied by a weedy bloke struggling under the weight of a 1U rack-mount server.

"We need to install this," the Boss says.

"?"

"It's your portal appliance," the weedy guy responds.

"A portal appliance?"

"A dedicated server which will act as the gateway to all your internal and external processing."

"Oh, you mean like a single point of failure!" the PFY gasps.

"No, this is state-of-the-art - a fault free turnkey solution."

"Fair enough, hand it over then," the PFY assents.

"No, I need to install it," the geek says, looking to the Boss for affirmation.

"But it's a turnkey device," the PFY argues.

"It might have some startup problems the first time."

"You said it was fault free!"

"Initial configuration options?" the geek suggests.

"Tell you what, do them here and we'll install it later."

...10 minutes later...

"So I'll just..."

"...hand it over and we'll install it."

"I'll need access to the console if it fails!"

"**AND** it's a critical portal application so he's going to need to have access at all hours - DAY AND NIGHT in case something happens when you're not around," the Boss adds.

"And I'll need a pager," the geek adds. "Connected to your monitoring software."

"Because?"

"It...might have a hardware problem...as yet undiagnosed."

Eventually I am talked around to giving the geek access to the server room, much to the PFY's disgust.

"It was just a cover story so he can let the Boss into the machine room."

"Of course it was," I concur.

"And he's not going to be able to do anything even if it does go down, just power the thing up again."

"Uh-huh."

"And if it does go down it's going to take user visibility to our systems with it."

"Indeed."

"It'll be a critical outage!"

"Uh-huh."

"And someone's going to have to respond."

"Yes, you're right. And who will that person be?"

"Not me."

"Or me. No, it looks like every outage will be dealt with by our geeky new acquaintance."

"Who could be in and out of the room all the time. And you're not worried?"

"Nah, he'll crack first," I say. **>CLACK!<** "Oh dear - it looks like the circuit breaker to the portal machine has tripped," I add, closing the switchboard door.

One higher rated breaker later...

>wiggle< >clunk< ... >wiggle< >clunk< "Oh dear - it looks like the power cables have vibrated loose from the portal machine!" I gasp.

Two cable ties later...

"And your next plan is?" the PFY asks.

"A simple combination of the effects of the lunchtime curry and repeated Pings-of-Death."

"Pings-of-Death? Nothing's susceptible to that any more!"

"Nessus says yes," I say. >tappity<

...Twenty Ping-of-Deaths, pages and geek visits later...

"We'll have to turn it off," the geek whimpers. "I can't keep coming in to reset it every minute or so."

"We can't turn it off!" the PFY responds. "It's the gateway to all our internal and external processing and we're starting end-of-financial-year processing!!!"

"But I can't keep coming in!" the geek whines. "I need to go to..."

>beep< >beep< >beep<

...

With the number of outages the head of IT was pretty much obliged to take a look at the situation for himself sooner or later - it was just coincidence that the PFY rang him to visit the exact moment that the effects of the curry, cold environment, and bowel pressure had the geek dispatching his lunchtime curry into a cardboard box within reach of the portal server's reset button.

Suffice to say there's a new entry in the unacceptable activities list and the inline filter is no longer necessary...

BOFH: The PFY punts for porn

Isn't that the only purpose of podcasts?

Published Friday 23rd March 2007 12:06 GMT

Episode 11 "We should get a server for podcasts," the Boss announces, breezing into Mission Control under the influence of a new idea.

"What for?" the PFY asks.

"So we can deliver podcasts and video to our staff and customers."

"What podcasts?"

"Podcasts about what's happening in the company."

"Where are these podcasts at the moment?"

"We don't **have** any at the moment, but if we had a server for them people would do them."

"Which people?" the PFY asks.

"Anyone with something to say."

"You mean anyone with **nothing** to say - like blogs," the PFY says.

"What do you mean?"

"That most people don't have **anything** useful to say but feel obliged to say it anyway. I'm also saying we shouldn't be promoting a forum for them not to say it in."

"I..." the Boss pauses, working out the double triple negative.

"LOOK," I say trying to demystify the PFY's words. "Your average beancounter for instance, what's he going to say to the masses?"

"I..."

"He's going to say that thanks to his ingenious plan of importing pens directly from a former Russian state he's saved the company a couple of thousand pounds a year."

"It doesn't sound all that ingenious," the Boss murmurs.

"No, the ingenious part will be the bit he doesn't say - that he bought the pens knowing that most of them will fail and people will start bringing their **own** pens in and the company won't have to buy pens any more."

"I guess that's **sort** of ingenious."

"No it's not, because we paid for the dud pens in the first place! Ingenious would be to have a competition to see how many free pens staff can obtain from vendors clients and suppliers, with a 10 quid movie voucher as a prize!"

"I..."

"And even **that** is boring."

"I don't get your point..."

"My point is that what people think is interesting really isn't. For instance, you might believe that there's people who'd like to know about the refurbishment of the steam locomotive once used to drive the royal carriage between Walthamstow and Leeds..."

"No, you can't get a direct run from Waltham..."

"Woah there - I think I lost nine minutes of my life - I must have been abducted by aliens! No, no, that's right, you were telling one of your train stories again - I can tell the difference now because aliens only steal nine MINUTES, not NINE HOURS!"

"So the train thing was a demonstration of something you find uninteresting?" the Boss says drily.

"Its something **everyone** finds uninteresting. So if you're going to podcast something we should find something that people WANT to watch and make some of that."

"Porn," the PFY blurts. "Everyone likes porn!"

"You'll have to forgive my assistant," I counter. "He dropped a bottle of isopropyl this morning and stayed to clean it up."

"So what would people find interesting?" the Boss asks.

"Porn!" the PFY repeats.

"I don't know," I say, ignoring the PFY. "But that **IS** the point - the real work is in finding out what people want to see..."

"PORN!"

"...then once you've found it, make some of it - or hire someone to make some of it."

"Isn't it a little... twofaced... to get someone in to make videos which are supposed to be made by us?"

"You'll never regret using a professional."

"Are we still talking about Porn?" the PFY asks.

"Regardless," the Boss says, following my example and ignoring the PFY. "I'd like to set up a server so that anyone in the company can publish stuff."

"P..." the PFY starts.

"EXCEPT for him!" the Boss interrupts.

I quickly realise that the Boss is going to want this to happen and that any advice to the contrary is going to be ignored...

"I guess we could use one of our recently decommissioned servers - till things pick up - that way we'd probably have everything up and running in a couple of days," I suggest.

"Excellent."

...three days later..

"How many podcasts have we got?" the Boss asks anxiously.

"Hang on, I'll just count... ..uh ...and... ..None"

"But someone must have something to put up."

"I could..." the PFY starts.

"It's to be used for things pertaining to the company, its staff and business, and things of interest to them!" the Boss snaps. "Nothing else. And we need to get some stuff up soon because the Head of IT and the CEO are keenly interested in it as a medium for morale and recruiting."

...a day later...

"How many podcasts today?" the Boss whispers - with just a touch of pleading to his voice as I notice the CEO wander into the Head of IT's office.

"Four," I say.

"Ohthankgoodness," he gasps. "Although I knew it would catch on. Any viewers?"

"Stacks."

"What's been put up?" the PFY and the Boss ask simultaneously.

"One of the beancounters has an interesting video on recycling paperclips and staples."

"..."

"And the mail room has one about how to fill out shipping labels - although my personal favourite is the security fire drill procedure..."

"I thought you said there were stacks of viewers!?" the PFY says.

"Yes, but not for them."

"What are they watching?"

"An instructional piece contributed anonymously entitled how to get a shag at the office Christmas party."

"Porn?" the PFY asks hesitantly.

"No, more a morale and recruiting piece aimed at people who might otherwise not get a shag in the normal course of events. It meets all the prerequisite criteria by being of interest to the company and featuring footage of actual company Christmas parties... >DASH!< >SLAM!< ...Featuring actual staff. And, in a couple of cases some clients."

"PORN!" the PFY sighs happily, sitting himself down.

So the Boss was right - it was good for morale.

BOFH: What do you mean the system's being audited?

Thrown to the wolves

Published Friday 6th April 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 12 "So if we go to your website and build this software, download and deploy it through a group policy over our domain - the machines will all report on the OS, software and version information that they have installed?" the PFY asks.

"Yes," Sonya, our friendly root-of-all-evil sales rep says, with the Boss nodding happily in the background.

"And the information will be stashed in a database so that we can get pretty reports for our managers - and no one else?"

"No one," evil says.

"And you're not going to use it to just have a peek to see if we're violating our software licenses for your products?"

"Never!"

"Not even so that you can tell how many people are using someone else's software instead of yours?"

"No."

"Not even to tell which software you should be developing in the future?"

"Not even then."

"Not even to tell which companies you should be buying in the future?"

"No."

"Not even if it saved your company millions and millions - and millions - of dollars?"

"No, it's a client service," our rep says - in the same tone of voice the proctologist uses when he tells you that you'll hardly notice the maglite and tree felling wedges he'll be using in the next procedure.

"Not even if Beelzebub himself asks for it?"

"Still no," our rep says.

"...Liar, liar pants on fire!" the PFY responds.

"Look," the Boss snaps, wading into the argument. "This is a fantastic opportunity for you to offload some of your more onerous tasks. They're doing it to help you! You can install this program and then when we need information about what software we're running, what we should be buying, and what needs upgrading, we can just go to their website and look - and it's all up to date!!"

"It's a waste of time. And an invasion of our privacy," the PFY says defensively.

"I think you're just exaggerating - it's a wonderful opportunity for us, and I'd like you to at least **trial** it. If we don't like it we can just uninstall it later. We'll take a look at it and see if the information it provides us is worth the effort."

...half an hour later when Mission Control empties...

"This is bad!" the PFY mumbles, pacing about the place. "Really bad!"

"What do you mean bad?" I ask. "We'll deploy the app, it'll come back and tell us that we have about 600 machines and maybe we'll discover that we need to get a few licenses for stuff which shouldn't in theory be running."

"What about if it came back and told us that we had about 2,000 machines?"

"No, it doesn't look at license keys issued, it looks at actual machines."

"That's what I mean," the PFY says, looking around furtively.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you know when that bloke from across the road needed some help in setting up their domain a couple of years ago?"

"I...vaguely."

"And you know how I did most of the donkey work for him..."

"Uhhmm, if you say so."

"You know, bought and installed the domain controllers, bought the client licenses, bought and installed the CALs for all their office prod..."

"You didn't!" I gasp.

"I...."

"You joined them to our domain with the site license."

"Yes."

"And DIDN'T SHARE THE CASH!?"

"I...think we have bigger problems."

"What do you bloody mean, WE? **WE** implies some form of partnership - consultation - **profit sharing**."

"Well if this is just about the money..." the PFY begins.

"That's right," I nod.

"And not about the harsh personal consequences that might befall you as the signatory of the site license documents and chief administrator of the systems concerned..."

"You bastard! You had this all worked out didn't you?"

"No, no, it was just luck that you were the one doing the signing this year. As opposed to the planning that went into ensuring that the ownership of the OU concerned was you - which will probably show up when I click the deploy button," the PFY says, finger hovering over his mouse.

"Okay, okay. Truce," I say. "It's a simple problem - deploy the app tonight, then drag a DC over to their building early tomorrow. Isolate them from the world and tell them there's been a network outage and they won't get the software or show up on the scan."

"That'll only buy us a couple of hours - we need at least four hours apparently."

"If you need an extra couple of hours, set a skip bin on fire and fan the smoke into the ventilation system - then break a stack of sprinkler heads inside after everyone evacuates," I say, recalling an old favourite.

"I suppose it's a plan."

...the next evening...

"Did you see the place across the road had a full blown evacuation today?" the Boss asks as the PFY enters Mission Control, pausing momentarily upon seeing Sonya back in the office.

"Really?" I say. "I was out collecting some gear from offsite."

"Big scene," the Boss burbles. "Anyway back to the review - so we're pretty much A-OK for licenses and our software's mostly up to date. There was just the one problem."

"Problem?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, a bit of...well...piracy going on."

"Piracy? I thought the tool wasn't going to be used as a stick to beat us with?" then PFY snaps.

"It's not," the Boss says. "I called Sonya in because someone's installed a stack of games on a couple of machines and Simon suggested she could tell me if she could help **me** track them down."

"YOU suggested?" the PFY says, looking to me.

"Well yes," I say innocently. "Because of course piracy is everyone's problem."

"Piracy?"

"Yes," the Boss says. "Sonya was able to find out that the license keys used were ones available on a pirate website."

"But the good news is," I say. "That they're not work machines - they are personal machines, and shouldn't even be plugged into the network. These machines in fact."

I point to a box with a couple of portable gaming rigs which look as impressive now as they did when I stole them from the PFY's front room this morning.

"And we were just discussing that since the machines have no identifiable owners there's no one to be referred for prosecution."

"Oh," the PFY says, masking a measure of relief.

"And as there's no identifiable owner Simon felt that perhaps Sonya's company might want to clean the machines up and donate them and some software to a suitable charity..."

"Did he?" the PFY seethes.

"And he suggested that you might be able to donate some of your time to helping erase them..."

"I don't thi..."

"Hey - why don't we check with the hardware vendor to see if the warranty card was filled out?" I suggest.

"Oh I suppose I can do it now," the PFY says.

"Isn't it great when everybody wins?" I ask.

BOFH: Geeks on heat

All's fair in love and war

Published Friday 20th April 2007 10:37 GMT

Episode 13 "So let me get this straight," I say to the PFY. "You want me to give you a reasonable amount of time to make a suave first impression - and engage her in some meaningful conversation about one of her interest topics - then bust in with some huge problem that **only you** can fix which will make you look like someone pretty bloody important?"

"Yes - a problem that I need to go **offsite** for so that I can arrange to meet up with her later to continue the conversation over a couple of drinks, yes."

"No problems - but are you sure she's worth the spadework?"

"Positive. You remember the temp from PR a couple of months back?"

"Oh yeah," I sigh happily.

"A two bag special in comparison."

"I find that rather difficult to believe..."

"True story," the PFY says, grabbing some office install disks and exiting. "She's a stunner, so just remember - 20 minutes then emergency time."

...

Ten minutes later I'm still trying to think of the right emergency that would require the PFY to go offsite. Then it comes to me, Core LAN switching problem. In a telco network - that's affecting emergency services - and they need the PFY because of...the paper he once presented on...repairing core LAN switching problems in Telco environments...where emergency services are affected...

True, it's not my best work and about as believable as the old weapons-of-mass-destruction chestnut, but we're talking about a user who can't even install her own copy of Office, so I don't think we need to go into too much back-story.

...Five minutes later...

>CRASH!<

"There you are," I gasp, muttering excuses as I turn to...

"What is it?" the PFY asks an indeterminate amount of time later.

"Is something the matter?" the PFY's companion - an absolute vision of radiance - asks.

The mental tyres are spinning in sand as I realise that the PFY had understated her beauty somewhat and that it was a bit like calling Michaelangelo a painting contractor.

"You have some emergency - for me?" the PFY prompts "Something important that only I can fix?"

"I...uh...yes," I say, still a little gobstruck but mentally turning over options. Bingo! "Your wife called and said her water's broken and she needs you to come home and take care of the triplets while she drives herself to hospital again...And she said that if you're not home in 20 minutes she's going to burn your porn and flush your viagra down the toilet."

That last bit was just a touch cruel but I figured that the PFY still had a bit of credibility from "sharing the parental workload" and all...

"I...I'd better go then," the PFY says, uncommonly subdued now he knows the death blow has been dealt. "I...can you finish the install?" he says, feigning distraction.

"Course I can," I say. "What stage are we at?"

"I...haven't actually got around to putting the install CD in yet," the PFY says.

The sly dog, dragging out the install so he'd need to come back repeatedly - one of my favourite ruses, it has to be admitted.

"Ok then, I guess I'll do that and get started as soon as," I say, slapping the CD in the drive as the PFY exits. "Sorry, I suppose I should introduce myself - the name's Simon."

"Katherine," she says in sweet melodic tones.

"And you're new here?"

"Yes, a mutual friend suggested I apply for this position," she says.

"Oh really, someone who works here?"

"Yes, he works in HR and noticed the vacancy."

"Partner?" I ask.

"Sorry?"

"Your partner?" I ask pretending to be too deeply immersed in setting the install options to be probing for details of her private life.

"Goodness no," she says. "No, I just know him from dancing."

"Ah, you mean like ceroc?" I ask having kept vaguely abreast of social trends.

"Wha, oh, no no, line dancing."

"Line dancing?" I gasp.

"Yes yes, I know what you're going to say, but there's nothing nerdish about it at all - it's great fun. I was put onto it by some friends in my D&D group."

"D&D Group?"

"Yeah, I got into it when I was a student. One of the people in my book group was a D&D-er."

"Book Group!?" I say, surreptitiously prodding feverishly at my cellphone keypad.

"Yes, we read the classics - you know the Bronte sisters, Solze..."

>BEEP< >BEEP<

"Excuse me," I say, drawing my phone into the open and pretending to read a text message. "Oh no! There's been a...core lan switching problem - at the Telephone Centre and...half of London is affected. I have to go!"

"Oh, that's a shame - would you like to perhaps meet up later - there's always room for another at the book club!"

"I'd like to but there's no telling how long this will take!"

>Dash<

"WHAT A GEEK!" the PFY gasps as soon as I get back to Mission Control.

"I know."

"Did she show you her photos?"

"What, line dancing, D&D, or book club?"

"What a waste," the PFY says. "And so sad too. So, what's up now?"

"Well, I thought I'd spend the rest of the afternoon playing *Stalker*, get 10 pints in at the pub, a quick curry chaser, then fall asleep in the tube and wake up in Snaresbrook five minutes after the last train."

"Now THAT's a hobby!" the PFY says.

BOFH: Fishbowl *this*

Glug glug glug

Published Friday 27th April 2007 12:35 GMT

Episode 14 "You want to WHAT?!?!" the PFY gasps, beating me to the draw by microseconds.

"Move the computer room?" the Boss responds, surprised that there's any objection to his latest brainwave.

"You've got to be kidding!"

"Not at all," the Boss asks, still not aware of the enormous upheaval he's proposing. "I've been talking with the head of IT and the architect and they both agree - it's prime office space wasted."

"But it takes MONTHS to move a computer room – properly," I respond.

"Why, we just need to fit out a room with a raised floor!"

"And air-conditioning."

"Yes, air-conditioning, we've thought of that. As space is a little limited we thought we'd install the unit in an alcove on the floor above and duct chilled air down into the room."

"What about UPS power?" the PFY chimes in.

"Can't we just leave the UPS here and run power down from it?" the Boss says.

"I doubt the people using the 'prime office space' will consider a 120KVA UPS with noisy inverters to be a desirable roommate."

"Point taken. I suppose we **could** move it to the sub basement and just get a smaller unit for the critical users left up here."

"Sorry, are you proposing **we** move as well?" I ask.

"Well yes - you'd need to be close to your machines wouldn't you?"

"THE SUB BASEMENT!" the PFY cries, having lost his love of dark, enclosed spaces during one of those weekend-in-a-lift practical joke sessions we enjoy so much.

"It makes perfect sense!" the Boss replies "A computer room has very few visitors - it doesn't need a second floor office space - and you don't even like visitors."

"We'd need fire suppression," I add.

"Not a worry, we can install that in the basement along with the air-conditioning. I've been promised three car park spaces in the basement to house air-conditioning and other services."

"Emergency lighting?"

"One at each end of the space."

"Offices?" I ask. "Assuming of course that you weren't proposing we work in the computer room itself."

"I... not a problem, we'll have an office built."

"Cabling?"

"What cabling?"

"The fibre and copper network cabling, the patch frames, the rack cabling."

"Oh... Do we really need them?"

"You mean could we fit wireless lan cards to every server and cover a wall with Wireless Access points?"

"I... yes."

"No."

"Oh. So how long would it take to get the network installed?"

"You mean repatch the fibre and copper distribution components down there, put in PBE frames, fibre termination points, racks and rack cabling? A couple of months."

"I... guess that would be ok. It affects the time frame a little but it shouldn't be too bad - should we go and look at the room just in case we see anything else we might want to consider?"

. . . Five minutes and several unhappy gestures from the PFY later. . .

"So this is the room," the Boss says, showing us into a large clinically clean concrete room.

"It's big," I say.

"What's that smell?" the PFY asks.

"Oh that, that's just a... two pot leak-sealing compound the contractors used to make the place completely watertight - because I knew you'd be concerned about leaks and flooding in a sub basement area," the Boss says smugly.

"So you've started work on this already without discussing it with us?"

"I... well yes, we're under a bit of pressure for the space so I thought I'd get a headstart by organising some of the work that I knew would be needed - like the leak sealing and the access for the air-conditioning - see up there?"

"Where?" the PFY asks, gazing into the roof space blankly.

"There, to the right. That hole corresponds with the alcove at the back of the car park where the bin normally sits. The bin will be moved outside and the air-conditioning and fire gear can be ducted through that hole into the room."

"Sorry, to go back to a previous point - you said something about pressure for space?"

"Uh... yes. Yes we need the space on the second floor - as soon as possible."

"For..."

"For a... uhhh... video conferencing, multimedia and fishbowling centre," the Boss blurts.

"A multimedia centre!" the PFY cries. "You're planning on moving us so you can chat to mates and watch movies! Whose bright idea was that?"

"I... Well it's not like you interact with people anyway," the Boss says defensively.

"And let's face it," I add. "This is a greenfields computer suite - we could build the perfect computer room here."

"What?" the PFY gasps.

"It's perfect - below ground so not subject to wild variations in temperature, watertight so not prone to flooding, overhead services so we don't need to sacrifice valuable computer room space for non-computing use, isolated and secure - it's perfect!"

"PERFECT!?!?!"

"Sure - well, almost perfect. I think the aircon ducting run might be a little long from ceiling to underfloor though - a little lossy," I say, pulling a seemingly valid criticism out of my nether regions.

"It should be ok," the Boss says, not wanting to ask what the hell 'lossy' means.

"Are you sure - it's a little long. Have you got a measuring tape?"

"Sure," the Boss says, handing one over.

"Okay, I'll feed the tape down and can you just hold it about 200mm from the floor - where the subfloor would start."

"Okay then," the Boss says as the PFY and I exit.

. . . two minutes later . . .

"How's that?" the Boss asks from below us.

"Fantastic," I say. "11 feet three inches. And what's the size of the room again?"

"Thirty feet by twenty feet, why?"

"And what rate does water come out of one of these babies?" I say dropping the fire hose into the hole a little while the PFY turns the handle.

>GUSH!!!<

>rattle< >rattle< >RATTLE!!!<

"The door's stuck!!!" the Boss cries as the PFY pushes the bin back over the hole

>indistinct rattle<

"Completely watertight you say? So I guess he'll get to try that fishbowling going WAY ahead of schedule..." the PFY sighs.

. . .

BOFH: Somebody know this body?

Accident or murder?

Published Friday 4th May 2007 10:56 GMT

Episode 15 "Ah, Simon, Steven, there's a man here from security wants a word with you?" the head of IT asks nervously.

"Really?" the PFY says. "What's he want?"

"Found a body," security says, stepping into Mission Control from behind the head.

"A body?" the PFY says, in his well-practised innocent manner.

"A body," security repeats.

"Where?" I ask.

"Third floor showers."

For a moment there I'd wondered whether the PFY really was the hard faced bastard he sometimes appeared to be and hadn't made the anonymous call to security about the Boss' sub basement predicament, but even our ducting system isn't watertight enough to push someone up four floors...

"And you're coming to us to see if we have security footage?"

"No."

"Swipe card records?"

"No."

"Motion sensor logs?"

"No," security repeats. "I popped up to see if you knew something about it."

"Showering?" the PFY asks, acting slightly offended.

"The body."

"Oh, I shouldn't think so. Who was it?"

"Bloke from accounts payable. Henderson."

"And you thought of them why?" the head of IT asks.

"We thought he'd died from natural causes," security says, nodding at the PFY.

"Natural causes?"

"Yeah, electrocution, drowning, poisoning..."

"They're not natural causes!" the head gasps.

"They are if you call me at 4am whining about the quality of toner," I snap. "Not that this bloke...uhm..."

"Henderson," security supplies helpfully.

"...did that."

"So you thought of them because?"

"Because he was a beancounter **and** because he had one of these in his hand," security says, holding up a USB key.

"A USB key," the PFY says. "What's on it?"

"I was hoping you'd be able to tell me that – it's encrypted."

"Ah...shouldn't the Police be doing that?" the PFY says, choosing the cautious route.

"They **should** be, but I've been asked to take a look at it because Henderson was being monitored internally. It seems he was a little enthusiastic in processing the payments he's been authorising the last few months. Paying them two or three times in some cases..."

"And **THAT'S** why you thought of us – you thought he'd been overpaying us?"

"No, the payments were all to an auditing company for 'consultancy' fees," the head of IT says, getting in on the act. "But our company doesn't want its name in the E-Crime reports since the CEO's a charter member of the E-Crime Awareness Committee, and it might look bad..."

"So let's get this straight – your sole reason for suspecting that we had something to do with it was because the guy was carrying a USB key?"

"He **was** naked," security adds.

"Oh please tell me he was 'carrying it' in his hand!" the PFY says, dropping it on his desk while suppressing a gag reflex.

"Yes."

"Oh, right then >PLUG!<" the PFY sighs. "Okay, >clickety< so it's a USB Key-based encryption system with... >tap< >tap< hundreds of trillions of possible keys and >clickety< would most likely take several **weeks** of computing time to crack."

"Really?" the head of IT gasps.

"Nah, it's a raw image of an encrypted ZIP file – >tap< >tap< and an very early version of ZIP at that.""

"So when will you have it cracked?" security asks.

"Now," the PFY says, opening a spreadsheet onto the window. ">clickety< Hm... >tappity-click< It's just a spreadsheet of payments – hardly worth putting into a zip file at all – certainly not worth encrypting >tappity<"

"Nothing else hidden on the device?!?"

">clickety< Nnnnooo, doesn't look like it. >tappity< By the look of it the key was brand new – or newly low-level erased and the Zip file raw copied over it – the rest is blank. So it looks like you're back to square one – perhaps someone at the audit company thought he knew too much?"

"Yes, it's possible – but at least we know we're not going to be handing over any data which might embarrass the CEO," security says. "We can hand this over to the Police safe in the knowledge that no further invoices will be triple paid. And now that that's cleared up.. >RING< Hello... Yes... Yes... really? Okay, yes... good, goodbye then."

"What is it?" the head asks expectantly.

"A friend of mine keeping me posted about the coroner's report – it was natural causes."

"You mean electric..."

"No stroke. The coroner reckons he probably dropped the key, bent over to pick it up and BAM, lights out matron!"

"So it wasn't them?" the head asks dubiously looking at the PFY and myself.

"Nope, just a random event – could have happened to anyone," security says, grabbing the USB key and wandering off sheepishly with the head of IT in tow.

...

"So you opened your own auditing office," I say to the PFY once they're gone. "Ballsy! But the stroke thing – a piece of luck or overdose of blood thinners in the water fountain?"

"ME?!"" the PFY gasps. "I thought it was you?"

"Hell no. But the double payment stuff sounds good!"

"Yeah, all the rage in Iraq. Apparently Henderson was paying the same bill on successive months by appending a suffix to the invoice number. On the third month he'd divert suspicion simply by paying the bill plus the overdue penalty so the numbers didn't recur. And the best part was he had

a set of SQL statements which he'd trigger from his desktop to do it without leaving an audit trail in the finance package."

"That's pretty bloody clever...But how do you know all this?"

"It was all in that ZIP file on the USB key."

"But that was only a spreadsheet!"

"No, that was off the Beancounter's fileshare. The real ZIP file was much more interesting – he's kept notes and everything!"

"So..."

"I think it's time we got our names on the employee list at that auditing place..." the PFY says, picking up the phone and bashing in a number...

BOFH: OutBOFHd

He's good, he's bloody good

Published Friday 11th May 2007 10:41 GMT

Episode 16 "...and this is Simon and Steven. Simon, Steven, this is David, he's our new hardware technician," the new Boss says, entering Mission Control.

"New hardware technician? What about our old one?"

"I was under the impression we didn't have an old one."

"That's right," the PFY says defensively. "Because we didn't need one."

"It seems you do. I was looking through the write off statistics and it seems that our equipment has some of the worst expected lifetimes around. In some cases we write off equipment that's almost new."

"Plasma screens have only recently settled down stability wise," the PFY counters. "And the larger sized ones had the worst failure rate."

"Still, probably worth a warranty claim though," David chips in.

"Too late, it was disposed of," the PFY says before someone starts thinking about looking for it. At his place...connected to his DVD player...

...Five minutes later...

"I don't like it," the PFY says. "He's going to be a problem."

"Nah, he'll be fine," I say. "The boredom will get to him."

...The next day...

"Have you guys got an oscilloscope?" Dave asks, with the Boss closely in tow.

"What for?"

"Need to check the data lines of the IDE interface on that machine you're going to toast. We may not need to chuck it out as it may just be a faulty cable," he says.

...Two minutes later after Dave's departed with the scope...

"The bastard!" the PFY fumes. "It took ages to pull that connector to bits and break off some of the data pins. I was going to use that as a home cinema!"

"Yeah, he's good. Strange he didn't just swap the cable out though."

"Mmm," the PFY says thoughtfully. "So he's just showing off?"

"Bound to be..."

...Two further minutes later...

"Yeah, it's stuffed," Dave says, popping his head back into Mission control. "Must be a dud motherboard."

"Ah well," the PFY says. "Sling it in here, we'll dump it later."

"No need," Dave says. "I've got a contact who does sustainable recycling."

"Yeah, but we might be able to use some bits."

"Nah, they're all stuffed," Dave says.

"It's true," the Boss adds. "He checked them all with the ozziscope."

...

"THE BASTARD!" the PFY snaps.

"Oh, he IS good," I concur. "But lets see how good he is after a few midnight callouts..."

...

So it's 2am and Dave's just put a machine back into a rack after replacing a couple of failed hard drives that the PFY and I had fitted a couple of hours ago prior to tripping the SNMP alert.

"Odd losing two in one go like that," he says cheerfully. "Still, it happens from time to time though. So if that's all I'll let you guys get onto the data recovery."

"Thanks," I say, letting Dave out.

...Three hours later...

"Sorry for getting you back in again Dave, but it looks like another drive's failed," the PFY says, pointing to the machine.

...Ten minutes later...

"That's funny."

"What is?" the PFY says.

"This drive looks exactly the same as one of the ones I replaced earlier."

"They all look the exactly the same don't they?" the PFY says.

"No, see how this one has a gouge in the label just before the brand name - I think I did that when I pulled the old one out of the drive tray."

"You must have done it twice," the PFY proffers.

"I don't think so. Say, do you have the old drives, I'd like to take a look at them."

"Oh, sorry, I didn't realise you'd want them. I sent them off to a sustainable recycler," the PFY replies, with more than a little sarcasm in his voice.

...Later that day...

"...and then Dave replaced the third drive and we >yawn< recovered the data," I say, recounting the whole thing to the boss.

"Did you keep that drive then?" Dave asks. "Didn't send it off for recycling in the middle of the night?"

"No, we kept it in case you wanted to check it against the next faulty drive," the PFY snaps.

"Which will probably occur tonight," Dave chips. "Once around 2am and another at around...5?"

He IS good!

"No, I'm sure it'll be ok," the PFY says. "Besides, I'm so tired I'm unlikely to hear the pager."

"Yes, David mentioned you might be a little tired so I've had security give him access through your office to the Computer room 24x7."

"The bastard," I murmur before the PFY can say anything.

"Pardon?"

"Hmm?" I respond.

...

"So we need to make ABSOLUTELY SURE that nothing goes wrong tonight so as not to justify his access."

"Should I check all the machines and do a bit of preventative maintenance?"

"I was thinking more along the lines of disabling the fault reporting system," I say...

"ONTO IT!" the PFY snaps.

...

The next day dawns without incident - which I confirm when I run into the PFY while waiting for the lift.

"Not a tinkle - the pager was silent all night," he affirms as we enter Mission Control. "MY DESKTOP!" he gasps, seeing his monitor sitting on his chair.

"What did y... *MY* Desktop!" I cry. "And my laptop! And my reserve desktop and reserve laptop!"

"My laptop!" the PFY gasps, opening his second drawer to find an empty space.

A quick scan of the room tells the story that the trolley scuff marks in the carpet should have told us before we walked in.

"WE'VE BEEN RIPPED OFF!"

"And we know whose fault this is!" I say, turning and heading to the Boss' office...which is completely empty.

Completely. Not even a phone.

"They're good," I say, as the PFY looks under the Boss' desk for any evidence.

"There's a note," the PFY says pointing behind the door.

"It's to us!" I say slamming the door and ripping down the note, "It says 'Thanks for the memories, the kit and the plasma screen - Dave and John.'"

"Who's John - and what plasma screen?"

"John is the Boss and the only plasma screen they knew about is the one you've got at - "

"What?"

"You don't still keep a spare house key in your desk drawer do you?"

"Yes, but it's loc.. THE BASTARDS!!"

"Oh, they're good," I say, noticing the blanking plate where the door handle should be. "They're BLOODY good."

BOFH: The revenge

It's amazing what people will fall for

Published Friday 18th May 2007 10:37 GMT

Episode 17 >SQUEAK<

...

"Impressive," our recent ex-new-Boss says nervously, edging towards the back of the room. "How did you... find us?"

"Simple," the PFY says, entering from the door behind him, cattleprod in hand. "One of the laptops you took wasn't exactly what it looked like."

"Bitlocker?" the ex-new-technician asks, halting his in-tandem retreat along with the ex-Boss.

"No," I respond, fingering my own modded prod. "The machine had built in wireless and GPS and used scripted netstumbler to peer with any access points it could find and report its location."

"Really?" the ex-boss asks.

"Nah, the PFY lifted your wallet the day you started and stole your credit card details and personal information. We followed you here from your home."

"Ah," the ex-Boss says. "Which was why I found my wallet on the floor behind my desk last week."

"Indeed. Why steal a wallet when the cards would be deactivated within the day? No, it's far better that you feel you mislaid it for a moment and give us the opportunity to order a month's worth of crap to be delivered to your home."

"Crap?"

"Gym gear, PC games, porn, and diet products."

"Ah," the ex-Boss says knowingly. "All stuff which is very hard to return..."

"And you **might** have made donations to a number of internet based organisations with anti-democratic viewpoints – so I wouldn't do any flying in the near future."

"Either of you," the PFY says nodding at the ex-technician. "Those messages you were posting about Western infidels are almost certainly being read by anonymous men in a grey building somewhere in the city..."

"Which is why returning home is probably not your best option," I add.

"Not with the three sacks of fertiliser under your stairwell anyway..." the PFY adds.

"I..."

"Have our equipment and are only too willing to give it back to avoid a nasty incident?" the PFY asks.

"Yes?" the ex-technician suggests.

"And compensate us for our time with a couple of hundred quid?" the PFY adds.

"Fifty," the ex-Boss says.

"Each," the PFY counters.

"Done!"

And a deal is struck. Being consummate professionals they know a lost cause when they see it. Moments later the PFY and I have keys to a North London lockup, a little cash, and an agreement that the company will have learned some valuable lessons from the incident.

"So how did you manage to get the gear out so quickly?" the PFY asks as we have a post-truce pint with the ex-Boss and ex-tech.

"We got some magnetic signs made for a fake PC repair company then slapped them on a rental van," the ex-tech explains.

"Then we got a couple of lab coats, a clipboard, and started loading up gear. Amazing what people will fall for."

"And security didn't say anything?" the PFY asks.

"Nothing apart from 'this is heavy'."

"You used security to help steal stuff from the company?" I sigh.

"Oh yes, they were most helpful."

"Ah well, I suppose the company will learn something from this..." I say.

"Although not much," the PFY adds.

"No?" our ex-Boss asks.

"No, the current brainwave of the head of IT is to fit out our Madrid office with kit that we configure here - network, desktop and server - and just talk them through the install on the phone!" the PFY snaps.

"Really? Much kit?" our ex-Boss asks eagerly.

"A bit - but don't even think about it - it's being shipped privately. It SEEMS that the CEO's bought a villa in Spain and is going to get the company to pay for his shipping container by putting the computing gear in with his stuff."

"Sounds like someone needs to be taught a lesson..." our ex-tech says.

"You mean..." our ex-Boss asks.

"Uh-huh. We could rent a van full of empty computer boxes that need to be put into the container at the last minute."

"50/50 on the proceeds?" the PFY asks.

...Late the next night at the Cargo terminal...

"They must employ the same security staff as we do!" the PFY gasps. "I mean who's going to believe we're Rabies inspectors!"

"What was the container number?" the ex-Boss asks nervously, knowing we've got a fairly small window to do this in.

"Here," I said, handing over a shipping receipt.

"Okay..." he responds, driving slowly past rows of containers waiting to be loaded. "... BINGO - and it's at ground level!"

>Creak< >Clank< >Groaaaaan<

"That's odd," the ex-Boss says. "There's computing boxes here but the furniture's complete crap."

"Well you guys go in and grab the stuff while the PFY and I grab the 'replacement' kit," I say.

"Okay... hang on, these are just empty b..." >GROAN SLAM!< >CLANK<

"Amazing what people will fall for," the PFY says, shaking his head and screwing up the shipping receipt.

"Still, a holiday in Spain can't be all bad," I say.

"True," the PFY says. "And I made sure to put the sacks of fertiliser next to the torch - so they know what to expect when we dob them in to the Coast Guard..."

"Okay then," I say. "We're about done. But before you return their van to the hire company..."

"Yes, I know," the PFY sighs. "Back into a solid object a couple of times, use up all the gas and wait outside a kebab place until someone's sick on the passenger seat."

As they say, vengeance is a pre-digested meal best served on pseudo leather...

BOFH: Lost licences

Now, if we all just work together...

Published Friday 25th May 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 18 "I've lost some documents!" the Head of IT gasps, bounding into Mission Control with beads of sweat dotting his puffy red brow.

"Documents?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, I scanned our licence agreements into the computer and now they're gone!"

"Gone from your computer?" the PFY sighs, firing up the backup software.

"No, no, I put them into the content management system."

"Ah," the PFY sighs. "So they're gone alright."

"But I only put them in last week!"

"Uh-huh."

"It sent me an email telling me they'd been added to the system!"

"Yep."

"There was a link to the documents!!"

"Mmmmm."

"I TESTED IT!!"

"Course you did - and it worked the first time around didn't it?"

"Yes."

"And maybe you checked, a day later, just to be certain?"

"I did - and they were there! But they're not now!"

"No, they wouldn't be would they?"

"WHY NOT!?" he snarls.

"Because we bought a **budget** content management system. The one based around a relational database that the developers designed themselves."

"I..."

"The one we *repeatedly* told the company not to buy a couple of years back," I chip in.

"Yes, but it was..."

"The one that the developers abandoned development on six months later because we were the only UK customer to buy it."

"They weren't to know th..." the Head pleads.

"The one with the referential integrity of an Alzheimer's patient meaning a document will be there one day, gone the next and back - briefly - at some indeterminate time in the future?" the PFY says, really labouring the point now.

"Yes, yes, well it's done now, so how do we recover the data?"

"Recover?"

"Get it back into the content management system."

"It's already back," the PFY says. "It's in there somewhere, just the database indexing is corrupt."

"So can you uncorrupt it?"

"You mean do an index rebuild?"

"Yes," the Head sighs, seeing a happy ending.

"Sure - though there's only a **small** chance we'll get your docs back in the index but a **large** chance that we'll lose other documents from the index."

"How? Why?"

"Ok," I say, going to the whiteboard in lecture mode. "The database >scribble< >squeak< will rebuild indexes which are corrupt. The indexes got corrupt >scribble< >scribble< somehow, which means there's every chance that there's duplicates >squeak< >squeak< in the database - which in turn means that when you rebuild the indexes one of the dups will disappear >scribble<. Alternatively, because the integrity's so bad, we could delete >scribble< documents that the database can index in the hopes that when you rebuild the indexes >squeak< >squeak< the missing licence documents will reappear."

"We need those licenses back, so do what you have to!" the Head snaps.

"Which licences were they exactly?" the PFY asks.

"All of them."

"All... uh even the ones in the document safe!?" the PFY gasps.

"Yes - especially those."

"Our site licenses... for... everything?!"

"Yes, but if you get them back you ca..."

"You destroyed the originals didn't you?" I sigh.

"Of course. What's the point in scanning them if you're going to keep the documents?"

"What was the point in scanning them in the first place?"

"We needed space in the document vault for some new contracts."

"So you destroyed licence documents - some of which are proof-of-purchase, some of which are one-time licences and will not be reissued by the vendor."

"But as you say, they're still in the content management system somewhere. Can't you just do a search on the content management server and find them?"

"Don't be silly - no content management server allows that - or you'd be able to change systems to some cheaper vendor. No, a *proper* content management system makes it next to impossible to extract your content in any automated manner so that you're forced to use their product and pay their licence fees no matter how crap it is."

"But you said this wasn't a proper system."

"No, we said that this was a **budget** system - so it's worse. In their wisdom the designers adopted a file system model and split the files into 128K chunks with a pointer to the first chunk and a linked list thereafter. Once you lose the first pointer, it's gone - unless of course you rebuild the database and the right pointer wins."

"So we should delete some documents from the system?"

"In theory we should delete all the documents from the system to free up pointers then rebuild the indexes which *should* retrieve all the missing documents. But it'd take ages to do that..."

"Not if we work together," the Head gasps. "But - how do we get the existing documents back?"

"When we've rebuilt the index we extract all the recovered data files. Then we just recover the content management system from backups and reinsert the documents into it, safely."

"Right," the Head says, dashing off to get deleting.

"So when do we tell him that there's no index rebuild function?" the PFY asks.

"AFTER I ring that company that gives you £50 for dobbing in companies who pirate software..." I reply, picking up the Yellow Pages.

"But that would be *after* I discover that the backup utility on the content management system has been silently failing for months...All of which would be a week or so before we tell him that the licences were only colour photocopies of the originals in the tape safes..."

"It's a plan!" the PFY chirps.

BOFH: PFY spreads his wings

And promptly has them clipped

Published Friday 1st June 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 19 Sometimes things get a little crazy - no one knows that better than me. Take bastard rivalry for instance, with the PFY and I staking the company's wellbeing against a paltry couple of pints...

"Ten quid says the server will clap out once the temperature hits 80," the PFY says.

"You're on!" I blurt, knowing full well that I had it up to 85 a couple of nights ago before orchestrating this wager.

. . . >click<

"And that's ten quid you owe me," I say smugly.

"Double or nothing that the SAN will falter under destructive diagnostics!" the PFY counters.

"No bet!" I say, recalling the PFY spending a bit of time in the computer room recently, obviously doing some orchestration of his own...

"Double or nothing I can make the Boss cry before lunchtime?"

"If it's double or nothing I'd want him crying before morning tea," I say. "AND no pretending to be his wife with the good news about the Nigerian Oil Company investment she put their retirement savings into - this has to be a **technical** cause."

"So it's a deal then?"

"Sure."

Half an hour and some tears later my winnings are voided...

"Impressive," I say. "How many hours of Photoshop was that?"

"None," the PFY responds. "It was a lucky find on MySpace."

"So they're real?"

"It would seem so. The Boss's daughter is a rising star in the... uh... entertainment... industry."

"Ok then, so how about shouting a couple of pints with your winnings?"

"It was double or nothing - there weren't any winnings," the PFY says. "But what the hey!"

Ten minutes later in the pub.

"Cheers," the PFY says, raising a pint. "Hey, isn't that Gary?"

I look to where the PFY's pointing, and sure enough Gary, a bastard acquaintance from the financial district, is having quiet pint in the corner. Responding to his wave, the PFY and I wander over and take a seat.

"A little out of your home region aren't you?" I ask.

"Yeah, but I thought I'd pop over and introduce you to my new assistant," Gary says.

"Really, who's that then?" I ask looking around.

"Me," the PFY says.

"You?" I gasp, realizing the orchestration was a little more detailed than I'd thought.

"Yep, Gary's offered me a better deal."

"More money?"

The PFY rattles off a figure that the average Beancounter would be pleased to see as a departmental budget and I can't help but be a little upset.

"You earn more than that here!"

"Yes but there's more opportunities at Gary's place."

"But surely you're better off here?" I sniff.

"Nah."

"What about loyalty?"

"Eh?"

"But I set you up with your first girlfriend," I gasp. "In fact, I also set you up with your latest girlfriend!"

"Yeah, well, that's over as of last night," the PFY sighs.

"Really? What a shame, I quite liked her. You don't still have her number do you?"

"You were saying something about loyalty?" Gary asks.

"It doesn't matter," the PFY says. "It was over."

"So you *have* got her number then?" I ask with what I now realize was unnecessary enthusiasm.

"I'm leaving," the PFY says, with some finality.

"I see," I say, noticing the glee on Gary's face.

And that's how it is with bastard rivalry - when you've run out of users to torture, you turn on your own...

"I have to say you're taking this well," Gary murmurs half an hour later as the PFY empties a few personals from his desk and tips the rest into the bin.

"Yeah, well, this day was bound to come - it's time for him to spread his wings and maybe do something important with his life," I admit.

...

What a load of crap! If Gary thinks I'm going to take this one bending over, he's got another thing coming. Several in fact.

...Two days later at 7am...

"Hello," Gary snorts, picking up his cell phone on the third ring.

"Gary, Simon here, just thought I'd ring and see how the PFY's doing?"

"Bloody fantastic," Gary gushes. "No hard feelings about me stealing your guy?"

"None at all - and I take it that you're ok with me stealing your UPS batteries?"

"Pardon?"

"Your UPS batteries. I happened to notice them just laying around doing nothing. In your computer room. Very early this morning."

"There would have been an alarm!"

"There SHOULD have been an alarm, yes, but there wasn't - which reminds me - I think the piezo speaker in your UPS is damaged. Looks like someone hit it repeatedly with the edge of a full drive tray that someone removed out of one of your RAID sets last night. They might not even have put it back into the same slot."

"I'd have been paged!"

"Oh yes, I think someone might also have opened the Telco pit outside your building, smashed the copper and fiber optic cables repeatedly with an axe then filled the pit up with quick setting concrete."

"Is that all?" Gary sighs.

"I hear there might be a power shutdown in your area and I do believe that the tank on your diesel generator may have sprung a leak..."

"When?"

"The power cut?"

"Yeah."

"How long does it take you to get into work?"

"35 minutes."

"Oh, that's a shame, I think the cut is 34 minutes away..."

>sigh< "So I just send him back then?" Gary asks.

"If you like. Though you should probably warn him that the market's pretty buoyant at the moment so I don't know that we'll be able to offer the same as he was getting..."

...and I can't help thinking as I ease open the door of Gary's main switchboard, that this rivalry business might be getting more than a little crazy. But as a wise man once said... 'What the hey!'

>CLACK!<

BOFH: PFY rescue mission

Back in the saddle

Published Friday 8th June 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 20 The world is full of great duos focused on a common goal - Hillary and Norgay, Armstrong and Aldrin, Sooty and Sweep - and so is the world of computing.

There's nothing like having a good backup guy, and for me the PFY was that man. My go-to guy, the PFY could be trusted to know what I was looking for almost before I did myself and have it ready and waiting when I got there. I could send him off on a task in the full knowledge that he'll see it through to completion with no hitches or questions.

And so it was a bit of a wrench when PFY forsook the comfort of the home pitch to play for another team - made worse by the two-month reemployment stand-down period which the department apparently has on contractors for some reason. This all means that in the meantime I don't have the ability to delegate those run-of-the-mill everyday functions that plague the life of a systems professional - in turn meaning that I end up having to do them myself...

...

"What's the spade for?" the Boss asks wandering into Mission Control.

"I...uh...gardening," I reply, scanning the helldesk database for a recent complaint.

"And this...uh...sack of...whatisit, lime?"

"Gardening again," I repeat. "Great for...uh...composting."

"The roll of old carpet?"

"Still gardening."

"What do you use carpet for?" he asks dubiously.

"Flip it upside down and use it as weed matting," I say, having prepared for this question earlier.

"Ah right, of course. You know I used to be a keen gardener," the Boss burbles, setting himself up for one of those directionless monologues that seems to plague the social interaction of so many members of middle management. "I used to have brassicas, and leeks."

"Speaking of which, I'm busting for one myself," I add, getting out of the room before I get a run down on the basics of fertiliser application in small gardens...

...

When I get back from the visiting the Gents the situation is even worse. The head of IT and the Boss are engaged in a conversation about the benefits of crop rotation to avoid systemic plant illnesses.

"Riveting as this is, I have work to do, what with my assistant being away and all," I say, pointing at the screen. "So if you'd just move on I could get down to the problem at hand. >clickety< Ah, here we are...the complainant was...M Easton."

"We could lend you a hand to catch up on your work if you need," the Boss suggests, much to the Head's surprise. "And we could chat about gardening at the same time."

!!!

I blame the PFY. Had he not left in the pursuit of career advancement none of this would have been happening - M Easton, whoever the hell he is, would be safely wrapped in carpet in the back of a van speeding towards a disused allotment in the middle of nowhere and I'd be deleting a complaint about the speed of our data recoveries from the helldesk system.

>clickety< >DELETE!<

"I'm sure we could give you a hand," the Head agrees.

"Could you?" I ask. "I need a bit of help digging a hole."

"What sort of hole?"

"I dunno, six feet by two feet by, uh.. six feet deep." "You mean like a grave?" the boss asks, then pauses anxiously.

"Sort of - I'm using the deep-cache method of liming."

"Deep-cache? I don't think I've heard of that?"

"It's a new-age Biodynamic thing," I say. "Quite new but showing some good results."

"Oh yes," the Boss asks dubiously. "How does it work?"

"Well, you dig a large hole, line it with a large quantity of lime, then a layer of compostable matter, then lime. The groundwater will seep up through the cache and distribute lime through the upper water table of the land as the compostable material breaks down."

"And what compostable matter were you going to use?" the Boss asks, interested now.

"Oh, just anything biodegradable I found laying around the office - foodscraps, newspaper...M Easton."

"You're not going to get US helping you with THAT," the Head of IT snaps.

"Yes well, an alternative I *have* been considering recently is a deeper hole with several layers of lime and compostable matter. Three maybe, depending."

"Depending?"

"On how many old carpets we have in the basement and whether the van's being used tonight - you won't be missed will you?"

"Look what's the real problem?" the Head asks, attempting to defuse the situation.

"The real issue - this moment - is that I'm recovering some data for this M Easton character as fast as I can change tapes and he's complaining about how slack we are."

"So the real issue is the lack of an assistant."

"That's part of it, yes."

"So what if we agreed to waive the stand-down period in this case?"

"That would certainly help yes."

"And you'll abandon this...uh...several layers...option."

"Yes."

"And leave this M Easton person alone?"

"Sure."

"No retaliation at all?"

"None."

"Ok then," the Boss sighs, easing towards the door with the Head of IT. "We'll get that sorted straight away."

...three hours later...

"Ahhh," the PFY says, plopping down into his chair. "Back in the saddle."

"Indeed."

"What's the spade, lime and carpet for?"

"One of the users, M Easton, called you a tosser."

"Right. I'll book the van!"

See, it's like magic having an assistant!

BOFH: Talking to tradesmen

Sometimes it's wisest to pay up and shut up

Published Friday 15th June 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 21 "You're stuffed," our friendly Sparky says, stepping back from our switchboard and putting his clamp meter away.

"Stuffed - and that's a technical term?" the Boss asks sarcastically.

"Yep!" the Sparky replies.

"So what does it mean then?" the Boss continues.

"It MEANS," the PFY says, "that there's no more capacity in the switchboard."

"Just add another circuit breaker, there's plenty of room!"

"I **could**" our Sparky responds. "But you're using more power than the distribution breaker should be handling - already. If I add any more circuits you'll probably trip the main breaker and bring down the computer room the next time a power supply blows."

"It's on a UPS!" the Boss says drily.

"Yeah," our Sparky says, pointing out, in turn, the parts of the power circuit diagram. "Power Supply to Generator/Supply changeover switch >tap<, to UPS >tap<; to Switchboard >tap<; to Computer Room >tap< - with a couple of Isolating switches >tap< >tap< thrown in."

"Which means?"

"The problem is *after* the UPS," the PFY says helpfully.

"Exactly," our Sparky adds. "A 100 KVA UPS breakered with a 80KVA circuit breaker which feeds a board currently running at 76KVA."

"?"

"It means you have to replace the switchboard circuit breaker," the PFY says helpfully.

"And busbars to be on the safe side," the Sparky adds.

"What would that cost?" the Boss asks.

"Ffffffffffffff.... " our Sparky sighs - in the way sparkies tend to do when they're trying to work out whether to go first or business class on their next holiday... "I'd have to get some prices."

"Prices?"

"Yeah, circuit breakers, new switchboard, busbars, cable - which is a nightmare now with the price of copper - and cutout switches."

"Ballpark figure?" the Boss asks.

"You're not going to have much change out of eight grand," he says, opting for the first class seats to Switzerland. And the expensive prostitute...

"£8,000," the Boss chokes.

"Can't we keep the old switchboard - what would that cost then?" the PFY suggests, conscious that the boss is borderline stroke material but the camcorder isn't charged...

"I suppose you could," the Sparky says sadly, seeing a downgrade to a ferry to Spain with the missus. "But then you'll move the problem to your breakers because you can't get that type any more - which means when one fails you're going to have to rig up some form of alternative - which can't be done live."

"So we'd need to shutdown the computer room if one breaks?"

"You'd need to shut it down *every time* one of them breaks," the Sparky responds, not giving up on Switzerland just yet.

"We can't do that!" the Boss gasps.

"Perhaps we could increase the capacity of the main breaker to 120KVA which will allow for a little bit of leeway in the switchboard. Then we ASSUME that none of the breakers is going to fail in the next two years or so, and admit that as the busbars are overrated anyway we should survive."

"I... suppose that might work."

"How much will that cost?" the Boss asks.

"A grand," our sparky says, barely allowing himself enough profit to take a cab to and from work for the next month...

"Well lets do that then!"

"Okay," the Sparky sighs. "So onto the UPS maintenance."

"What UPS maintenance?" the Boss snaps suspiciously.

"Your annual UPS maintenance - what I came here for when you sidetracked me for more powerpoints."

"What's that going to cost - and for what?"

"A grand or so," the Sparky says. "I change the coolant, do a discharge test, retune the time-remaining figures, scan the batteries and electronics with a thermal imaging camera, check the error log, reset the error log, upgrade the UPS and monitor BIOS if necessary and then produce a site report."

"And you want a grand for that?"

"That's actually a pretty good deal," I say to the Boss.

"No it's not!"

"It is," the PFY adds.

"We can't afford it!"

"You're actually contracted to it for five years," the Sparky says.

"Well in that case we'll terminate the contract," the Boss snaps.

"Ah... that's not such a flash idea," the PFY says worriedly. "He will have bought that contract off the UPS company. **He** would be losing money, personally."

"I don't care," the Boss seethes.

"So I take it you won't be wanting your generator serviced either."

"Yes please," the PFY says nicely.

"Not if it's going to cost a grand I don't!"

...A day later, in the dark, silent computer room...

"Well you showed him didn't you?" the PFY says.

"He can't just turn the power off!" the Boss snaps.

"He didn't, he turned the UPS off!" the PFY responds. "Course if I was him I'd dial in and turn the UPS on and off a stack of times in quick succession to ruin some of our power supp
>WHHIIRRRR< >Click< >WHIRRRRRRRR< >CLACK< >click< >WHIRRR< >click< >WHI<
>CLACK< >click< >WH< >CLACK< >click<..."

...

...

"He can hear us can't he?" the Boss asks.

>WHIRR< >click<

"It would seem so," the PFY whispers back. "Probably through the UPS monitor microphone."

"We can bypass the UPS can't we?" the Boss asks.

"Oh I wouldn't do that," the PFY says uneasily.

>WHIRR< >click< >WHIRR< >click<

"Why not?"

"Well if I were him, I'd wait till we went into bypass mode, then dial in to the Generator control system and toggle the changeover switch about 100 times."

>WHIRR< >click<

"I...So what do you suggest?"

"I suggest you pay the bill."

>WHIRRRR< >click<

"THREE BLOODY GRAND!!!?"

>WHIRRR< >click<

"Make it an even five," I suggest.

>WHIRRRRRRRRRRRRR<

"I'm not paying five grand!"

>click<

"Make it six grand!" I snap.

>WHIRRRRRRR< >click<

"What, you want more?" the PFY asks.

>WHIRR< >click<

"Money?"

>WHIRR< >click< >WHIRR< >click<

"Ah. Leave it with me," the PFY says, reaching for the cattle prod.

>WHIIRRRRRRRRR<

Professional Tradesmen - you've got to know how to talk to them...

BOFH: Printer cartridge? What printer cartridge?

Framed

Published Friday 22nd June 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 22 "Simon, Stephen, this is David and uhh... " the Boss says, petering out as his memory fails.

"Carl," David says.

"Carl. And they'll be running the new Multifunction Printing Device rollout."

"I... What multifunction printing device rollout?" the PFY asks.

"The Multifunction Printing Device Project? There was a whole project team looking at it!"

"A whole project team?" I ask.

"Yes, to change all our printers for Multifunction Devices. The project was running all through last year apparently - Surely you knew about it?"

"No one told us!" the PFY asks.

"You must have known!"

"Nope. Whose idea was it?"

"Yours?" the Boss asks, scanning a well worn project brief he must have just come across on his desk somewhere. "'To cut down on duplication' it says."

"Really?" I ask. "It's an admirable concept but it didn't originate with us. I mean if we'd known there was a chance that we were going to be replacing our printers we most certainly wouldn't have ordered a thousand toner cartridges at the beginning of the year."

"You ordered 1,000 toner cartridges!!!" Carl gasps.

"Yeah, but I suppose we can send them back - I don't know what the restocking fee's likely to be tho..."

"Twenty per cent of purchase price for large orders," the PFY says.

"So how much are we talking about?" the boss asks.

"Dunno, maybe six grand" the PFY responds.

"You bought SIX THOUSAND POUNDS WORTH OF TONER CARTRIDGES???" the Boss gasps.

"No, we bought about thirty grand worth of toner cartridges, but the restocking fee'll be about 6k."

"We can't waste that sort of money!" the Boss gasps.

"Course we can!" the PFY says - being a glass-half-full sort of guy.

"I'll be crucified if they see that! They'll think it was my fault!"

"As our manager you **are** supposed to sign off high value orders!"

"I wasn't even working here at the time!"

"And I'm sure the board will realise that," the PFY says dubiously.

"The BOARD!"

"Yeah, word's bound to get out. Unless..."

"Unless?"

"Well in the normal scheme of things we'd just use the toner cartridges and no one would be the wiser."

"And?"

"Say the toner cartridges were to run out real fast - because someone printed thousands of pages of printouts every night for about a month?"

"You're proposing we waste both toner cartridges and paper?!"

"Hell yeah! If you send the toner cartridges back a credit'll be sent back to the company tied back to the original invoice which will cause the auditing beancounter to show an interest. If we just chuck the toner cartridges into the bin then the auditor will notice an anomaly in his spreadsheet between the consumption of paper and toner cartridges, but if we use toner cartridges and paper simultaneously it'll look like we just had a run on printing!"

"But won't people notice the huge volumes of printouts and wonder why?"

"Not if we get people to initiate the printouts themselves - with some pointless activity. So say we implement five or six new IT policies that all staff are supposed to familiarise themselves with, make them a bit geeky so people don't want to read them off the screen and cram them full of screenshot examples so they chew through the toner..."

"There's got to be a better way!" the Boss sniffs.

"Well we could..." the PFY starts.

"Could what?"

BOFH: Computer room deluge

Published Friday 6th July 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 23 "Water!" the PFY gasps, entering Mission Control from the computer room.

"Where?" I ask, to which the PFY responds with an urgent wave to his entry point.

"F%*!" I say moments later as I survey the steady stream of water coming down the computer room wall. "Where's it coming from?"

"Dunno," the PFY says, shaking his head wildly. "Upstairs somewhere."

"Go and find it - stop it. I'll pull the floor bung so that the water can drain out!" I snap, grabbing the tile lifter.

...Several tiles later...

"What's happening?" the Boss asks, tiptoeing around the lifted tiles.

"I'm trying to find the floor bung!" I say, continuing my work.

"What floor bung?"

"The floor bung which drains water out of the computer room in the event of a flood!" I snap, indicating the computer room plan. "It should be about three meters from **that** pillar, but it's not."

"Are you sure you're looking at the plan the right way around?"

"There's only one pillar in the middle of the room - the others are at the corners or on the other side of the wall in the Control Room" I snap.

"Maybe they drilled the hole by the wrong pillar?" the Boss suggests.

"Nah, it's clearly marked on the plan, you'd have to be a complete id... I'll take a look."

Reentering Mission control, I lever up one of the floor boxes in the middle of the room and shine a torch toward the pillar...and find the computer room drain.

"They put it in the wrong room!" I seethe.

"They put what in the wrong room?" the PFY asks bouncing through the door.

"The drain - it's in this room, not the bloody computer room."

"How is it you haven't found this out before?" the Boss asks.

"Until now no Beancounter's ever brought an electric drill in from home to make a hole to feed a cable through a wall and subsequently put a hole in the main water riser pipe..." the PFY responds.

"There's a hole in the water riser!" I gasp. "But that's a bloody high pressure pipe! It'd take ages to drill through that - AND there must be water **everywhere!**"

"Not so you'd notice," the PFY says. "Most of the water is just filling up the wall cavity - which is what we're seeing down here."

"Okay then," I snap. "It's going to take ages to fix and the wall cavity's going to keep leaking into the computer room for ages after they turn the water off so we're going to have to create a new bung hole."

"But how do we do that?" the Boss whines.

"Let's think," I say. "Who do we know that has a drill??"

...Ten minutes later I'm back from the hardware store and present the apologetic beancounter with a masonry drill large enough to find oil...

"I... Err. Where should I drill the hole?" the Beancounter mumbles as we lead him into the waterlogged computer room.

"Three metres from that pillar over there, in line with the... WOAHH! Where the hell did you get that drill from?!?" I gasp, catching sight of a ginormous power drill with surface rust from where Noah left it out on the deck...

"I...it was my fathers?"

"Not your grandfather's then?" the PFY asks, looking at the monster.

"Waste not want not," the beancounter simpers.

"Soooo..." the PFY says, surveying the computer room. "How about that old double insulation stuff then?"

"What?" the beancounter and boss say in unison.

"Nothing," I say. "My assistant and I need to go into the other room to shut a few systems down, but meantime you should probably drill as fast as you can before the water reaches the underfloor electrical outlets..."

"Oh, good point" the Boss says, nudging the beancounter on.

>Whirrrrr< >GRRRRRIIIIIIIIIIIIIINNNNNNNNNNNNNDDDDDDDD!<

... A minute later, in Mission Control ...

"It's no use, I can't do it" the PFY sniffs.

"Can't do what?"

"Can't let them get zapped" he mumbles.

"What? Of course you can!"

"I can't, I just can't do it!"

"Why not - are you getting soft?"

"No... You'll just make me clean it up. And finish the hole!"

"True. So you're just going to isolate the UPS and computer room with no orderly shutdowns?"

"Uhuh"

"Fair enough!"

>Clickety< >Click< >Beeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep< >Clack!<

"What happened?" the Boss asks, bursting into Mission Control.

"You must have shorted out the power somehow!" the PFY says, obviously having thought this through.

"But the drill's still running!"

"The wall plugs aren't on UPS supply" the PFY counters.

"Ah, right" he says, going back to supervise the work.

"Dodged that bullet," the PFY says. "The last thing I want to be doing is hiding bodies on a Friday after... >KZZZZZERRRRRRRRRT!< >CLACK!<. ... Oh crap!"

.. half a minute later in the computer room ..

"THAT'S WHY THEY DIDN'T PUT THE DRAIN HOLE THERE!" I gasp peeking through the hole to the smoking - and very wet - building transformer below.

"And I suppose you want me to clean this up?" the PFY sighs.

"Nope," I reply. "Get security to call an ambulance - The raised floor mesh absorbed most of the charge and they're only stunned. Though you might strongly suggest that no one reset the building breaker any time soon."

"Meantime...pub o'clock?" the PFY asks hopefully, helping himself to the wallets left carelessly laying around in the Boss' and Beancounter's pockets...

"WHY NOT!"

BOFH: A question of urgency

Coffee's pretty important, ya know...

Published Friday 13th July 2007 10:50 GMT

Episode 24 "How's that job going?" the Boss asks hurriedly, ducking into Mission Control.

"Which job?" I ask.

"The installation," he responds, obviously believing that I have some idea of what he's talking about.

"The installation?" I ask.

"The server installation."

"What server installation?" I ask, beginning to wonder if the Alzheimer's is kicking in.

"The WEB server - for PR."

Okay, so it's Alzheimer's - which is a bit of a shame actually as I could have kept all those aluminium pots I threw away a year ago. Unless...

"Are you doing the server install for PR?" I ask the PFY.

"What server install for PR?" the PFY asks - and I KNOW he can't have Alzheimer's because he eats takeaways and avoids deodorant like vegetarian food.

"The Web Server," the Boss repeats with more than a touch of frustration. "The new Public Relations Web server!"

"WHAT NEW PUBLIC RELATIONS WEB SERVER?!" the PFY and I snap.

"It's in your helpdesk queue!" the Boss says, FINALLY giving us a bit of useful information.

"Ah, the SERVICE desk queue," I say, being ITIL compliant. "When did that go in?"

"This morning," he replies.

"Ah, and what priority did you give the Job?"

"High."

"High," I say to the PFY. "What's the response time on that?"

"One working day," the PFY says.

"Oh, ok, so we'll probably get back to you on Monday," I say. "Unless of course we fail to meet our response target in which case the job will escalate to you and you can follow-up with us Monday lunchtime."

"So... the server's not going to be ready by the weekend?!" the Boss gasps.

"No, no," the PFY says, calming the Boss down a little.

"Oh good."

"No," the PFY continues. "What he's saying is we don't have to get back to you to have the whole 'What server?' 'The Web Server' 'What Web Server?' 'The PR Web Server' 'What PR Webserver?' conversation until monday. **If** we meet our response target."

"B-But... we need the server up and running before the weekend!" the Boss gasps. "The company's running an online promotional competition which they've advertised in a mailout!"

"Hmmm," the PFY says. "And they waited until now to worry about the server?"

"Not exactly," the Boss says, guilt oozing from his pores.

"YOU waited until now to worry about the server?"

"No," the Boss blurts. "The developers said it would run on any web server, so PR put it on their web server last night but overnight it had a meltdown and we need a replacement server!"

"What sort of meltdown?"

"The whole thing collapsed - the disk filled up and the database log thing went berserk and the web server crashed and they can't fix it," the Boss gabbles. "So we need a server before the weekend!"

"In that case you should ring the service desk and get the priority changed to Urgent," I say to the Boss. "Because then the response time drops to two hours."

"Just look at it now *pleeeeee*," the Boss pleads.

"I'd like to," I lie. "I honestly would, but if I do that then I'd be resolving a non-urgent call before an urgent one - which would show up when they analyse the KPIs which are set as part of our annual bonus calculations. I need to fix the urgent call first or get your job made urgent."

"So what's the other urgent call?"

"Someone wants us to put SNMP into the coffee machine so they know when the beans need to be refilled," the PFY responds.

"THAT'S NOT BLOODY URGENT!"

"It was logged in the service desk as urgent," the PFY says. "Apparently the CEO was here last week and someone offered him a coffee but couldn't give him one because the beans were out and the refills were locked away to stop people stealing them for home..."

"Well, can't you change my call?"

"Only the **owner** of a job or the service desk can change its priority," the PFY says. "Because apparently SOME people thought that we'd deprioritise calls we didn't want to do..."

"I..." the Boss says, getting the guilty look again. "I'll go and change the priority and be right back!"

...two minutes later...

"So when will the server be ready?"

"I think we can probably have it run up by next Wednesday."

"But it's URGENT, you need to get started now."

"I would but I have to deal with the Critical jobs first."

"What critical jobs?"

"The coffee machine job," the PFY says. "It's just been upgraded to Critical. Apparently the CEO asked for a raincheck on the coffee!"

"But you never said there was a critical!"

"There wasn't one then," I say. "It got upgraded."

"So how does the urgency thing work?" the Boss snaps.

"High is priority 2, Urgent is priority 1 and Critical is priority 0."

"So Critical's as important as it gets?"

"Yup!"

"Right!" the Boss says, stomping out.

"Quick," I say to the PFY. "Change the required resolution time of the cof..."

"Onto it!" the PFY snaps, updating his service desk call. "but I was just thinking - have you looked into the urgency mapping to see if it supports..."

"Negative numbers?" I ask. "Already onto it and it does...One Super Duper Critical coming up!"

BOFH: Operation bean the beancounter

Published Friday 20th July 2007 10:55 GMT

Episode 25 "Okay, so where are we at?" I ask the PFY as I review plan 32 beta.

"Right then," the PFY responds with the ruthless efficiency of a seasoned professional. "32 Beta is a GO! At oh seven thirty and I printed 12 copies of >shuffle< **this** >shuffle< picture to various printers around the building."

"Ah," I say distastefully. "Nasty. It's a bit sledgehammer-when-a-tack-hammer-would-do isn't it?"

"It's all to do with efficiency," the PFY says. "Nothing says pervert like farmasutra."

"And you've printed it with this header info?" I ask.

"Some yes, some no. Some refer to the user's home directory and some will appear to be printed directly from the website."

"I see. And you've dropped this picture into his home directory?"

"That and several others from the series."

"The series?" I shudder.

"Oh yes," the PFY says, shaking his head sadly.

"And?"

"I've modified the file access times so they look like they were downloaded just after morning tea yesterday and modified the web log entries to back that up."

"And?"

"And what?"

"It's hardly incriminating is it?"

"I... sure it is!"

"No. He could fall back on the 'it must have been a virus' defence, or the 'I think something went wrong with my peer-to-peer app'. Look, pop down to Boots, grab a large packet of tissues and a tub of moisturiser. Chuck half the tissues and half the moisturiser out and make sure the moisturiser jar is nice and greasy. Appearance is everything. Then slap it into his desk drawer, third one from the top."

"Third from the top?"

"Yeah, he's a beancounter. The top one will be full of pens and the one below it will be full of reserve pens and stapler refills. The others will be empty. AND?"

"And what?" the PFY asks.

"The website?"

"The website? OH, yes, the website. I've established a history of posts to a blog over the past two days under an alias of his surname backwards, expressing my abiding interest in meeting other men with a love for... the animal... kingdom. So to speak."

"Okay, so it's all systems go then!" I blurt.

"Or not!" the Boss snaps, creeping into Mission Control from where he must have been hiding.

"Or not what?" the PFY asks innocently.

"Or not... to frame someone."

"Eh?"

"Your plan, to print pictures like this >shuffle< to frame one of our accountants. THIS GUY ONLY STARTED YESTERDAY - he can't have annoyed you already!"

"It's a pre-emptive strike," the PFY explains. "He's bound to do something."

"No, he's not!" the Boss gasps, reeling from the unfairness of it all.

"He is," I counter. "He was brought on with the brief of examining asset management, inventory control and depreciation."

"But maybe he's not interested in you!"

"...Azariah," the PFY adds.

"Eh?"

"Nothing, just a bit of antipodean humour. But we digress, because of course he's going to be interested in us - IT assets are some of the most poorly recorded around because beancounters traditionally didn't know whether you were buying an item in its own right or an item which was part of an item."

"Huh?"

"In our asset database will be graphics cards from thousands of years ago when 32 Meg of onboard memory was worth more than Posh Spice's underpants on eBay. And they were typically issued an asset number because of their book value, then slapped inside a machine with its own asset number. When the machine was binned, **it** was written off, but the card wasn't. Same with large monitors, disk drives, etc."

"Which will in turn mean," the PFY continues. "That **we'll** get all the asset inventory and depreciation track down work which will take weeks of wandering around the building checking stickers, working out what we have and don't have..."

"...Trying to remember what you've stolen you mean..." the Boss suggests, unkindly.

"Alternatively, it's far simpler for us to plant the seed that all beancounters are secretly perverts with a fetish for donkeys."

"So you're going to send out a stack more of these are you?"

"Why not?" I ask. "We'll keep framing beancounters until the company stops appointing them."

"Of course not, no that's just dealing with the symptoms, the real problem is the inventory system."

"And your solution to that is?"

"Plan 32 Alpha, totally destroy the asset database."

"It's backed up," the Boss says.

>BZEEERT< >BZEEERT< >BZEEERT< >BZEEERT< >BZEEERT<

"Not anymore," the PFY.

"It's on RAID!"

>Clatter< "Not with that disk removed it's not."

"But it'll still work with one disk removed."

>Clatter< "But not two."

"It will if you put it back in."

>CRUNCH<

"Not now it won't."

"If you put the other disk back... >CRUNCH<"

"Oh dear," the PFY says, putting his hammer down. "We appear to have lost the asset management system."

"I... suppose it's pointless asking you to have a look at my laptop then?"

"Of course not!" the PFY gasps, picking up the hammer again. "Bring her in - it may have depreciated so much you need a new one..."

BOFH: Moving faster than blame

It's got to be somebody's fault

Published Friday 27th July 2007 11:31 GMT

Episode 26 >clickety< >clickety< >tip< >tap< “

>clickety< >tap<

>clickety< >clickety< >tap<

>clit..< >tap<

>tap!<

>TAP< >TAP!< >TAP!<

"Financials server's not responding again!" the PFY says, looking up from his monitor.

"Hmmm. >click< ping test says it's up - must be just the app."

>clickety< >tap< >clickety< >tap<

"Yep, I can login alright, so it must just... >tap< >TAP!< nope, it's hung."

"DISK!" the PFY and I say simultaneously.

"But it's on the SAN!" the PFY says.

"So's the HR server, and that's still working," I respond.

">tap< >TAP!< >TAP!< ... Nope. It's not," the PFY counters.

...Seconds later in the server room...

"The lights say it's working ok," the PFY says, tapping the SAN box.

"Yeah those two green lamps really tell you a lot," I say. "Course, if the disk activity lamps were doing anything it would probably mean more to me..."

"Ah," the PFY says "I hadn't noticed that. It's crashed then, has it?"

My affirmative response is partially interrupted by the ringing of the server room phone which has a dual purpose - to contact us when we're inside the room and to indicate that the Guild of Idiots has taken up camp outside Mission Control with a view to finding out both what happened and when service will be restored.

Sigh.

We wander outside and to talk to the assembled group.

"So what happened?" the head Beancounter wheezes, being a bit tuckered out after the walk from the lift.

"The SAN has crashed," I say.

"When will it be back?" the head of HR asks.

"After it's been reset and done it's data rebuild," I say.

"Have you reset it?" the Boss (and final Guild member) asks.

"Nope, it's remotely managed - remember?"

"No?" the Boss says.

"They do," the PFY says, pointing at the other two guild members.

"What do you mean?" the Boss asks.

"The companies that produce our HR and finance software merged last year and created a single unified product," I explain.

"Their merger was so successful that they approached a hardware vendor to come up with what would be a complete turnkey solution," the PFY adds.

"A turnkey solution so simple that an idiot could administer it," I murmur.

"Although at the time we didn't realise it was a requirement," the PFY says as an aside, nodding at the two department heads.

"The idea was magic!" I continue. "An administrative web page which would allow the users to tailor, start, stop, backup and recover the application without systems people's intervention. And the plan was good - right up until the new company decided that the hardware merger wouldn't be returning the expected gain in profit and so alternative vendors were sought."

"Vendors who could deliver a healthy additional profit," the PFY adds.

"Vendors who didn't know the meaning of the word expensive."

"Or reliable," the PFY again adds.

"So when the combined forces of HR and finance decided that they wanted this solution we *suggested* that the proposed hardware might not be great for a production system."

"And we were ignored," the PFY adds.

"And so we now have a situation where the disk hardware appears to be as unreliable as the server hardware."

"The server hardware can't be that unreliable - I can't remember the last time it went down," the head of HR says.

"That's because you don't use it all the time, AND because we have a master reset feature at our disposal."

"Master Reset?" the head of HR asks.

"Indeed. Follow."

The Guild follow me into Mission Control and I show them the master reset system.

"Behold," I say pointing high above my head.

"Two pieces of string?" the Boss asks...

"Two pieces of string which go through the wall, through the comms room, through the comms room wall, across the computer room and down to the HR/Finance rack to one of two levers."

"Levers?"

"Yes, levers poised above the reset button on the servers. A quick pull on this and your servers go down faster than Paris."

"You can't be serious!" the Boss bumbles.

"Sure am! I'm not wandering into the computer room three times a day to restart one of their machines!"

"Well give it a pull then," the head of HR says. "Because we're supposed to be doing a bank run for the salary payments and we've only got 23 minutes."

"I could give it a pull, but it's the disk that's crashed, not the machines. You want us to install a disk reset as well?"

"I... suppose so," the head of HR responds reluctantly.

"I'll get it," the PFY says, heading off to the computer room with a battery drill and a ball of string...

A few minutes later the PFY's back with a concerned look on his face.

"Yes?" the head of HR asks.

"The SAN was crapper than I thought - the reset button broke off when I pulled the lever and is wedged between the panel and a case so it's stuck in reset mode."

"Take the panel off then!" the head of HR gasps.

"It's riveted on!"

"Drill them out!" the head of HR snaps. "You've got 11 minutes!"

"Yeah well... I don't know that that's the best course of..."

"You're wasting time - just do it. You've only got 10 minutes now!"

...2 minutes later...

"I blame the manufacturer," I say to the PFY as I tap the front of the SAN.

"Yeah... security rivets with hardened faces on a piece of crap kit like this," the PFY says.

"I know. A shame the front panel **isn't** hardened though."

"Or the front of the chassis," the PFY says.

"Or the controller board," I add, gazing into the newly created hole in the now **very** dead SAN.

"Or all that cabling behind the controller board," the PFY says looking deep into the hole. "...So, back to Mission Control to fess up? I... Hello?"

...microseconds later, at the pub...

>ring< >ring< >ring< >ring<

"Leave that," I say to the Barman as he reaches for my cellphone helpfully. "It'll just be my assistant - about a technical matter."

"Technical matter?"

"Yeah, how to move faster than blame..."

BOFH: Dodging the auditors

The PFY has a lucky escape

Published Friday 3rd August 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 27 "Oops," the PFY says, looking away from his screen guiltily.

"What?"

"I think I've just dropped the indexes from the financials database."

"Ok," I say. "No need to panic, we can probably recreate the indexes on the fly from the table data."

"Yeah, no."

"No?"

"I dropped the tables as well."

"So what you *meant* to say when you first said 'oops' was 'oops I've deleted our financials database.'"

"Yeah."

"Backups then," I say. "You didn't delete them as well did you?"

"No, no, they're automated - the finance people schedule them for 11:30pm from their web interface. The only interaction I have is to change the incremental tape each morning when it's ejected and the full tape every Monday when it's ejected."

"And when was the last time the full tape ejected?" I sigh, fearing that this conversation is dragging a little.

"Uhhh," the PFY says, rolling his eyes a little. "Three weeks ago."

"THREE WEEKS AGO!" I gasp. "You mean those idiot beancounters haven't scheduled a bloody full backup in THREE WEEKS! It'll take **days** to roll that forward!"

"Oh they've scheduled them alright," the PFY says. "They've just not run."

"WHY HAVEN'T THEY RUN?" I ask, gritting my teeth a little.

"It's because of the financial policy change," the PFY says.

"Policy change?" I prompt, wondering if the PFY has suddenly become unable to form a sentence complete with subject, object, verb, adverb and intelligence.

"Yeah, you know about three weeks and two days ago the Beancounters changed the way in which they would pay recurring invoices?"

"No, but go on."

"They decided that if an invoice was a recurring one that varied in amount month to month the fixed component of the bill could be paid in advance but the varying portion should be paid for in arrears."

"And whatever that means has... some effect on backup scheduling?"

"WHAT IT MEANS contractors like us who are paid in advance would get paid their normal time in advance but their overtime in arrears."

"Uh-huh - and this means?"

"It means that there would be a two month gap between successive overtime payments when the policy was enacted."

"...Three weeks and two days ago?" I reply.

"Yes. Which means that if you operate as I do - on a month to month basis - by then end of the month you have no money left."

"Yes, but you'll still get paid every month, just not your overtime - for one pay."

"But in the case where you commit your monthly income to substantial mortgage repayments on a studio apartment in the West End..."

"Oh!" I say. "So you're broke for a month!"

"Two months actually," the PFY sniffs.

"And because you're broke you can't even afford the time to put a tape in the backup drive?"

"No..." the PFY says.

"You can afford to put tapes in but you don't for... personal reasons?"

"THERE'S A TAPE IN THE BLOODY DRIVE!" the PFY snaps.

"So why haven't we taken a full backup properly?"

"Because the backups are timed to occur at 1:00am on Monday morning."

"Still not with you..."

"Well at 12am, I've been doing some database maintenance which takes about 90 minutes to complete."

"So why not run the maintenance after the backups?"

"I can't, because the accounts payable payments are processed and transferred to the bank at 3am."

"And you wouldn't want to impact my chances of getting paid," I say.

"No. So I run it at 12 and it takes till 1:30."

"Yet still the backups don't start at 1?"

"No, because I have to change the system clock to be 3:01am before I do my maintenance."

>CUE RAT AROMA!<

"What exactly does your database maintenance entail?" I ask, fearing the worst.

"I select all the accounts payable transactions in the database which ran three weeks and three days ago, order them by payee and drop anyone who isn't me."

"And run the payment with the timestamp which would have occurred had it been a legitimate payment going to the bank."

"Yes. And then when that's done I set the clock back to the proper time, which is generally 2:30 or so and the real run goes through."

"Wouldn't that mean you had lots of duplicate payments for the same day?"

"It would - if I didn't delete the row when I get into work - from there and the audit table."

"A plan so complicated I need a memory upgrade and a math coprocessor to understand it. So why did you delete the tables?"

"I was looking through the financials package manual..."

"A manual?! You HEATHEN!"

"...and happened to notice that the audit table has its own audit table which is available to the auditors..."

"AND THE AUDITORS ARE COMING THIS WEEK!" I gasp, finally realizing.

"Indeed," the PFY sighs, confession over with.

"You realize they take a hardcopy of the audit table's audit table every night?"

"You're kidding!"

"Not at all. They made it mandatory last year when I managed to replay a desktop order enough times to build my own Beowulf cluster - though they couldn't prove anything."

"So what do I do?"

"You mean, what do you do now that you've push the company into a possible crisis of investor confidence by manipulating our financial systems and ruining any possibility of a quick backup?"

"Uh... yes."

"Start a small fire with the paper audit logs - they're kept in the head beancounter's bottom drawer, then buzz every second incremental tape with the bulk eraser so they can't roll forward."

"But won't they still be peed off that we didn't do backups?"

"Not when we blame it on the SAN again - because of >flip< >flip< fibrechannel aspherical monochromousity."

"Ah, F.A.M!" the PFY says. "And I'm guessing you'll be faking web pages for Google to find?"

"Already done it. Although that's my second cluster down the toilet."

"That's what I like about you," the PFY says. "You're a people person!"

BOFH: Damsels in distress

Why yes, I *can* help

Published Friday 10th August 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 28 So the PFY and I are both on a quick junket to Paris and have managed to score seats in business class thanks to the combination of the Boss' short sightedness and the PFY accidentally stepping on his glasses until the lenses broke.

"So what's this junket about then?" I ask the PFY while making the exact amount of eye contact with the stewardess that was recommended in an ebook on sleeping your way through the service industry.

"Blah blah blah blah blah," (or something like that) the PFY says, while I'm finishing off my eye contact thing.

"Sorry, what was that? I wasn't listening," I confess.

"Blah blah blah blah blah."

"Sorry. Sorry, she just came back, I'm listening now."

"It's a two day conference on security web applications servers against attacks. Everything from SQL injection through to blah blah blah..."

"Can I get you a drink sir?" the woman of my dreams asks.

"Indeed you can!" I respond happily. "Would you happen to have a glass of The McCallan?"

"The..."

"McCallan," I say. "Eighteen year old by preference, but 12 would be ok."

"Ah whiskey. We've got Johnny Walker?"

"Tape head cleaner!"

"Right - well can I get you anything else?"

"Oh, well, I suppose I'd be alright with eight cans of Tennants Super and half a dozen packets of salt and vinegar crisps."

"I'll have what he's having," the PFY adds.

"I'm afraid we've only got four cans left..."

"No worries," the PFY says. "Just give me the balance in cans of cider."

...A quarter of an hour later...

"You were saying something about SQL injection?" I ask the PFY, now that my chances with the stewardess are as small as her lager, cider, and crisp inventory.

"SQL injection methods are becoming more complex with a blah blah blah.."

"Sorry," I say to the PFY. "She's got a friend."

The PFY and I both turn our attention to a uniformed woman striding down from first class with a worried expression on her face.

"Does... uh... anyone here know anything about in-flight computer systems?" she asks nervously.

"Uh, not in-flight computer systems, but computer systems in general," the PFY says.

"Anyone at all?" she asks.

"I think what my assistant is suggesting is that we may be able to help you," I say. "What seems to be the problem?"

With no other takers our stewardess is forced to make her way through the crisp bags and empty cans that hit the floor once the words 'computer systems' were mentioned. It's a reflex thing.

"It's not serious," she assures us. "It's just that apparently the plane has an... um... three of five cluster quorum - if that's right - and one of the five has gone offline and another has an error. Apparently it can be fixed by in-flight diagnostics but they're not starting."

"Well, you came to the right people!" I say. "We're bound to be able to help. Show us the way!"

We proceed with the stewardess to the flight area and get pointed to an open plate behind a seat.

"You're in luck!" the PFY says, playing with the tiny LCD debug panel. "It's Intel kit and it just so happens that I have a USB key with me with a Knoppix install on it. We could probably format the five machines, get rid of the Microsoft OS and install a much faster Knoppix install in no time."

"I..." the pilot says, not knowing what the hell the PFY just said. "Do you need anything?"

"Five...?" the PFY says, looking at me.

"Make it six - best to be on the safe side," I say.

"Six," the PFY says decisively. "Cans of Tennants Super."

"Each," I say.

"And some salt and vinegar crisps to go with the tramp juice."

"Beer and crisps!?" the pilot gasps.

"BACK OFF MAN, WE'RE PROFESSIONALS!" I snarl, whipping out my Knoppix USB key.

"What do you want us to do?" the Co Pilot asks.

"Get as high up as possible," I say. "We're going to have to reboot them all to change quorum when we go from Windows to Knoppix, so we'll need all the glide time we can get..."

"I... ok"

"And get a wiggle on with those lagers."

...a few minutes later...

"Right," the PFY says, dropping the third empty can to the ground. "I'm ready!"

"Me too," I say. "Control-alt-delete time."

"I was just going to press the reset on the motherboards."

"Works for me!" I say.

>click< >click< >click< >click< >click<

>WHAAAAAAOORRRRR< >WUMPF WUMPF WUMPF!<

"Whoa," I say, turning to the PFY. "That was *some* turbulence. I was having a pretty strange dream."

"Me too," the PFY says, rubbing his eyes. "We were at the conference and a crisis broke out and they needed someone who knew how to recover a Commodore CBM save tape and it just so happened I blah blah blah."

"Sorry about that," I say to the PFY. "I was momentarily distracted by a uniformed woman striding down from first class with a worried expression on her face. Grab us a six pack of Tennants Super from your carry on will you?"

BOFH: New toys

And how to keep them

Published Friday 17th August 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 29 "What's the timeframe on the install of that videoconferencing device?" the Boss asks, bowling into Mission Control, dressed, as the saying goes, like a pox doctor's clerk.

"Yeah, good," the PFY says looking up from the assorted pieces of hardware on his desk.

"No, I wanted the timeframe till it's in place, not a status."

"Oh right. Well I guess it'll be sorted inside of a week"

"A week?! But I was told it'd arrived yesterday!"

"Yep, so it'll be all installed and configured in a week."

"But you told me that it was a *turnkey device*, all you'd need to do is give it a network address?"

"Uh-huh, and we'll do that when we rack it up."

"Can't you rack it up now?"

"Not really. I mean it's going to take at least a day to put it back together."

"Put it back together?!" the Boss gasps. "Why? What was wrong with it?"

"Nothing," the PFY says. "We just wanted to see how it works. It's quite good too - it boots off >tap< >tap< this hard drive here, but it's also got a slot for a flash card if you want to make it truly solid state. The kernel's a tiny Linux jobby that does a stack of sanity checking before handing off to the application. You can also set a jumper on this >tap< IO Card to tell the box to silently encode all conferences to one of the two drives in this >tap< >tap< media bay. AND it's got three NICs with inbuilt spike suppression, truly redundant power and the ability to battery backup to RAM >tap< here to hibernate the device should you wish to move it and boot it quickly in a portable configuration!"

"You... took it to bits?!" The Boss finally gasps.

"Yeah, but we take **all** new kit to bits!"

"But it says 'no user serviceable parts inside!'" the Boss says, pointing at a small label on the lid.

"Yeah, that's just what they tell you to keep you stupid," the PFY responds. "Besides, we're not users."

"But you've voided the warranty!"

"Nah, they'll never know we've been in there, we'll rivet the case back up when we're done."

"Rivet?"

"Yeah, we drilled the original rivets out - they tried to make it tamperproof."

"They'll **know** you drilled it out!"

"No they won't, it'll look mint!" the PFY says, brushing some metal shavings off the case.

"There's a great big gouge out of the side!"

"Yeah, I sent a complaint in to the vendor saying it came like that. That way if it claps out we'll just claim it was damaged in transit."

"They'll check the box!"

"This box?" the PFY asks, pointing at a box with a large number of boot marks in it.

"But they'll still know you opened the machine!"

"Nah they won't. The final assembly work is performed in Leeds - probably so that the company can bypass some import tariff or the other - so all we have to do is make it look like the last person who had it open was from Leeds."

"And how do you propose to accomplish that?"

"Smear the lid with lardy fingerprints and drop a couple of chips and some pork scratchings inside the case."

"I..."

"Oh, I almost forgot. I'll slip a bootleg of some blurry porn into the DVD drive."

"Uh... why?"

"That way they'll know it's been inspected by quality control."

"You can't seriously believe..."

. . . A week later . . .

"And so we took it out of the box and it's a complete DOA," the PFY says to the engineer, as the Boss looks on nervously.

"Let's just have a look at it then," the engineer says. "It's probably just a power supply fault."

>rattle<

"Have you opened this case?" he asks suspiciously.

"You can open it?" the PFY says. "How?"

"No, no, you can't open it, it must have got damaged in transit," the engineer says.

The PFY points to the Box and the engineer nods.

"It's the shipping agent we use in the factory up north," he says, shaking his head. "Used to be a baggage handler at Heathrow. Okay, lets just open her up."

. . . a couple of drillings later . . .

"Ah, it's the daughterboard," he says, pointing. "It's plugged in one row of pins to the left of when it should be."

"What's that for?" the PFY asks, pointing at a chip laying in the case.

"I... uhhh, that's just some packing," the engineer bluffs.

"It looks like a potato chip."

"Yeah, but it's not. It's one of those enviro carbon things. They're made out of... biomass and hexofibre - good for the atmosphere. And there's another one."

He dumps the food into his pocket, shuts the lid and plugs the unit into a tiny debug console he's brought with him.

"Righty-ho," he says. "Let's see how she goes."

>click< >whirrrrr<

An image promptly appears on the debug device and a self test starts.

"All looks ok," the engineer said.

"So how did it get out of the factory like that?" the PFY says. "Isn't there supposed to be some form of testing?"

"Yeah well, there should be, but it's possible this one got overl..."

He stops abruptly as a flabby backside wobbles its way across the screen...

"...might have just been damaged in transit," he says, pushing the eject button hurriedly.

"So we're all sorted then?" the Boss asks.

"Yep, all up and running."

"Can I get you a coffee?" the Boss asks, as the device is powered down.

"Why not?" our engineer says.

...

"So have you learnt a lesson today?" I ask the PFY once they've both gone.

"I have," the PFY says. "Engineers get the best toys. That debug device of his is fantastic."

"It is," I say. "How do you think it works?"

"Only one way to find out!" he snaps, reaching for the drill...

BOFH: Chilling the bearings

Freezers have other uses, too

Published Friday 31st August 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 30 "So what are we looking at here?" the PFY says as the Boss humps a desktop machine into Mission Control.

"It's dead," the Boss says, tapping the cover of the machine gently.

"Dead as in DEAD or dead as in it's not booting properly?"

"I... it's not booting properly."

"Right then, slap her on the desk and I'll have a gander."

>Clunk< >Rustle< >Click< >whirrrrrrrrr<

"Looks fine..." the PFY says, watching the diags roll by.

"No, it's after this, it won't boot."

"You mean after the Windows bit comes up?"

"It doesn't come up," the Boss says. "It just says something about drive no... Oh."

"It's working now," the PFY says.

"I... yes it is, but it wasn't yesterday."

"And you've done nothing till now?"

"It's my home machine. I moved my desktop machine to home and use my laptop at work."

"So you moved the non portable machine and leave the portable machine on your desk?"

"I..."

"And now the drive's failing..."

"Is it?!" the Boss gasps.

"Yup."

"So can you get the data off it?"

"Sure," the PFY says. "We'll just plug in a USB hard drive and copy it all to that."

"Do it!" the Boss says. "As soon as you can. It's got a complete budget breakdown of the company's IT assets and their replacement cycles in a spreadsheet. It's taken about two solid weeks of work to produce, but it's worth it because you can tell when every single IT asset is due for replacement!"

"Sure I'll do it right... Ah. Maybe later, it's crashed."

"Why?"

"My guess is that the bearings in the hard drive are almost dead and so once the drive warms up a bit they start getting a little cranky and the drive gives off read errors, ultimately crashing the machine."

"Can you reboot it?"

"Not really," the PFY says, pointing at the disk fail message on the boot screen.

"So it's gone then?"

"No, no it's probably still there - we could possibly get the motor and bearings replaced if it were worth enough to you?"

"How much would it cost?"

"A couple of thousand quid - and we'd have to send it away."

"Can't you do anything else?"

"We could chuck it in the freezer?"

"Can we be serious?" the Boss asks.

"He is," I say. "SOMETIMES when you put a drive in a freezer overnight the bearings will shrink slightly and allow the drive to be run up for a while."

"Long enough to get the data off?"

"Quite possibly."

"Okay do it!"

... early the next day...

"Alright then," the PFY says putting the chilled drive back into the desktop. "Lets take a look."

"It's booting!" the Boss gasps, pointing out the bleeding obvious. "Windows is starting!! It's UP! QUICK, COPY THE DATA!"

"Yes yes," the PFY says, plugging in the USB hard drive. "Ooooh, USB1, what joy!. Where's the spreadsheet?"

"In my documents somewhere. But there are several versions... let me think..."

"Chop chop," the PFY says. "The drive's warming up."

"Can't you just copy all my files and I'll find it later?"

"Sure," the PFY says, dragging the contents of the Boss' documents folder to the USB drive.

"TWENTY MINUTES?" the Boss stresses.

. . . seventeen minutes later . . .

"Nup, it's gone," the PFY says as the machine resets.

"So we can't get the data off?"

"I didn't say that," the PFY says. "We just have to be a bit tricky. We'll slap the drive back into the freezer to cool it down again then after five we'll move your desktop machine into the walk-in chiller in the cafeteria. The combination of cold drive and very cold air should buy us the extra three or four minutes we need..."

"Okay then!"

. . . That afternoon . . .

"And you think this'll work?" the Boss asks.

"It's the best plan we can come up with," I say. "But if the spreadsheet was that important, why didn't you do it at work and back it up properly?"

"I... because... it might be... unpopular."

"You've lost me."

"This spreadsheet," the Boss says, tapping his machine lovingly as we place in onto a shelf in the chiller, "will revolutionize asset replacement for our company and many others. It tracks asset lifecycles from the moment they come into the company; it reallocates low-spec machines to lower use roles; it tracks upgrades and book values! It will save companies millions in replacing machines that don't need to be replaced and upgrades that don't need to occur! It's the culmination of my life's work."

"Really?" the PFY says dubiously. "I think you're overestimating it slightly, but who knows? Anyway, I'll just plug the USB drive in and let you get copying."

Ten minutes later the PFY and I have left the Boss to it and are returning to Mission Control.

"So do you really think that it'll revolutionize IT asset management?"

"Nah," I say. "These things come and go and they're so tightly linked to a company's financial modeling that they don't easily translate to another company."

"But it'll still cause **us** some headaches."

"No, no, having an asset tracking and replacement spreadsheet is one thing, but you've really got to have an opening to use it. Still, I think we should be prepared to wake up and see the writing on the wall."

"That asset management is a political issue?"

"No I was thinking more of *The systems guys locked me in the chiller* carved into ice. Which reminds me, can you pick up a hair dryer on the way to work tomorrow?"

BOFH: Building changes

Gotta watch those professionals...

Published Friday 14th September 2007 11:22 GMT

Episode 31 "Just before you go," the Boss cries, waving some building plans at me as I'm ducking out to lunch. "Can you just take a look at this?"

"What is it?"

"We're just looking at making a few small alterations on the third floor," he responds. "And I'd like to get your thoughts on them."

"Didn't we make some 'small' alterations to the third floor six months ago? 'Small' in that case meaning a complete revision of the floor plan, with new offices, aircon and cabling throughout."

"Yes, we apparently did do a few more changes than originally planned back then – scope creep I think they said – but the changes they're proposing now are just a bit of fine tuning to come up with the ultimate configuration for both staff comfort and work process."

"So we changed from open plan to offices and now we're...?"

"It's a combination of open plan *and* offices. A hybrid model if you like."

"They're going to move all the walls again, aren't they?" I sigh.

"No, no, nothing as drastic as that," the Boss says, laying down the plans. "We'll keep all these walls here, those over here and of course those."

"Right, so with the exception of the external walls and the load-bearing internal walls, all the other walls go?"

"I... uhhhhmm, yes, it would appear so."

"So we're only keeping the concrete?"

"Yes."

"The stuff without cavities for faceplates?"

"What's your point?"

"My point is that all the wiring has to be done again – all the comms, all the power."

"It's underfloor, surely!"

"It *used* to be underfloor looms, sure. Then, when they did the renovations they decided that the floor plates looked ugly and that they caused problems for wheely chairs, so they had to go."

"But the cable looms must still exist?"

"You'd think so wouldn't you? But then one of the CEO's architect mates said that everyone was using solid wood floors for natural heat retention or something so they replaced the integrated tiling with wood, built permanent walls – for their improved sound proofing – and fed all the cabling from the ceiling space into the new walls."

"But surely that would be..."

"Madness?" I suggest.

"No..."

"Hideously expensive?"

"No..."

"The least intelligent method of partitioning offices in a dynamic environment?"

"I... don't know what to say."

"I do," I say. "*We told them so*. We **told** them that on average we 'renovate' about a floor a year in this place – more if there's been a change of head man or head man's PA – and that putting permanent floors and walls in would be a mistake and would cost us a fortune in comms reinstallation."

"Ah well I have some good news there," the Boss smiles. "They said we can reuse our old stuff."

"What, you mean they'll let us *reuse* the cable that some chippy's yanked out of the wall, tied up in a ball and taped to a ceiling member then untaped, unwound and stuffed back into a wall in another location?"

"I... Well you see the architect hasn't allowed any money for new cables in the renovation budget," the Boss says, scanning over the document.

"Are you sure?" I ask, grabbing the document off him. "Hang on – IT'S THE SAME GUY!"

"What?"

"It's the same guy who recommended solid walls and floors who's behind this and the cabling reuse. I'll kill him!"

"I think we should be reasonable about this."

"REASONABLE?!" I gasp. "If we do this we'll spend the next six months identifying cable faults and organising cable replacements out of my maintenance money!!!"

"But isn't network cable supposed to have a 20 year lifetime?"

"IN THE BLOODY WALL!" I snap. "Your bloody LADA will last 20 years if you leave it in a garage, it's only when you play with it that it stops bloody working!"

"I think you're being a little overdramatic – these builders are professionals."

"Yes, you're probably right," I say. "They're really IT wizards attracted to the building industry by the opportunities of wearing tight shorts and flashing butt cleavage. So when are they proposing to start this work?"

"I... They started this morning!" the Boss says.

"And we only heard about this today!?"

"Well I might have heard about it a week or two ago..."

"So that dull thumping noise I can hear above me *isn't* the sound of my assistant encouraging someone to fill in a survey form correctly?"

"That would be the builders," the Boss says.

"Let's take a quick look, shall we?"

...minutes later...

"Well this all looks OK," the Boss says. "The cable's all wound up nicely."

"The electrical cable is, yes," I say.

"What about the data cable then?" the Boss asks, unable to identify the aforementioned.

"It's the thin grey cable," I say. "The stuff they're using to tie the electrical cable together with. Oh, and hold those ceiling lights on with. And to steady that ladder."

"Ah, I..."

"And that bloke over there is using some as a belt and some more of it to run remote speakers off his boom box. But I'm sure he'll join it all back up with strip connectors when he's done."

"I..."

"Oh and look. There's the architect!" I say.

"Now let's not do anything hasty," the Boss burbles.

>KZEERRRRT!< >KZEERT!<

...The next day. . .

"And you're sure this room is to stay?" the builder asks me.

"Positive," I say. "I had a chat to my Boss and the architect and we agreed that it should remain here forever."

"But there's no doors!"

"Don't need them, it's going to be a duct."

"But... wasn't there a door there yesterday?"

"There was, but the architect and the Boss popped in last night and had someone put a panel in. The extra soundproofing it provides is priceless," I add.

"Yes, it's good stuff," the builder says. "And you know what they say?"

"In space no one can hear you scream? Or in a duct for that matter."

"What? No, they say no one regrets buying quality."

"So true. And speaking of quality, about that total cabling refit..."

BOFH: In search of the lazy atom

It's more scientific than car key gnomes

Published Friday 21st September 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 32 "That's that stuffed then," the PFY sighs, looking up from his screen.

"What, OpenOffice?" I ask, having read the recent blue whale news.

"No, no, an experiment I was doing."

"What's that then?" I ask, peering over his shoulder. "... Actually what **IS** that?"

"This is a view down an electron microscope."

"At what?"

"All sorts of stuff."

"What's it looking at now?"

"No idea, I just sent them a bunch of stuff and got them to load it on the webscope."

"Why?"

"I'm trying to locate something."

"What? And how did you get someone to put something in an electron microscope for you?"

"I'm looking for a certain atom. And I just sent them some samples in an envelope and said it was related to cheese virus outbreaks."

"Cheese?"

"Yeah, well, the microscope's in Switzerland."

"Virus outbreaks?!"

"It's a government facility, they don't load stuff for the public."

"But they loaded it for you?"

"No they loaded it for doctor Bjorn Snuffstrisse from the Ministry of Cheese."

"The Ministry of Cheese?!"

"A new department aimed at protecting the cheese industry from adverse... uh... stuff," the PFY rambles, waving his hand about distractedly.

"I see, and you're looking for...?"

"An atom."

"And you realize that you can't actually *see* a single atom with an electron microscope?"

"I know, but I can see the effects of it."

"Right. And what is this actually about?" I ask.

"You know when you push your car lock remote when it's still in your pocket and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't?"

"Uhh... Yeah."

"And if it doesn't it just WON'T, until you drop what you're carrying and get it out of your pocket - and then it works perfectly."

"Yes."

"And you know how you swipe your card to get to the computer room and sometimes it just doesn't work, while other times it's just fine for weeks?"

"Uh-huh."

"And when you type in your password and it doesn't work, so you type it in again and it doesn't work and you type it in SLOWLY and it still doesn't work, but then you type it in quickly again and it does?"

"Yes."

"I think there's a scientific reason. I... *think* it's because there's a 'lazy' atom in the mix."

"A... lazy... atom?" I say, dubiously.

"Yes, it's like a sort of resistor in the circuit of atomic life. It impedes the work of other atoms and generally stops things happening."

"A bit like the Director's PA?"

"No, it's a dynamic entity, it actually does work to avoid work!"

"Yep, that's her!"

"No this atom becomes involved in things outside of its molecular bond, it affects things that it has nothing to do with."

"Have you not met the woman?!"

"LOOK," the PFY blathers. "It's an atom, I'm sure of it!"

"So it's a hitherto undiscovered atom - so obviously with a large atomic number? Hmm. Actually if it's *really* heavy then I'm **positive** it's the Director's PA! You could name it Angela too! Or Angelanium!"

"It doesn't **have** an atomic number, it's dynamic!"

"?"

"It's any atom. Any atom at all - it *becomes* lazy."

"Ah, you mean like it has no protons or something odd? But even if it did exist, what could you possibly achieve by finding it?" I ask, while slowly typing 'straightjacket' into eBay."

"I could build a detector!"

"Why?"

"So I can detect where the atoms come from. It could light up when an atom is present. Then you'd know when IT devices would fail."

"If you built one you could put it on Angela's desk! She could use it as a desk lamp!"

"You're not taking this seriously!"

"You're right. Car remotes fail because water gets in the remote or the button gets pressed down when you sit on your keys - and the battery goes flat. Or you press the wrong button. Swipe cards don't work because every six weeks or so security sends someone around to clean them with a dirty cleaning card and it takes a couple of swipes to get rid of the grime they deposited."

"But my password - it doesn't explain my password!"

"Your password stops working because every now and then I disable your account briefly - you know, for giggles."

"So you're saying there's... no... lazy atom?" the PFY sniffs.

"Nope! No lazy atom, no lazy molecule, just a lazy PA. She's good tho. You could study her - she's a bit like a black hole in that work falls into her and pops out in some parallel universe. Hey, she could *radiate* your lazy atoms!"

"Let's see, she uses the same door, she's used my keyboard and she..."

"She's been in your car?" I gasp.

"I was young, I needed the money! I didn't inhale. I was very, VERY drunk at the time."

"You've been irradiated with lazy radiation!"

BOFH: You think you know a guy...

But...he seemed so normal!

Published Friday 28th September 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 33 "He seemed..." the PFY says, gazing out the window sadly. "...So normal."

"I know," I respond. "But you never can tell what's going on in someone's head."

"But he was such a good bloke!"

"I know," I say again. "You think you know someone, then something like this happens..."

"Something like what?" the Boss asks, entering both the conversation and the room without permission.

"One of our... colleagues... I suppose you could say," I reply. "Seems to have turned out to be a complete basket case."

"Had a breakdown?" the Boss asks.

"Worse."

"Hurt himself?"

"Worse than that."

"Is he dead?" the Boss gasps.

"No, but he probably wishes he was."

"You mean he hurt others?!"

"Uh-huh."

"He was such a quiet bloke too," the PFY says shaking his head.

"Kept to himself a lot?" the Boss prompts.

"Yeah, but he **was** an IT person, so that hardly counts," I reply.

"So he was... a serial killer?"

"What?! No, no. He was... uh... late... for a Linux users group last week... and so the geeks started to get a bit worried about him..."

"And?"

"And so they went round his place fearing he might have had an accident, you know, open chassis, high voltage, cup of coffee that sort of thing..."

"Yes?"

"So they broke in when there was no answer to the door..."

"Yes?!"

"And when they got to his front room they found..."

"YES?!?!" the Boss gags.

"..."

"WHAT?!"

"Macs. Stacks of them!"

"Macs?"

"Apple Mac 'computers'."

"And?"

"He was a MAC USER!" the PFY said. "For years he'd been living a lie!"

"I don't see..."

"He was a MAC USER!" I say. "I mean it's bad enough being an Apple user, but Macs as well! He'd been at it for years, too. When they broke into his basement they found Power Macs, Quadras... They even found... a Lisa."

"No!" the PFY gasps.

"It's true!" I say. "And it was still warm!"

"So he wasn't just experimenting!" the PFY says in hushed tones.

"Oh he inhaled alright! I talked to his family and friends, but none of them had any idea."

"They're always the last to know," the PFY says, shaking his head.

"So let me get this straight," the Boss says. "You're concerned because your friend..."

"Colleague," the PFY says, but even that makes him twinge.

"...Uses Apple computers."

"I think you mean Apple 'computers'," the PFY says, inserting the missing quote marks.

"And that's a problem?"

"Look, for years he seemed like a normal person!" the PFY says. "He ate with us, drank with us - we thought he WAS one of us. But all along he was hiding a nasty secret!"

"What's wrong with Apples?"

"They're just not real computers," the PFY says. "They're the piano accordion of the computing world, entertaining, but not made for professionals."

"Our Graphics people..."

"Yeah, but they're not professionals. They'd be just as happy with crayons and finger paints!"

"I... So what happened to your friend?"

"COLLEAGUE!"

"Er, colleague?"

"Who knows?" I say. "He might have run away to join the circus or he might have handed himself in for deprogramming."

"Deprogramming?"

"Yeah," the PFY says. "They strap you into a wheely chair and play In-A-Gadda-Da-Vida at **11** through headphones to you while administering electric shocks - until you renounce your faith."

"And they actually have places that do this sort of thing?"

"Yeah, they're everywhere. All you need is a place where no-one will notice a geek twitching, screaming and occasionally wetting themselves in front of a computer."

"In other words the gaming area of an internet cafe," I say.

"...And this works?"

"Who cares?" the PFY says. "They're filthy Mac users!"

...

"You'll have to forgive him," I say to the Boss once the PFY leaves to get himself a coffee (and hopefully some form of sedative). "But he has a pathological hatred of Mac users, always has..."

"So you're not so concerned about them?"

"No, no, I think they should burn in hell like the dirty heathens they are, but the PFY has an even deeper dislike of them. It's personal - almost as if he has some axe to grind."

"I see," the Boss says, realizing that this conversation will never get any better. "In any case what I ACTUALLY came to ask about was why my machine is dead."

Sigh.

"Lets take a look then," I say, following him to his office."

. . . moments later . . .

"It's dead because your PowerPoint is dead - see your desk phone and speakers are off too."

"Oh."

"We'll just go and reset the breaker and you'll be fine."

. . . a few moments after that . . .

>click-clack<

"Hmmm."

>click-clack<

"What's the matter?"

"The breaker is tripping when reset - something's using a lot of power. Hmm, the breaker info says it's just your office and the one next door."

"That office is empty," the Boss says. "It was used by the auditors and hasn't been used since."

"In that case I'm guessing they probably left their desktop machine on and its power supply has just shorted out," I say, making for the office concerned. "I'll just unplug the machine and bin it an we'll..."

On opening the office door I can't help but let out a gasp of horror... the PFY hunched over the power supply of some ancient hardware... the smell of old, warm plastic... the owl logo on the keyboard... And suddenly the PFY's pathological hatred makes sense!

"An Archimedes user!" I gasp.

"This isn't what it looks like," the PFY gasps.

"So you're *not* an Archimedes user?"

"Well... I... It was ahead of its time - with RISC, advanced gr.. >KZEERRRRRT<"

"Tell it to Iron Butterfly," I say, dragging the PFY's unconscious body over to a wheely chair...

BOFH: Skip diplomacy

Friendship through mutual embarrassment

Published Friday 5th October 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 34 "Hurry up and get the door open!" I gasp as the PFY fumbles with his swipe card at the back door of the building.

"Ok, ok," the PFY whispers back. "I'm working as fast as I can! >swip< Got it!"

>bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >click<

"Right, I'll hold the door, you pick up that lot."

"Okay," the PFY says, hefting up a bunch of machines. "But Archimedes - who in this company would have an Archimedes?"

"No idea," I lie, not wanting to risk refreshing his memories of the whole thing - his secret stash of machines in the room next to the Boss' office, our discovery of him using them, his reprogramming, his subsequent regression, his encounter with the dentist from *Marathon Man*, the discovery of a second stockpile of running Archimedes in a basement room...

"So what are we doing with these?"

"Dumping them in the skip before anyone notices," I snap back. "So get a move on."

"What skip?" the PFY asks.

"THAT ONE!" I reply, nodding with my head.

"When did that arrive?!" he gasps.

"About 6:30pm, right on the change of security shift so that neither of them will be interested in it," I say.

"So why didn't we chuck this crap out then?"

"BECAUSE," I respond. "We have to wait till there's no one around to ask questions."

"Why not just come in early tomorrow then?"

"Because (a) there's bound to be someone who comes in early to fire off an email to their boss about some work topic before bunking off for a couple of hours kip in the sick room, and (b) leaving a skip unattended overnight is an invitation for people to do what we're doing."

"Which is?"

"Getting rid of evidence."

"Why's this evidence?"

"It's not, but the rest of the stuff we're going to chuck in the bin tonight is."

"What stuff?"

"Those two large SSA disk enclosures that we talked the Boss into a couple of years back."

"The ones that cost 20 grand."

"Yep, and were never used because they weren't compatible with the adaptors in our machines..."

"Oh. What else?"

"The 200 slot tape library that we bought for cheap which ended up having handling errors about 50 per cent of the time."

"Oh yeah, that was another 40 grand. What else?" the PFY asks, as he heaves his load into the bin.

>crash< >crash< ... >crash< >crash<

"I dunno - but I know there's about three cupboards full of our purchasing mistakes that need to be disposed of on the Q.T."

"But won't people see them when they come to work?"

"No chance - I'm going to cover them with a thick layer of ITIL manuals."

"What ITIL manuals?"

"The ones in the helpdesk area, the Boss' office, **our** office, the consultants' offices, the company library and the IT Library."

>swip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >click<

"But... won't people notice them missing?"

"Of course they will - the same way they'd notice a cold sore is missing."

"You mean they won't say anything?"

"Who'd want a cold sore back?"

"But won't people notice them in the bin?"

"They might, but ITIL manuals are like kryptonite to enthusiasm. If someone sees them in the bin they're not likely to delve any further to see if there's anything good in there."

"Point taken," the PFY says, as I unlock one of our many storage cupboards (personally keyed and marked 'Outflow Waste Pumping Station').

"Bloody heavy," the PFY gasps as between us we heft it to back outside. "Just rest it on that will you?"

>swip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >bip< >click<

"Okay, lets go."

. . .

>CRASH!<

"Who's that?" a voice gasps from the other side of the skip.

Funny who you meet dumping stuff in a skip in the middle of the night. Like the Boss, for instance, with a couple of armloads of recently purchased 'biometric security devices' which have been found to be just as crap as we'd warned him...

... Like the Head of IT a quarter hour after that with some ITIL manuals (bonus!)

...Like the CEO pushing the multifunction 'smart' whiteboard which has only ever been used as a normal whiteboard but has been ruined by non-whiteboard markers and abrasive cleaning pads...

BUSTED!

The ensuing dumping amnesty was a great thing for forging alliances at all levels of the organization and will be spoken about in hushed tones for years like a soccer game in Flanders.

...The rest-stops at the pub while security dumped a load of CCTVs with a non-standard proprietary interface...

...the camaraderie as we formed a human chain to help one of the stores guys dump 97 trolley tires...

...followed shortly thereafter by every man for himself when the Old Bill turned out to investigate a skipful of burning tires...

. . . The next morning . . .

"OKAY, WHO BURNED ALL THE ITIL MANUALS?" the IT Training contractor bloke snarls, seconds after turning up to his empty office shelves.

"It was him," the PFY says, pointing to the Boss.

Ah well, camaraderie's overrated...

BOFH: A tragic accident

Workplace safety just ain't what it used to be

Published Friday 12th October 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 35 It's an exceptionally quiet morning at Mission Control and the PFY and I are killing time by rifling through the director's PA's drawers to see if she left anything good behind when she departed the company.

"Ah... excuse me?" a voice asks haltingly from behind the partition.

"Yep?" the PFY asks, always willing to help out.

"I'm looking for the manager of systems and networks?"

"Ah, well, unfortunately he's gone."

"Do you know when he'll be back?"

"He'll never be back - he's gone," the PFY responds.

"What my assistant is trying to say is that he has left the company following a workplace accident," I add.

"Really? What happened?"

"He unfortunately fell into the path of an oncoming cab."

"What?! When was this?"

"Last Friday lunchtime," the PFY says gazing into the distance thoughtfully. "I remember because it was the deadline he'd given us to install some patches on our system. It didn't happen and he came to the pub to find out why and get us back onto the job. On exiting the pub I observed a cab, black in color, coming down the street and that my manager appeared not to have noticed it. I reached out to grab his jacket just as he tripped into the path of the vehicle."

"Really? Was he ok?"

"A few bumps and bruises, a loss of accurate memory of events preceding the event, but apart from that he's ok – but he's decided to move on."

"I... see," the bloke says slowly. "Perhaps then I could speak with his immediate superior?"

"And there's a funny thing," I say. "The IT director, returning to the office that same afternoon, heard of the boss' misfortune and grasped the wrong end of the stick and presumed that the injury may not have been accidental in nature. He immediately sought me out in the stairwell on the floor above preparing to move a trolleyload of boxes of old lineflow paper. As he entered the

stairwell below me I realised that (a) I hadn't needed to bring the paper up to that floor to dispose of it in the first place and (b) the lift would be a better way to get it to the basement. In executing a 180 degree turn one of the boxes of paper slipped from the top of the trolley and fell onto the director."

"Oh. How about your helpdesk supervisor?"

"Again, a workplace tragedy. He'd asked us to ensure that all our calls were passed through the helpdesk system so that they could be logged in his database - and in order to do this had our DDI numbers redirected by a telco contractor without our knowledge. My assistant here went to speak to him about how we could facilitate the return of the DDI numbers and accidentally knocked a desk lamp into the fish tank at the exact moment that he happened to be cleaning it..."

"Someone – anyone - FROM the helpdesk?"

"Gone also - but nothing to do with us. They're all on sick leave after ordering a dodgy pizza from the place across town that has a web ordering service and free delivery. Apparently there was some glitch in the webform which resulted in the words 'powdered glass' being entered into the freeform text box under 'additional toppings'. Ordinarily this would have not been a problem as they don't have this stuff on hand in the store except that the exceptionally customer-focused delivery person stopped off on the way and added it."

"That's terrible!"

"I know," the PFY says. "That someone with the dedication to go the extra mile for the customer is treated so shabbily. As luck would have it though, once we heard of his availability we were able to offer him a position in our helpdesk starting next week. And wouldn't you know it – he's just finished a degree in IT!"

"I... see. So is there anyone I can talk to? Your security consultant?"

"Cycling accident."

"Business analysts?"

"They got trapped in a lift over a bank holiday weekend with no water supply. Not pretty, as I'm sure you can imagine. Of course they're both nuttier than monkey crap now and have an extended stay in the dribbling academy..."

...a few minutes later...

"So there's no one?"

"Just us," the PFY says.

Sigh. "Okay, well I'm here to audit the IT portion of your business process for the company's annual business stability rating."

"Which means?"

"Well I'll just need to verify that you're following best practice in change controls, security management, access control, logging, and suchlike. So I'll need to see all supporting documents so that I can check them for completeness."

"Oh right," the PFY gasps cheerfully, having noted my surreptitious nod. "We keep them in a fireproof safe."

"Excellent – if you could just show me to them..."

"Sure, sure, they're upstairs – on the roof."

"The roof?!"

"Yeah they wanted to bolt the safe to some structural element of the building and the only accessible pieces are where the roof meets the outside walls of the building..."

...Two minutes later...

"There's been a terrible accident!" the PFY gasps, staggering into Mission Control.

"Yes, I thought there might be..." I say, kicking the auditor's briefcase under the PFY's desk to join the others we've collected over the years.

BOFH: The bastard wants to know

Are you faking it?

Published Friday 19th October 2007 11:02 GMT

BOFH Poll IT is a complex business and let's face it, hard to keep up with. At some stage in your career you're going to pass the point of no return where the next technological leap means as much to you as human rights to a defence contractor. But have you passed this point already? Are you just pretending to be the IT expert that you once were????

1. A security consultant produces a comprehensive report on the serious vulnerabilities they've found in your company's network. You:

- ☐ A. Take one look at the report, realise that this is serious and get some experts in
- ☐ B. Take one look at the report realise it's probably serious and get the experts in
- ☐ C. Take one look at how thick the report is and get the experts in
- ☐ D. Take one look at the report and push it into the shredder

2. A vendor is explaining the finer points of the new hardware their company has produced. You find yourself:

- ☐ A. Getting excited by the potential of these new features
- ☐ B. Getting excited by the prospect of getting some new hardware
- ☐ C. Getting excited by the prospect of the free clothing that comes with the hardware
- ☐ D. Getting excited by the prospect of the muffins they brought with them

3. You're signing off on the receipt of equipment that you ordered a few months back. The receipting document lists 24 individual pieces of kit which make up the three servers and disk array that you ordered. You would:

- ☐ A. Identify and check off each piece of kit as you sight it
- ☐ B. Get someone else to do A
- ☐ C. Identify that the kit looks like the stuff that the vendor has on their web page

☐ D. Take one look and push the document into the shredder

4. You get a form asking you for an indicative operational budget for the coming five years, incorporating maintenance, depreciation, software licensing and associated consultancy costs per year. You would:

☐ A. Push the document into the shredder

☐ B. Push the document into the shredder

☐ C. Push the document into the shredder

☐ D. Push the document into the shredder

5. There's a server outage and you're called in to see what you can do. On opening the lid you discover that the internals are as foreign to you as geography to GWB. You would:

☐ A. Consult the manual

☐ B. Consult the manual and phone the help line

☐ C. Phone the help line

☐ D. Give it a couple of slaps on the side and say it's probably a loose wire. Then get someone to phone the help line.

6. With new languages coming out daily you find it increasingly hard to keep up. In fact, the last thing you remember programming successfully was:

☐ A. A PHP script

☐ B. A Visual C application

☐ C. A VB script

☐ D. A VCR, by waiting up till the program started and pressing record

7. A colleague is explaining some memory management problem they believe to be the cause of a software fault. While they're explaining it you:

☐ A. Have a mental picture of the memory contents

☐ B. Draw a picture of the memory contents

☐ C. Write down a list of memory update

☐ D. Write down a list of groceries that you need to get

8. Corporate have requested an entirely new application to be run up for a new initiative. In order to purchase the hardware you would:

☐ A. Fire up a test installation, compare it with the prerequisite lists then verify it's functionality and scalability

☐ B. Get a contractor to do A

☐ C. Look at the application recommendations and just use those

☐ D. Shove the request in the shredder and fall back to (B) when they get back to you in a couple of months

9. Looking back over the comments you've made to project proposals in the last six months you find your most common response is:

☐ A. No problems, should take a couple of days

☐ B. No problems, should take a couple of weeks

☐ C. Can you give me a little more information?


☐ D. Does anyone know when the shredder will be fixed?

10. You're at a meeting to discuss the merits of a huge upgrade when you realise that everyone is looking to you for your opinion. Given that you haven't read the documentation you'd:

☐ A. Ask for a couple of minutes to review your notes and skim the documentation to gain an opinion

☐ B. Ask for a couple of minutes to review your notes and look to the executive overview for an opinion

☐ C. Ask for a couple of minutes to review your notes and skim the documents for any glaring anomalies

 D. Ask for a couple of minutes to review your documents, then fake a seizure. Then get the shredder fixed.



The bastard wants to know - are you faking it?

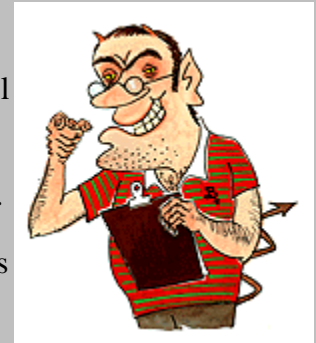
How did you do?

Mostly A's: You've not reached your use-by date yet - but the day will come...

Mostly B's: You know you're on borrowed time, but are still operational.

Mostly C's: On the thin line between knowing and not knowing, now's the time to be getting yourself a lucrative consultancy position.

Mostly D's: Welcome to the real world. TAKE THE BLUE PILL! TAKE THE BLUE PILL!!!



BOFH: A foray into HR

It takes six pints to really know a guy

Published Friday 26th October 2007 11:02 GMT

Episode 36 "It's a somewhat unique situation," the HR droid says to the PFY and me as we meet in the IT director's office. "You see we've never replaced an entire department at one time and as such we need to be sure that due diligence takes place."

"Due diligence?" the PFY asks.

"Well yes. From a company standpoint we want to ensure that the successful candidates – especially at senior IT management level – are fully aware of the needs of the company and are of a correct caliber, which is where I come in. We also have to balance that against the technical knowledge that would be appropriate for a person at that level in the IT department – which is where you come in."

"Right," the PFY says, mentally preparing a paraphrase. "So you do the red tape and we make sure they can at least spell IT."

"I... yes, I suppose so."

"Okay," I say. "So where do we start."

"Well, last week I took a look at the shortlisted candidates that you supplied and weeded out the shortlist into a choice of two candidates – with the exception of the helpdesk positions which are..."

"Cannon fodder?" the PFY suggests.

"WHICH ARE PRETTY MUCH THE SAME, so I have six candidates for four positions."

"Right," I say. "So where do we START?"

"Oh I see. Yes. Well, we have interviews for the rest of the day with the first candidates arriving in about 20 minutes. I thought it best we adopt a top down approach, director first, managers next, analysts and helpdesk to finish."

"Sounds ok to me – Where are we interviewing?"

"We'll be interviewing each candidate in the interview room on the fourth floor, although the candidates will be held down at reception until we're ready for them – in case any interview runs overtime. Prior to that though I'll need to see your interview questions to ensure that they're both appropriate and consistent."

"Good idea," the PFY smarms. "So how about we gather our stuff and meet you upstairs in five."

"Okay then."

No sooner has the HR droid left than the PFY is in the lift admin utility, silenced the alarm call buttons, disabled the phone and is waiting patiently to flip the lift into disabled mode.

>Click< "And we're on," the PFY says. "I've sent him to halfway between B1 and B2 and turned the lights out. Faze two!"

A quick call to reception to advise them of the new interview location and faze two is complete.

...Seventeen minutes later...

"Send the first candidate over," I blurt into my cell phone.

...One minute later...

"I must say, your interview procedure is somewhat... informal," the prospective IT director burbles as he carries several pints over to the table.

"Yeah, well, it's a CEO thing," the PFY responds. "His view is that you don't really *know* someone till after they've had six pints - and you do realize that we only have 30 minutes for this interview though, so you'd better get cracking!"

...Six pints later...

"...bastids!" our first candidate slurs.

"And senior management?" the PFY asks.

"Seenya bastids!"

"User groups?"

"Farkem!"

"Well that's pretty much all my questions," the PFY says. "Simon?"

"Okay, my question is more of a hypothetical," I say. "You enter a room and witness one of your technical persons shoving a roll of carpet out the window into a skip bin. You realize that the auditor that you'd just seen entering the room is nowhere to be seen. What would you do?"

"Isss jus an auditr?"

"Yes."

"Hoogivesacrap?"

"IS THE CORRECT ANSWER! WELCOME TO THE TEAM! And now that you're on the team I guess you'll want to sit in on the rest of the interviews?"

"Yup."

"Okay, well you get the pints in and I'll ring for the next one – manager of systems and networks."

Seven interviews later and I've spotted the slight flaw in our plan in that the first questions we should have asked of our new director were "Are you a violent maniac after you've had a few pints?" and "Did you know that punching someone in the face for using the words 'total cost of ownership' is not technically an approved interview technique – funny though it may be?"

"Methinks we made a slight error in judgment," I say, nodding at the director who's getting some more pints in at the bar.

"Two slight errors in judgment," the PFY says, directing my gaze to the HR droid across the road, steaming towards us with an unhappy expression on his face. "He must have tripped the fire alarm with his lighter."

"What's that then?" the director asks returning with three pints of real ale.

"We told the HR bloke that we'd appointed you but he says the deal's off because he didn't rubber stamp the appointment," the PFY says, thinking quickly and pointing at the HR bloke. "He said that if he wasn't involved in the negotiation it would affect the total cost of..."

>SLAM!<

"Well," the PFY says smugly. "I think that should take care of both our immediate problems..."

>Screech!< >thud<

"Nope, only one," I say, pointing out the window. "In his haste to give the HR bloke a good kicking he's stepped out in front of a cab."

"Didn't the last guy do that?"

"Dangerous business this IT stuff..."

BOFH: Budget cuts

But how will we buy beer?

Published Friday 2nd November 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 37 Things are dire in Mission Control. Our plans for company IT domination have backfired on us like a baked bean vindaloo with a boiled cabbage chaser followed by a double helping of pickled onion ice-cream. And 10 pints of fizzy lager...

"So you're saying that we have no operating budget?" I ask.

"None," the head Beancounter nods.

"Nothing at all?" the PFY asks.

"None," the head Beancounter repeats. "And even if you had a budget, which you don't, you couldn't spend it, because there's no one to sign off the expenditure."

"So **I** can't sign off the expenditure?" I ask.

"No."

"And **he** can't sign off the expenditure?" I ask, pointing at the PFY.

"Even if he **had** signing authority, he couldn't because he's your junior."

"So by extension if **he** proposed something **I** could approve it?"

"Only if you had a budget, which you don't," the Beancounter says smugly.

"So we've no money at all?"

"Unless there's some in your wallet?"

"Twenty quid," the PFY says. "But that's for my rail card."

"Then you're out of cash."

"But what do we buy consumables with?" I gasp.

"You mean beer?"

"I mean consumables!" I respond.

"Consumables from the Blue Posts?"

"Blue Posts IT Warehouse, yes."

"And not the Blue Posts pub, across the road?"

"Is that what it's called?" the PFY asks, faking surprise badly.

"Yes," the Head Bean counter responds drily.

"I think you'll find we're buying our consumables from a completely different Blue Posts," I proffer. "The Blue Posts IT Warehouse."

"The same IT Warehouse with the beer coasters all over your office?" he asks.

"You mean mouse pads," I suggest.

"Beer coasters."

"No mouse pads. For laptops!" I say, holding one up. "See, they're just the right size for those tiny mice."

"Or a pint of lager"

"You know I never thought of that, but I think a pint might actually fit on this mouse pad quite snugly..."

"**NO** budget!" he repeats.

...

"It's just unreasonable," the PFY sniffs later after the beancounters have departed. "What are we supposed to live on?"

"You mean how can we afford lager if it's to come from our own pockets now that there's no one left in IT to graft from?"

"Yeah."

"Well I hesitate to say it, but perhaps we can generate income ourselves?"

"You mean sell our servers?"

"No?"

"Blackmail?"

"Nope, done that."

"Theft from petty cash?"

"I was aiming a little higher than that..."

"You mean thermal lancing the beancounter's safe open and stealing some of the blank cheque printing stock!"

"Uh... No. No, I'm suggesting doing what anyone with a mercenary outlook would do when faced with a lack of revenue. Besides, a thermal lance is bound to be noticed by security - even if it doesn't cook the contents of the safe."

"So what are you proposing?"

"Product placement."

"Product placement?"

"Yes, as you know I document our daily intercourse (ooooh err vicar) for the vicarious amusement of others..."

"Uh... yes"

"And those people might be prone to... uh... subliminal suggestion..."

"I suppose so."

"And we could potentially obtain money by suggesting things to them..."

"Uhhhhh... You mean sell out?"

"Precisely!"

"You'd sell your self respect for the price of a few beers?"

"Several beers, but yes. Or alternatively you could dip into your own pocket in future..."

"I see now that it's a complex issue," the PFY nods, standing beside the shiny new Cisco networking equipment we recently ordered because of its reliability and value for money. It's bloody great.

"Yes," I say, tapping away on my recently installed Microsoft Windows Vista installation (which I must say is a complete pleasure to use and does half my work for me to such an extent that I'm seriously considering buying two and retiring to the Bahamas).

"But what about if we're called upon to promote something which looks to be all glitz and glamour but is actually the lowest form of proprietary consumerist crap?" the PFY asks, while looking a number up on his iPhone.

"In the event of that happening," I say, dropping the aforementioned item into the bin. "We just scratch Apple off our potential list of sponsors."

"And wasn't it you calling a certain network hardware vendor a bunch of cheapskates for not even supplying kit with a standard 12 month warranty on purchase."

"I suppose it was," I sigh, scratching another name off my list. "But it's ok - we'll still have enough cash for drinks so long as you don't say anything derogatory about M..."

"This Vista is crap isn't it?" the PFY interrupts, moments before a 17 inch monitor hits him in the head...

...A lovely 17 inch Philips monitor, with outstanding clarity and screen resolution. In fact, it's probably still working perfectly after its test flight, that's how good it probably is...

BOFH: Workplace accidents = 0

It's been 10 days since... uh oh...

Published Friday 16th November 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 38 "Excellent," the new Boss burbles as the PFY updates the 'days since last workplace accident' sign (put there since the last IT decimation). "Ten days since the last accident."

"I think you'll find that's a binary number," the PFY says.

"Still... 10 days," the Boss counters to much rolling of eyes.

"And that's only because we don't count disappearances as accidents," I add.

"Or people who don't work here."

"Or disappearances of people who don't work here."

"So what are you keeping track of this for – if that's not a silly question?"

"Oh, that's not a silly question!" I say. "A silly question is, 'Why don't the MP3 files I email myself from home turn up in my inbox?'"

"Or, 'Why aren't you adhering to the purchasing policy for blank media which insists on buying the cheapest CDs money can buy?'" the PFY adds.

"Or, 'Why's my desk on fire?'"

"So that sign doesn't take into account people that don't work here?"

"Correct," the PFY says. "Otherwise we'd have to take into account everyone who tripped on the pavement outside, entered the building by mistake thinking it was the pub across the road (after several drinks), etc."

"Not to mention Inland Revenue people," I add.

"True," the PFY says.

"Hmmm?" the Boss asks.

"Inland Revenue people – they disappear on or around the premises on occasion. It's like the Bermuda Triangle for them around here."

"And they're disappearing because... you're evading your taxes?" the Boss gasps, putting two and two together and coming up with 22.

"Of course not!" the PFY blurts. "I don't pay taxes!"

"Of course you do!"

"No he doesn't," I say. "My assistant is contracted to the company out of an exceptionally tiny contracting agency at an overseas location with very lenient tax laws. Not only that, he managed to rent accommodation in the embassies of a couple of African nations who will be exceedingly wealthy if the price of dirt ever follows the oil trend. Meantime, however, my assistant is their non-UK-tax-resident paying-guest."

"I... And what about you?" the Boss asks, looking to me.

"As a registered charity I'm not really required to pay that much tax either – so no financial nightmares waiting for me in the closet either."

"A registered charity?"

"Don't ask," the PFY cautions, not wanting to hear once more the heartrending tales of women who've crossed the line to depravity..."

"So, if it's not you two... then who's getting rid of all the Revenue people?"

"No one knows," the PFY says. "We've had one of their cars in the basement for a couple of years now and there's a whole stack of briefcases in security's offices."

"And no one's tried to contact Revenue about it?"

"I think it's a case of not wanting to draw attention to yourself," the PFY says. "Almost all the security staff are moonlighting other jobs, half senior management have some undisclosed 'consultancy' role somewhere that keeps them in holidays, and all but one of the cleaning staff are under the table."

"And not just cleaning there," I add for the Boss' benefit.

"So what you're actually saying is that if Inland Revenue were to cast their gaze over the company..."

"...The prison sentences would look like a Terry Waite package holiday..."

"Well, from what I've heard about you I'm surprised you've not availed yourself of one of the incentives that Revenue have to offer from time to time," the Boss mumbles thoughtfully. "You could have earnt some kudos - sometimes they even offer cash!"

From the expression on the Boss' face I can see that his thoughts are moving from the theoretical to the practical...

"No, like I said - half the company is trying something on. If one of us/them went down they'd take others down with them and the whole place would go down the gurgler. Instead, however, we'll just sit astride this gravy train and see where it takes us."

"Yes, yes, I suppose you're right – don't want to rock the boat as the new guy." the Boss nods.

...

"I smell a derailment," I say to the PFY. "Time to keep an eye on him."

"Why?" the PFY says. "I'm watertight – and your charity thing seems to have some prima facie semblance of legitimacy."

"Like I said, when one goes down, they'll all go down. Before you know it someone will be questioning your non-resident status and suggesting that I **don't** have the best interest of those stringfellows women at heart. Worse still, I have a sneaky suspicion that this isn't going to be able to wait till he trips into the path of an oncoming taxi..."

"What are we going to do?" the PFY whines, starting to get agitated.

"I don't know!" I snap. "Security is watching us like hawks since the last decimation of IT staff, so I don't want to risk a simple electrocution or stairwell fall. WE NEED A PLAN..."

...Five minutes later...

"I DON'T HAVE A PLAN!!!" the PFY sniffs.

"WE NEED TO THIN..." I say, stopping as the CEO enters Mission Control, and flips the chart from 10 to 00.

"I'm terribly sorry to be the bearer of bad news," he says. "But I'm afraid your manager's had a nasty accident. He was just now telling me about some apparent tax dodginess when he accidentally tripped and wrapped my phone cord around his neck several times. I tried to get to him but must have tripped as well and knocked myself out. Next thing I knew security was reviving me to find that he somehow managed to end up with his head in the fish tank..."

"Terrible business," I say. "Which just goes to show that it's not just cellphones we should be afraid of. You'll be needing some alcohol wipes then?"

"What for?"

"Oh, just to wipe the phone cord and fish tank down with – wouldn't want any of those forensic people catching security's germs off them."

"Yes... Yes... Good point. Uh... give us a couple, I might do my desk and the visitor's chair at the same time."

...

So at least we didn't have to do EVERYTHING ourselves...

BOFH: Spreading the festive cheer

On the first day of Christmas, BOFH gave to me...

Published Friday 23rd November 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 39 "Ahhhhhh," I sigh cheerfully. "Smell that?"

"You mean the whiff of cardboard, seasonal green and red ink and just a hint of glitter?" the PFY responds.

"MMmmmm," I mumble.

"Well, it's Christmas season again, isn't it?" the PFY concurs.

"No... It's Christmas CARD season again," I say. "For the next three weeks we can expect the usual deluge of cards from the vendors we deal with on a day to day basis, the vendors we deal with on an occasional basis, and the vendors who've never dealt with us but wish to do so in the future - all wishing us the very best for the Christmas season."

"And presents," the PFY says happily.

"No, not presents," I correct. "Not this week. Have you not noticed that the places that send us cards early in the season never actually send us presents?"

"I... No, I hadn't."

"Just take a look. If you get a nice looking card - and it's not an invite to a party where the booze and women flow like water from a natural spring - then there's no box of chocolates or fancy lager from them gracing your desk at the end of year. If there's no card though, there's a distinct possibility the vendor's going to courier you a hamper full of Christmas treats to keep you going over the break."

"So if we get cards, we're stuffed?"

"Probably. Instead of sending the Christmas contraband to the people who've done the design, specification, evaluation, and acceptance of vendors proposals, they'll give the cakes, booze, toys, and trinkets to some person in middle management whose sole contribution has been to add a signature to a piece of paper that they didn't understand."

"It doesn't sound fair," the PFY simpers.

"Of course it's not fair!" I snap. "It's never fair. You don't see the Boss trolling through technical specs to ensure that some proposed hardware has sufficient capacity for expansion into the future. The director's not reading reviews of hardware reliability on geek blogs into the small hours! No, they just sign bits of paper in the knowledge that come Christmas time they'll be raking in the cakes. AND IT'S NOT GOOD ENOUGH!"

"Too true," the PFY echoes. "So what do we do about it?"

"What do we do?" I snap. "We take steps, that's what we do!"

"So you've no idea?"

"Of course I have!" I respond. "I've gone through the long list of Bosses, Heads of IT, and now Directors that we've had in the past two years and left strict instructions with the mail room, security, and stores that any Christmas mail or parcels destined for them are to be delivered straight to me."

"Why not do it properly and get the current Boss and IT Directors?" the PFY asks.

"Two reasons," I say. "First, they'll notice the drop off in mail and are almost certain to go to some event where they'll be asked if they received their contraband..."

"And secondly?"

"They're new, keen, and have upset a large number of people in the company. There's every chance they'll get a cake or two which shouldn't be eaten..."

"Mmm?"

"Remember that time the Boss got that beautiful Gateau cake the topping of which was in actual fact a thick layer of grated laxative chocolate?"

"No. When was that?"

"Ten minutes ago."

"Oh, I see," the PFY nods. "But won't he be suspicious if it comes this early?"

"No, I just made up an IT company name and put a card in saying that we're celebrating our relaunch."

"So it's a fair bet he won't be taking the tube home tonight then?"

"Or trusting vendor presents anymore..."

"Oh, so it's about making them not trust the presents they get!" the PFY says, finally clicking on. "What about the Director?"

"Ah! You know those fold up canvas chairs we got from the LTO3 vendor in July?"

"The tripod ones with the aluminum poles?"

"Precisely. The Head of IT received a pair of these which he'll no doubt test drive."

"And he shouldn't?"

"Not without a proctologist on standby anyway. There might be a slight technical hitch with the rivet in the middle."

"Oooh," the PFY gasps. "Hopefully the rivet won't travel too far?"

"It's unreasonable of you to ask me to guarantee that," I say. "But I feel fairly confident that our Christmas fortunes will be looking up after today..."

"So it's a matter of just sitting back and waiting?"

"Or sitting back and screaming," I say, as a cry from the Director's office indicates stage one is complete.

A few minutes later the Boss and the Boss's PA help the Director struggle to the lift...

"So that's stage two sorted," I say wandering back into Mission Control and tapping away on the keyboard."

"Stage two?"

"You didn't notice the corona of chocolate round the Boss' gob?" I ask. "Looks like he's started on that Gateau already."

"And don't tell me - the lift is about to develop a technical fault?"

"Could be... And I bet we've only sent our lift engineer a card this year..."

BOFH: Friday madness

There's only one way to get you through the afternoon

Published Friday 30th November 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 40 It's a Friday afternoon and the clock has stopped. All the clocks have stopped. It's been 2:15pm for the past two hours, I'm sure of it.

"COME OOOOONNN!" the PFY whines.

"It's no use," I say. "The seconds hand is moving but the minutes hand has just stopped!"

"I want the pub," the PFY gasps. "I *NEED* the pub!"

"Me too," I sigh. "What time is it now?"

"Two fifteen."

"IT WAS TWO FIFTEEN LAST TIME I ASKED!" I whine.

"IT WAS PROBABLY TWO FIFTEEN WHEN WE GOT IN THIS MORNING!" the PFY whines back. "Nggaaaaargh!"

I hate Friday afternoons.

"What's up?" the Boss asks, wandering into Mission Control without purpose - which, if I may say so, is just the icing on the bloody cake.

"Nothing," I sigh. "We're just waiting to go home..."

"That's hardly the attitude!" he cries. "What about sorting out something by the end of the day?"

"Something like what?" the PFY asks.

"I don't know... Surely there's something in your helpdesk queue?"

"Help yourself," the PFY says, turning his monitor around.

"What about that one - printing delays?"

"The one that requires us to refresh the print server and all the print drivers because someone in Beancounter-land updated their printer driver and found that their printer had a hitherto unused duplexing function, then, as a public service updated the drivers on all other printers regardless of what type or manufacturer they were?"

"I..."

"Which would involve us having to do a walkaround to each printer which is now uncommunicative to find its exact make and model, then find the drivers, THEN update the print server with them?"

"Surely it's possible?"

"So's giving yourself a circumcision under local, but you don't find many people doing it," the PFY quips. "If we changed things now it'd cause a major printing outage over the weekend which would mean that half the beancounters wouldn't be able to take their work..."

"...Porn," I correct.

"..home with them," the PFY finishes. "Which means we'd be called in several times over the weekend to fix the color printers."

"Okay, so maybe that's not a Friday afternoon job," the Boss says. "What about that?"

"Change the access password for the HR documents webstore," the PFY says. "Nope. If you do that on a Friday afternoon you actually decrease security because half of HR have already gone home - which means that the other half will leave notes on their screen about the password change."

"Okay, what about that?"

"Update the BIOS on a stack of desktop machines in Beancounter central."

"Yeah - that seems simple enough."

"It is - if the reason for the update was anything more compelling than a boot screen image."

"Mmm?"

"They want a BIOS upgrade to fix the utility that lets you put your own picture in the background of the boot screen."

"I... Perhaps that's a bad example.."

"They're all bad examples," the PFY says. "And the day is just dragging on and on."

"I hate Friday afternoons," I add.

"Isn't there a bit of housekeeping you could do - some tidying? Some documentation?"

"Nope."

"What about this?" the Boss asks, picking up some install media off the PFY's desk. "Surely this should go away somewhere"

"Sure," the PFY says, taking it and tossing it in the bin.

"It's the eternal problem," I say to the Boss. "You don't want to start a big job because you won't have any time to complete it and you don't want to start a small job because it's Friday afternoon and you just can't be arsed. Half the company's already gone home and the only reason we're still here is because the offsite tape storage guy is late..."

"One of the outside tables has just come free," the PFY says despondently, gazing out the window to the pub across the road.

"So if you can't do a small job and can't do a large job, are there any medium sized jobs?"

"Nope. There's only really one thing which passes the time when you're bored on a Friday afternoon."

"What's that then?" the Boss asks.

"Multiplayer gaming."

"You're not suggesting you play games on the company time?"

"No, no, I'm suggesting we play games on the company machines, the company network AND the company time," I say, scratching around for my headset...

.. only to find that it's in two pieces after what looks like a run-in with a wheely chair.

"DAMN IT!" I snap. "I knew we shouldn't have shot that albatross!"

"Ay?" the Boss says.

"Nothing," I say. "Who fancies a game of I Spy?"

"Okay then," the PFY says.

"I SPY, WITH MY LITTLE EYE... SOMETHING BEGINNING WITH... C.P"

"C P.." the Boss says looking around. "Two words then. Ceeeeee Peeeeee. Cee... >KZERRT!<"

Well, it passes the time...

BOFH: Xmas party: Get a wriggle on

When the chips are waiting...

Published Friday 7th December 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 41 "Get a jiggle on," I tell the PFY as I clamber into the work vehicle, "or we'll be late."

"Take it easy," the PFY responds calmly. "Stacks of time. The place doesn't even open for another hour."

"Yeah, but it'll take us that long to get there!" I snap.

"I'm sure we'll be ok," the Boss says, clambering into the back seat. "It's not like they're going to drink the place dry before we get there."

"Don't you believe it!" I respond. "Black tie casino evenings with open bars tend to finish quite quickly – especially when half the attendees are on their fifth gin and tonic before the chips are handed out and a vendor is picking up the bar tab."

"Chips?" the boss asks.

"The CASINO evening," the PFY says. "Hence the tux and tie combo."

"Oh, I thought it was just very formal," the boss burbles. "How does it work?"

"You get chips at the door, gamble for a couple of hours, then they'll run an auction of goodies with your winnings."

"And by goodies he means stuff the vendor hasn't been able to shift for the past year or two."

"Like the iPod knockoff with tons more capacity but with a 3.5 inch internal drive."

"Hmmm," the Boss says decisively. "You'd better step on it then."

"Like I said," the PFY counters. "Take it easy. This baby is kitted out like the Bondmobile!"

"Are the guys across the road coming?" I ask.

"Who?" the Boss asks.

"The IT gits from the place across the road – some government outfit. Last year they managed to win big by both cheating and registering stacks of people as attending – so they had stacks of chips. So we need to get in before them!!!"

"It's all taken care of," the PFY says, pointing to a red button on the dash with a small legend underneath it.

"You fitted nitrous oxide to a work vehicle!!" I gasp. "Brilliant!"

Seconds later we're out of the basement car park and barrelling across town

...moments later...

"They're behind us," the PFY says, looking in the rear-view.

"Who?"

"The guys from across the road."

"Where?"

"White van, a couple of cars back, I recognize the driver."

"So it is," I concur. "Lose them?"

"Not a worry," the PFY says, pressing another button on the dash which results in a sudden lowering of the vehicle.

"What was that?" the Boss gasps.

"I've adjusted the shock absorbers to street race specs, changed the computer's fuel injection parameters to peak performance and disabled the redline revs cut-out."

"Uhh... Call me paranoid, but I think they just did that too," I say, noticing a corresponding lurch from the van now immediately behind us.

"Don't panic," the PFY says, pointing to another non-standard button the dash board.

"What does it do?" I ask, noticing no helpful legend.

"It lowers the wheel well under the boot."

"And it's full of waste oil!" I gasp.

"No," the PFY says, hurt. "The boot's full of all hundreds of old install CDs. Once they hit the road..."

"Ah," I reply. "No traction. Well you'd better hit that or the nitrous soon, because they're about to overtake.."

"Just a few more secs," the PFY says, pointing to the dual carriageway ahead "...any moment now... >WHOOOOOOOSSSSSSSSSHHH< >SCREEEEEEEE<"

"THE BASTARDS HAVE GOT NITROS TOO!" I shout over the engine noise as the Boss almost wets himself and the Van behind us looms large in the back window "THEY'RE OVERTAKING!!!! >Crash< NO Hang on!!!"

"GOTTEM!" the PFY says smugly, taking his finger off the nitrous button as the van disappears into the rear-view in a cloud of tire smoke...

"Not exactly," I say. "The CDs passed harmlessly under the middle of their vehicle".

"Then what happened?"

"The spare tire and wheel well didn't..."

"Ah," the PFY says. "Note to self: Lowered suspension affects the wheel well."

Moments later the PFY pulls to a halt around the corner from the venue.

"You can't park here," the Boss snaps. "It's a no parking zone – we'll be towed!"

"I... don't have any cash for the meters."

"Right!" the Boss snaps. "I have - I'll drive."

"How about we meet you inside then?" the PFY suggests.

"Fine!" the boss snaps, getting behind the wheel.

Moments later we're inside grabbing our chips for the evening.

"May as well grab the Boss' chips while we're at it," I suggest, pointing out the Boss' name out to the woman at the desk.

"Sure," the PFY says. "And we should probably pick up the chips for our mates across the road."

"Their company?" the woman asks.

"They're with the Ministry of Defense," the PFY says. "I believe half of their party is... delayed..."

"And the other half?"

"Busy outside detaining a reckless driver with unnecessary force..." the PFY says.

..

"So Mr Bond," I say to the PFY as we watch the Boss being manhandled into an unmarked van outside. "What would you say to an ice cold lager?"

"Hello ice cold lager!!!!" the PFY burbles happily...

BOFH: Balancing the budget...

With an end-of-year purchasing frenzy

Published Friday 14th December 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 42 "Got a bit of work on I see," the Boss says, peering around the large mound of cartons clogging up Mission Control.

"No, no, things are very quiet at the moment."

"So what's all this then?"

"This," I say, tapping on a carton. "is a... laptop, one of a batch of... nine, while this >tap< is a top-of-the-line workstation, one of... twelve. And those >tap< >tap< are ultraclear extra large flat panel monitors with inbuilt speakers and USB hubs."

"And you're going to install them where?"

"Nowhere," I say. "No, this is part of the annual end-of-year purchasing frenzy."

"I'm not sure I understand?"

"Of course you don't, you came from the real world. You see here, at this company, we use the **Government** model for budgeting where if you don't spend all your budget in a year you obviously didn't need it in the first place and so next year's budget is cut. If you overspend your budget the overspend gets taken from next year's budget. If you just spend all your budget in a year then that's obviously a good number and one which should be used for subsequent years."

"I... see... And your point is?"

"EVERY department pinches pennies all year and doesn't replace anything unless they really have to. Come the end of the year they all have money left over which will be taken off them by the beancounters - and worse still, removed from their budget the following year - so they rush to spend it on anything that can be purchased and delivered before the end of the year."

"Yes, but I still don't see how this has anything to do with those boxes."

"Okay, so IF the gear arrives here and gets receipted in this calendar year then the department pays for it in this year's budget - and they meet their budget target."

"Yes..."

"But if the gear is delayed and gets receipted AFTER this calendar year then it comes out of NEXT year's budget, which will be significantly lower than last years - because last year's wasn't all spent."

"You've lost me!"

"Okay, say you have a department budget of 30 grand to spend on office and IT products. You scrimp and save all year so that you've only spent 10k by the end of the year. You order 10 superduper desktops with large screens, etc, to spend the remaining 20k so that the beancounters don't cut next year's office and IT budget to 10k."

"Uh... yes," the Boss says, thinking furiously.

"So IF the gear arrives this year you get 10 flash desktops AND you get an office and IT budget of 30K next year - but if the gear doesn't get receipted until January then the beancounters will have cut your office and IT budget to 10k and you'll have a bill for 20k worth of flash machines to pay for in that calendar year."

"And these boxes haven't been receipted yet?"

"Oh no," the PFY responds. "They're still in delivery."

"Until when?"

"Till about 4:45pm on the last day..."

"...What happens then?"

"Generally, we ring the department up and tell them that only **part** of their order turned up. Like say 5 machines - which they can accept or send back for a refund. Now NO ONE wants a refund because that means they'll get less money next year - so they take the 5 machines. Then, we tell them that to make sure the beancounters are happy we'll SAY we received 10 machines and just fake the inventory system. They get some of their machines and their budget's not cut. Everyone's a winner!"

"And what happens to the other five machines?"

"That's the beautiful thing - we use those to replace our machines!" the PFY says.

"But... don't you have an office and IT budget?"

"Course we do, but we spend most of ours in the first week of January in case there's a budget cut during the year."

"So at the end of the year you have nothing?"

"Nah, by the end of the year we're usually around 20 grand under."

"So you have less money next year?"

"Nah, we just spend the amount we put in our budget for the year."

"But that'll mean that you'll be twenty grand over budget *next* year - which will be cut from the year after's budget!"

"I think you mean forty grand over budget," the PFY says. "Because we overspend by that twenty grand again."

"It's a game we like to play with the Beancounters," I explain. "They try and curtail our spending by cutting our budget, we get machines from other areas and keep spending regardless. "

"But surely they'll catch onto what's happening and ask for some form of audit of machines, where they came from, and what you're doing with your money?"

"Yeah, that does happen," I admit.

"And surely there's some form of penalty or financial oversight to be answered to?"

"Yeah... not so much."

"But aren't they just going to not allocate you a budget at all and just refuse to pay the invoices you've generated?"

"Indeed they do."

"So what happens then?"

"Whose machines do you think are blocking up our office?"

BOFH: The trivia quiz

Test your skill. Place your bets!

Published Friday 21st December 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 43 BOFH: The Trivia Quiz

Yes! It's time for the Bastard Trivia Quiz!

Test your skill! Place your bets!

General Knowledge

1. You're in a maze of twisty little passages, all alike. Where do you go?



A. N



B. S



C. E



D. W



E. To lunch

2. Network utilization figures are reaching an all time high for no apparent reason. This probably means:



A. You may have to look at chunkier routers



B. There may be some network card error



C. There may be some network monitoring error



D. Someone's found the MP3 stash!



E. They're leaving you out of *Unreal Tournament* just because they don't like fighting an invisible, invincible opponent with The Redeemer. The wimps!

3. Complete the series: 5V, 12V, 48V, 96V...

- ☐ A. 127 Volts
- ☐ B. 0 Volts
- ☐ C. 24 Volts
- ☐ D. 1 Amp
- ☐ E. "AGHH AAAGHH! I'll tell you what you want to know!"

4. He who laughs last...

- ☐ A. Laughs loudest
- ☐ B. Laughs longest
- ☐ C. Is a prat
- ☐ D. Annoys the hell out of everyone
- ☐ E. Hasn't seen the cattleprod

5. Which of the following is an industry standard substitute for a SIMM removal tool?

- ☐ A. Nothing - there is no substitute!
- ☐ B. A screwdriver
- ☐ C. A car key
- ☐ D. Some pliers
- ☐ E. Banging on the motherboard with the back of your hand till the chip falls out

6. A CPU can generally be clock chipped to:

- ☐ A. A small fraction above its rated speed

- ☐ B. 10 per cent faster than its rated speed
- ☐ C. 18.5 per cent above its rated speed
- ☐ D. 70 per cent above rated, with a freon cooling and a death wish
- ☐ E. 100 per cent, even more if its not your box

History

Are you an old bastard?

7. >Clunka Clunka Clunka< is the sound you would most associate with:

- ☐ A. The clothes dryer
- ☐ B. A washing machine with an imbalanced load
- ☐ C. A flat tyre on your car
- ☐ D. A tape safe door shutting repeatedly on an annoying user's foot
- ☐ E. An imbalanced DEC RM05 Disk assembly moving around the computer room by itself during a head crash

8. You drop a screwdriver down a ventilation hole in the power supply at the back of a VAX 11/780. You expect:

- ☐ A. A very careful removal process
- ☐ B. A power supply failure
- ☐ C. A nasty >crack< noise
- ☐ D. Power outage to the computer room?
- ☐ E. Looting of the shops in the two adjacent streets after the local transformer trips out

9. The nine-track tape you're using is having problems reading some very important survey data for some critical research - only getting half-way through the tape before failing. You would:

- ☐ A. Clean the read heads, which probably are dirty
- ☐ B. Have the tape sent to a commercial data recovery centre
- ☐ C. A, then reduce the temperature of the computer room, and try to complete the read
- ☐ D. Report the failure to the user
- ☐ E. Just cut and repeatedly paste data from the beginning of the data file until the file's up to size

10. The greatest danger to the RA60 removable hard disk media was:

- ☐ A. Not being locked into the drive spindle tightly
- ☐ B. Not being able to be removed from the drive spindle after use
- ☐ C. Disk damage if the cover lock unlatched itself during use
- ☐ D. Dirty read heads
- ☐ E. A preventative maintenance by the Engineer

11. The correct combination of carefully timed disk seeks on the drives in an RA80 disk drive rack could cause:

- ☐ A. A 'tune' to play
- ☐ B. A small vibration
- ☐ C. A large vibration
- ☐ D. A very large vibration
- ☐ E. The disk rack to run in 'horizontal' mode

12. A user has been looking through the sad remnants of their life and found a large box of several thousand punch cards of their undergraduate work, which they would like you to do something with. A good administrator would:

- ☐ A. Call a computer museum and get them read
- ☐ B. Write a quick program to interface to a scanner and read them
- ☐ C. Give the user the punch card hole code info so they could type them in
- ☐ D. Throw them in the bin and tell the user that they've been demagnetised
- ☐ E. Throw them at the user from a fourth-floor window

Finance

Are you an expensive Bastard?

13. The correct way to put a yearly budget plan together is to:

- ☐ A. Add up the cost of all the expected projects and maintenance for the year to come and put that figure forward
- ☐ B. Use last year's figure and add five per cent
- ☐ C. Use the last year's figure as well as the previous year to discern a trend, and ask for that
- ☐ D. Look at the performance bonus of the board members for an indication of potential
- ☐ E. Multiply last year's budget by two after anonymously sending those photos from the Beancounter's photocopy room after the Christmas bash

14. A vendor tells you the product he's pushing will lower your TCO. This means:

- ☐ A. Your total cost of ownership, taking into account purchase price, maintenance, expected lifetime and possible rental options, will be less
- ☐ B. The TCO will probably not be affected, once you take training, early termination of previous contract and installation fees into account

- ☐ C. He's on commission and things have been lean this year
- ☐ D. He's a lying bastard
- ☐ E. C, D and you can probably screw a few lunches out of him before you say no

15. An annual maintenance contract has come up for renewal and the Vendor takes pains to point out that they have not increased their charges like so many other vendors. This means:

- ☐ A. They're trying to be competitive
- ☐ B. A, and they're looking for extra business
- ☐ C. They've found a subcontractor who will work for shiny beads and offal
- ☐ D. They're scared of going into receivership after that anonymous letter to the tax dept
- ☐ E. A, C, D, and they re-added those three extra pieces of equipment you cancelled maintenance on earlier in the year (due to an "administrative error")

BOFH: Beancounter bashing

And the PFY gets his bonus revenge

Published Friday 28th December 2007 12:02 GMT

Episode 44 "You know what **your** probblim is?" one of the Beancounters slurs, using the ISO certified phrase to indicate that the speaker's had too much to drink "...you're out of touch!"

"Really?" the PFY says, tipping back his drink with one hand while setting his modified cattle prod to 'stir-fry' with the other. "How's that then?"

...

Sometimes I can really get to hate end of year office drinks. Sure, it's a chance to overindulge in company supplied beverages, witness burgeoning office romances (that both parties will be deeply ashamed of in the new year – worse still when the webpage comes out..) and help some jilted office assistant sort through her pocket book for her ex's fax number - but you also have to put up with the crap as well...

Crap like a beancounter telling you exactly what the current market rate of service-level-guaranteed internet is - based on the cost of his ADSL connection at home - and how we're simply paying too much for our connectivity.

"...I mean for **that** money you could put in dozens of ADSL lines - surely that would be cheaper. You could aggregate them like phone lines," the beancounter burbles.

"Oh look!" the PFY gasps. "It's a laminated photo of the locomotive LNER 4468 Mallard!"

"Wher.. >KZERT!<"

...

But a lot of conversations can't be ended as happily. In fact, an hour later it's far worse. Now that the alcohol has had time to affect people's mental processes their darker natures are starting to emerge...

"...which is **why** you can't trust software people!" a cretin from the HR department drools emphatically at me. "The information the software gathers is **passed** from one place to **another** and then a **profile** of you is built up in places that you've never been to and never **heard** of."

"You mean like Leeds?" I ask.

"What? No!"

"Oh, you mean it's like ECHELON?"

"Wa?"

"Echelon - you know, the NSA thing which intercepts phone calls, electronic data, etc, scans them with fuzzy logic for key words or phrases then assigns some weighting as to whether you qualify for an all-expenses-paid holiday of abuse with absolutely no legal recourse in Guantanamo. Codename Democratic Freedom?"

"Huh? I was talking about software vendors!"

"Oh right, sorry. Please, continue..." I sigh.

"They collect information about you with their software then they feed it back to their company."

"Uh-huh," I mumble, looking to see what drinks remain.

"But not just that, they send people to your company to gather information on you."

"Oh you mean Helene and Mike?" I say, pointing across the room.

"Huh?"

"Helene and Mike - over there. Helene's the one by the fax/copier looking through her address book and Mike's the one drinking the alcohol based cleaning products. Apparently last month was a good vintage for window cleaner. Now **they** work for one of our software vendors."

"Have you told them anything?"

"Only where you live, how much you earn, your bank account numbers – nothing important"

"You what?! Don't you know they us.. >KZERT<"

"Don't mention it," the PFY says as he steps over the cretin on his way to freshen up his drink.

I take it back – a lot of conversations **can** be ended happily after all. Things might be looking up.

...

An hour later I find they are when I happen upon the PFY helping his half-cut half zapped beancounter victim make a couple of last minute eBay purchases.

"A Beta video recorder!" he gasps over the beancounter's shoulder. "Give it a couple of years and it'll be worth a fortune on antiques roadshow. Click Buy-it-now - you don't want to be outbid and £100 is a small price to pay! Oooh, and look, the same person is selling an eight track player and some Newtons – collectables if I ever saw them..."

You know, I'd almost feel bad if I hadn't seen the PFY scouring the basement for items to list on eBay this morning...

Wondering what the Boss' idle hands are up to and where the Christmas bonuses are, I make for his office and step past our two vendors as they rifling through drawers for a good vintage of tippex...

"Ah, there you are," the Boss burbles. "Just handing out the bonuses. Last minute thing so you'll have to make do with cash. Apparently someone tried to break into the cheque safe and broke the lock mechanism. You wouldn't know anything about that would you?"

"Me?" I say. "No, no. But thanks for the cash all the same."

"Can you pass on this to your assistant."

"Sure. And if you have a bottle of tippex with a 733 in the serial number, Mike outside would like it."

Striking while the iron is hot, I shoot straight back to where the PFY is, helping his beancounter make some internet banking transactions to secure his eBay purchases.

"Christmas bonus?" the PFY asks.

"None this year, the bastards," I lie. "Apparently they have to buy a new cheque safe..."

"Ah," the PFY says guiltily.

"Still, not to worry. In any case, I thought I'd toddle off, last minute presents to buy and all that..."

"Okay, have a good one," the PFY says.

So now I have to leave the building and calculate the chances of the PFY running into the Boss. Well, the PFY running into the Boss **before** I get out of the building... then feed that into equation about how long it takes to get down three flights of stairs versus three flights in the superfast lifts... Hmmm...

Somewhere between 1 and Ground the lift stops and the lights go out..

"Dark in there isn't it?" the PFY's clipped voice comes through the lift speaker. "Do you want to play a game?"

...

Uh Oh.

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BOFH: Memory short circuit

And my password is... damn it

Published Friday 11th January 2008 13:11 GMT

Episode 1 There must be something in the water. I've got a shocking case of nominal amnesia which I can't shake and the PFY just isn't helping. True, being locked in a lift for several hours (until I'd fed sufficient pound notes through the doors to the PFY) just prior to the holidays didn't help, but I'm never really any good at getting back into the swing of things after time away from the workplace. It's as if the mind just spins down and needs a couple of days of doing something mildly taxing to get one's thoughts back up to speed again...

"What's happening?" the PFY asks in response to the blank expression on my face as I survey the login prompt in front of me.

"Can't remember my password," I sigh, tapping away on desk impatiently.

"**You** can't remember your password?" the Boss asks cheerfully after wandering in unannounced.

"No. In fact, when you've got around 40 10-12 character root passwords to remember you're lucky to remember any of them. Which is why I..."

"Write them down?" the Boss prompts.

"No I encrypt them and store them on my desktop."

"And you can't get into your desktop!" he chortles happily.

"No - because I changed my password yesterday as it had expired. All I can really remember is that it's something that you get hit with?"

"A car?" the PFY says helpfully.

"NO, you get hit with it," I say. "I know I'll remember it soon, but I just can't remember it now. I remember thinking that it was something that I'd never forget."

"Yet still you did," the Boss chuckles.

"What about hard drive?" the PFY suggests.

"No, would be way too simple. Anyway, I remember that the password was long," I say, scanning my memory for further information.

"A Microsoft update via dialup? An Oracle streamlined install?"

"No, No! This isn't helping! I'll have to think of something else. Though... I think it also had something to do with the Boss."

"Management?" the Boss suggests. "Responsibility? Team Player? uh..."

"Git!" the PFY chimes in. "Tosser? ArseBandit? Trainspotter?"

"!" the Boss gasps, wordlessly.

"Oh, you mean **this** Boss?" the PFY gasps, going for the late (and crap) save.

"It was something about... I don't know... the boss... being hit... and... um... electricity... Yes! Definitely something about electricity!"

"Well that certainly narrows it down," the Boss says sarcastically. "But think - how did you come by the password? Can you recreate the process you used?"

"I'm not sure. I was thinking about a new password, and then I was also thinking about something to do with hitting, you, and then electricity - but I can't remember how they all came together."

"Torch," the Boss gasps. "You can hit someone with a torch, it's electric and I own one!"

"In that case we could use **car** as well" the PFY says dryly. "Or vibrator."

"Right!" the Boss snaps decisively. "I..."

"Just jokes," I say calmly. "We're all friends here. Now back to the password..."

"What were you thinking about?" the Boss repeats.

"Give me time," I say calmly. "It'll come to me... I was looking around the office for inspiration..."

"And you saw this," the PFY says, holding up a cattleprod.

"No..."

"And you thought of me?" the Boss asks.

"No ...The door blew open."

"Yes?" the PFY coaxes.

"And it banged into the wall where that big dent is, which reminded me..."

"...OF THE TIME I PUSHED THE DOOR OPEN, BUMPED THE BOSS INTO THE CATTLEPROD YOU WERE TESTING AND HE FELL BACK ONTO THE WALL!" the PFY gasps happily.

"YES!" I cry. "And it was a pass phrase based around that!"

"Accident?" the Boss suggests.

"No... No, I can't get it."

"Try and recreate the sequence of events in your mind's eye," the Boss says, airyfairily. "Does that help?"

"Ummmmmm... Nope."

"Maybe it's tactile? What about if you hold the cattleprod in your hands?" the PFY says.

...

"No, nothing. It's too distracting having you both shout suggestions at me. I'm sure it'll come to me if I just have a few moments to myself to think..."

"Ok, I'll go get a coffee - so you're not distracted..." the PFY says.

"Okay," the boss says. "And I'll be quiet." "Quiet as a mouse. I'll just stand over here out of the wa-"

>Click< >BUMP< >KZERT!< >CRASH!<

"That was it, H1l4r3us!" I say, as I step over the Boss and tap away on my keyboard.

"You're welcome," the PFY says, helping the Boss extract himself from the wallboard.

"And I'm in!" I gasp happily at the Boss. "You know I think that whole recreation idea of yours was a winner."

"Now you can help me with my password," the PFY says. "It was something to do with a spade, a sack of quick lime and a roll of carpet in the work van..."

BOFH: Defusing the enthusiast

We don't *need* Linux's best-kept secret

Published Friday 18th January 2008 12:02 GMT

Episode 2 Isn't it always the way that at the beginning of the year, when your enthusiasm for work is at an ebb, that the Boss decides it's a good time to get someone in to talk about some piece of software that you just don't want to use?

And isn't it also always the case that when you get someone in to talk to you they're not only an expert in the product but also (sadly) a complete enthusiast who would quite happily adopt the software's illegitimate babies and raise them as their own in a silicon paradise - if only they had a chance?

And even worse than that, when you get the enthusiast in they've had hours and hours to think about the long and involved ways to tell you about how they optimized the application so as to get a teensy weensy bit more performance out of it by converting the raw code into processor-specific code by removing all the #IFDEFs and maintaining an ever-increasing number of branches of the same code?

And they can still remember (and will recount to you in excruciating detail) EXACTLY what they were doing the MOMENT they heard that version 2.7 of the software was released...

...and be slightly offended when your response is "Probably drinking at the pub".

And the problem with enthusiasts is that they simply cannot understand how it is that you don't want to sell all your worldly possessions and come join their roving band of software improvers and make the world a better place... This is made worse when they appear to be the only expert in the country and are desperate to get someone else enthused so as to form a pressure group for the adoption of the application...

...

So it is that the Boss has lined someone up to tell us all about how we're going to install an application which will link our websites, calendars, email, financials, HR, etc, etc to one clearly understandable homogenous mass with some new software that has just been released into the Open Source world.

Moreover, the Boss is not at all impressed at our protestations about the robustness of the software development and release lifecycle of this project which, from the look of the webpage, consists of someone saying "I've got a good idea!!!"

And so it is that a conference room is booked, audio visual gear is installed, biscuits purchased and a server machine configured to the exacting requirements of our expert.

Of course the true horror is revealed when we discover that the required OS is such an obscure version of Linux that it probably only has one contributor (to match the Google result when we go looking for it). The install notes describe the branch as "Linux's best-kept secret" - and once the PFY and I finally work our way through the convoluted install process we agree to keep it that way.

And of course no enthusiast is ever going to use the release version of any prerequisite software when there's a beta version that's been available for at least a day, so the PFY and I waste another couple of hours trying to nurse the install script to life under the new version.

Several emails later we have the system up and running and let our expert know that he can come in and do his demo any time...

...which is when the Boss tells us that he's sold the idea to senior management and that once the explanation and three-day tutorial is over we'll start running up the software in the company...

"Did he say **three** days?" the PFY asks, gnawing on a knuckle. "I thought you said it'd be half a day tops if we agreed with everything he said, didn't ask questions and erased the server as soon as he'd left the building."

"I admit I made a slight miscalculation on the amount of **our** time that might be made available to him, but I'm sure that as software experts with a history of successful open source installs in the past we can lock him in the basement until the whole idea blows over."

"Ah yes," the PFY says. "In fact, I think that's where we installed the server."

"B2, over in the far corner room."

"The electrical plant room with the dodgy light and even dodgier bus-bar cover?" the PFY asks.

"The very same."

. . . One day later . . .

"Where the hell is he?" the Boss asks. "He was supposed to be here two hours ago! I bought biscuits."

"I shouldn't worry, I'm sure he'll be here eventually," the PFY says, just as the lights dim slightly.

"Then again, perhaps we should flag the whole thing?" I add as the basement smoke alarm beacon illuminates on our building monitor.

"But what will I say to senior management?"

"Just tell them you're doing an analysis of needs and that you'll need each of them to fill in a quick 20-page questionnaire... no one will ever mention it again."

"I... OK then. But I'm keeping the biscuits."

"What biscuits?"

Sigh.

BOFH: What GPS is for

For having fun with the Boss, of course!

Published Saturday 26th January 2008 09:02 GMT

Episode 3 The good thing about sales reps is that they're never too busy to come on site and explain a couple of their products to you if there's a potential sale in it. Better still when the IT consumables company replaces the grizzled veteran of "over a million 8 inch floppies sold" with Susan, a lovely young woman with a pleasant nature and the drinking habits of a CAMRA founding member...

So I'm ordering my second gross of cleaning tapes over a couple of quiet pints at the pub when the Boss trundles in with a sneaky expression on his face to interrupt my important work-related chatting up...

"Uhh... where's your offsider at the moment?" the Boss asks.

"Who?" I ask whilst giving the thumbs up to a third carton of cleaning tapes (which will probably be sufficient to see the company through to the next millennium).

"Your assistant."

"Oh him. He's probably still offsite doing those VPN client installs you asked for."

"How far's he got?"

"No idea," I say. "But at about 20 minutes a time plus half an hour travel he's probably almost done by now."

"So you don't know exactly?" he asks - attempting to make some sort of point. "What if you needed him to help you with something?"

"I'd ring him on his mobile," I suggest.

"What if he's had an accident?" the Boss asks.

"Then he's not going to be any help to me is he?"

"The point I'm trying to make is he should have a GPS on him – or at least the company vehicle should."

"You mean a *GPS tracker*," I say.

"They're... not the same thing?"

"One is used to help you find where you are, the other's used to find where something else - like a company car – is."

"Oh, well I suppose in that case we should just have GPS units then."

"But what if the PFY's had an accident?" I ask.

"Like you say - he'd be no help," the Boss says, moving on. "So when can you get a GPS unit - a portable one?"

"We can do you one of those," Susan chips in, downing her pint of cider and flipping over a couple of pages. "A couple of hundred quid'll get you this one which has an SD card slot and a downloadable range of nav voices - from Spock to Billy Graham."

"I'll take it!" the Boss gasps. "Simon'll fix you up with a purchase order..."

...

"What was that about?" the PFY asks, once the Boss has trundled off.

"No idea," I said. "He set a speed record in changing from caring about your welfare to not giving a rat's..."

"It'll be Geocaching," Susan responds helpfully.

"Geocaching?"

"Yeah, it was mentioned in one of those Management rags a couple of weeks back. It's all the rage as middle managers from all over the place are ordering top-of-the-line GPS units as IT gear. I've sold out of all the top line models already."

"But why's the Boss spending my budget on toys?"

"It's happening all over the place. The rag has their own geocaching page where employers can leave clues and coordinates for readers to pick up hints on job prospects – the theory being that if you're good enough to solve the clues you might be a good prospect for employment."

"And this is popular?" the PFY asks.

"Oh yeah!" Susan responds. "We lost one of our people to a company just down the road! They just gave the salary, the GPS coordinates and a simple substitution code clue!"

"And he was gone?"

"Yep. He found the place in his lunch hour and was gone."

"Curiouser and curiouser..." the PFY says thoughtfully. "You wouldn't know the name of the website would you?"

...

A few days later the Boss returns from lunch nursing a black eye, a bloody nose and a broken GPS, so we know the dream's over...

"What happened?" I ask feigning concern.

"I... tripped," he says. "But I really need to organize a new GPS as the screen on this one's broken and I have something I need to look up."

"Staring at the screen when you should have been watching where you were going?" the PFY asks, pulling a replacement unit out of his drawer.

"Something like that," the Boss says, leaving the broken GPS and wandering off with its replacement.

"Great stuff this Geocaching," the PFY says, pulling yet another unit out of his drawer. "You find the coordinates of some local night-shift working nutcase, post them - along with some clues that only the Boss could figure out - to the website then pay some kids to ring the nutcase's doorbell every half hour or so for the next few days before running off... bloody fantastic!"

That's technology for you - we're always finding new uses for it!

BOFH: Carbon neutrality

This is what we think of carbon credits...

Published Friday 1st February 2008 12:02 GMT

Episode 4 "What're they for?" the PFY asks as the Boss rolls in a trolley load of brightly colored plastic bins.

"They're for our recycling initiative," the Boss responds. "Red for plastic, white for paper, yellow for cardboard and blue for polystyrene."

"What about glass?" the PFY asks.

"Glass is to be sorted by color into bins in the basement," the Boss replies.

"Hmmm... And what's driving this initiative?" I ask.

"The... company has decided to become carbon neutral by the year 2010 - and so they're moving to implement recycling prior to the announcement being made in the press."

"Carbon neutral in three years?" the PFY says dubiously.

"Yes. Obviously it will take longer for the whole company to convert to this but in the meantime we're planning to implement recycling, energy saving measures and implement the purchasing of carbon credits."

"Carbon credits!" I sneer, unable to suppress the derision in my voice.

"What's wrong with carbon credits?" the Boss gasps.

"Carbon credits are like putting a humidifier in a room then putting a dehumidifier in as well to offset the effects," the PFY offers.

"Only with carbon credits they're in different rooms," I add. "Or maybe it's a bit like putting your heater on in one room of the house and turning the aircon on at the other."

"I'm not sure I understand what you're saying."

"Okay," I say. "Carbon credits are a bit like beating someone up on this side of the world and sponsoring one of those poor starving kids on the other side of the world to make up for the fact that you're a complete shit at home."

"Only people think you're great because you're cancelling out a bad deed with a good one."

"Instead of not committing the bad deed in the first place," I add.

"It's like dropping a crap in someone's desk drawer and offsetting it by cleani..." the PFY starts.

"I think he gets the picture," I interrupt. "So what energy saving initiatives are we looking at?"

"Low power lighting, grey water harvesting and green computing, obviously."

"Green computing - you mean iMacs?" the PFY asks.

"I think he means computing hardware which supports hibernation, processor cycle reduction and suspension and virtualization," I mumble.

"Oh right, NancyBoy boxes."

"Exactly!"

"I..." the Boss burbles.

"So we'll end up with machines which'll slow themselves down at weird and inconvenient times and lose processing power while they ramp up in response to need?"

"No, I'm sure the bloke said you can tune them to only reduce to a certain point and to speed up recovery time. And with virtualization you can tune them to consolidate virtual servers onto the least number of machines and shut the rest down till they're needed."

"Still sounds like Nancy-Boy boxes," I concur.

"?"

"A REAL computer has ONE speed and the only powersaving it permits is when you pull the power leads out of the back!" I blurt. "In fact, a REAL computer would have a hole in the front to push trees into and an exhaust pipe out the back for the black smoke to come out of."

"AND," the PFY adds. "they run so hot - even on screensaver - that they keep the room nice and toasty when you're not there - saves on heating."

"All that is a thing of the past though," the boss burbles. "The bloke was telling me that using mobile processor technology the..."

"What bloke?" I ask.

"The... um..."

"Mmm?" the PFY says.

"Bloke... from... uh..."

"..."

"...the... green consultancy..."

"So you and the IT Director talk to some yoghurt-eating fruitcake in a hemp suit and sandals and the next thing we know you're planning to replace our high power server environment with a poor imitation of it?"

"I think you'll find it's the way of the future," a voice from the doorway says.

"Ah, Simon, Steven," the Boss says. "This is... uh... Jeremy from the Power Green consultancy. He's been contracted to the company for a couple of months to help us reduce our carbon footprint."

"Hi," Jeremy bubbles. "Nice to meet you."

"And what is it you do Jeremy?"

"Well, in a nutshell I analyze plant and power usage, server capacity utilization and desktop usage and feed those numbers all into a sophisticated package which makes recommendations on what hardware to purchase in the short term to improve a company's ITCF."

"ITCF?"

"IT Carbon footprint."

"Ah right, so what you're saying is you'll gather some numbers and dictate what server equipment we buy this year."

"Well... essentially, yes," Jeremy says.

... Two hours later...

"OK," the PFY says as we leave the building via the service entrance. "All we have to do to be nastiness neutral is to find a couple of people bound and gagged in a skip bin, take them out, give them a couple of wallets, unkick them a few times, unelectrocute them with a cattle prod and say 'clothing hippy on discount percent seventy look oh'."

"On the other side of the world," I add.

"Should we stop for a quick lager first?"

"Be rude not to..."

BOFH: The Silence of the Servers

The servers are quiet for now, Clarice

Published Friday 15th February 2008 12:02 GMT

Episode 5 "Ah the long, dark reaches of intrigue!" I say faux-casually in the dark, scaring the Boss half to death.

"What the hell are you doing here?" he cries when he's collected himself, no doubt readjusting his underpants in response to the recent extra loading.

"It's a computer room, I belong here," I say, getting up from the chair I've been sitting in - strategically placed behind the swing of the server room door. "Which is more than I can say for you."

"I... was just stopping in on the way home to make sure everything is ship-shape," he snaps, reaching for the light switch.

"No, don't touch that!" I say as the server room door quietly >click<s closed. "Because if you're really here to check on things then it's best done in the dark..."

"In the dark?" he blurts nervously.

"Yes, in the dark," I reply calmly. "Look at the racks around you, what do you see?"

"Machines."

"Look closer agent Starling, what do you see?"

"I uh... servers?"

"Clo-ser..."

"Lights."

"Indeed. And what do these lights mean?"

"Pardon?"

"What do they mean? Each lamp has a purpose... Of each particular lamp ask: what is it in itself? What is its nature?"

"I... That the server's on?"

"No. That is incidental. What is the first and principal thing each lamp does? What needs does it serve by lighting?"

"I... That everything's ok?"

"NO! A lamp indicates STATUS. And STATUS is what we're interested in. And what do the lamps tell you?"

"That everything's ok?"

"Do they? Is that what they're telling you?"

"I..."

"Because they tell me a completely different story."

"What?"

"Hmm?"

"What... story... do they tell you?" the Boss asks uneasily.

"That orange lamp over there tells me the story of a server with a faulty power supply. That flashing red lamp over there tells me of a degraded RAID array. And those two flickering orange lamps over there tell me a server has two dodgy power supplies that it's switching between. And all these stories are part of one larger story."

"What?"

"Hmm?"

"What's the larger story?"

"**THE** larger story."

"What's the larger story."

"You mean the **name** of the larger story?"

"I... yes, if you like."

"The name of the larger story is... The Silence of the Servers."

"The Silence of the Servers?!"

"Yes. It's an interesting story that I'm sure you'll like, involving a mid level manager, and electrical engineer and the deferment of the refurbishment of an UPS for financial reasons."

"I... don't know what you mean."

"You're sure?"

"Positive..."

"Ok, once upon a time there was a technical person - me, for instance - who put the replacement of UPS batteries and refurbishment of the electronics onto his business plan - as a cheaper option than replacing the UPS outright. And in this story let's say that this technical person's *manager* would rather spend the money on something else - new computers with touch screen monitors for a call-centre - for instance."

"Those machines were in last year's budget! We'd committed to buying them when we replaced the call centre software!"

"As I say, this is just a story. So say, for instance the UPS wasn't refurbished and the batteries not replaced. Say the manager concerned didn't want to tell his technical person that this wasn't going to happen for financial reasons - for his own personal safety reasons. Say he got an electrical engineer to *pretend* to do some technical work and battery replacements but instead jumper the UPS input and output while taking off a small supply to power the lamps on the panel to *look* like it was still working normally..."

"I... don't know what you're talking about."

"Of course you don't. Because this is just a story. But say when this electrical engineer crept back in the wee small hours to do the internal bypass and panel rewire he didn't realize that the moment he disconnected the UPS internals he'd also be disconnecting the power to the SNMP agent inside the UPS that talks to our paging system..."

"Oh..." the Boss.

"And say, instead of jumpering input and output through a smoothing circuit he just connected all our expensive servers to dirty raw mains - dirty raw mains fed from the same board as the lift motor as it happens, a huge inductive load, I might add, introducing power factor changes, surges, back EMF, etc..."

"I..."

"And say in the story that the technical person mentions to his manager that there could be a power problem. If the manager were innocent of wrongdoing he'd call the electrical engineer to check the UPS and if not he'd sneak back in the middle of the night to make sure that the lights on the UPS were still working properly so that no one would find out his dirty little financial secret."

"Uh..."

"But anyway," I say, flicking the lights on. "The backstory is irrelevant, its how the story ends that's important."

"How it ends?"

"Yes, say the story ends with a complete UPS replacement, then it's a happy ending. If it ends in lies and denial, well..."

"You know I think we might have budget for a UPS replacement," the Boss burbles.

"Excellent, I'll let the PFY know," I say, reaching for the cellphone.

"Really? Where is he?"

"He's in the basement carpark doing to your car what the engineer did to our UPS."

"I... but I thought you said it was a happy ending."

"Perhaps you should think of this more as a Roald Dahl happy ending then. Maybe that would help..."

BOFH: Insecurity complex

Been there, done that, got the bullet holes

Published Friday 22nd February 2008 12:02 GMT

Episode 6 It's Mission Control late one morning and we're giving the Boss a damn good listening to...

"...and I've been talking to Jim from P.R and he says that we can probably do a little better on our machine maintenance because when he was working in a former company he managed to get a 48 per cent reduction in price by presenting vendors with competitive quotes from an alternate service agent."

"Yeeees," I say. "While it is true that reduction in costs is a definite possibility, when looking at such a large reduction in costs we have to bear in mind a few salient points."

"Which are?" the Boss asks, listening attentively.

"Firstly, Jim was probably talking about reduction in the costs of the machinery he was in charge of in his former role – which was, in this case, probably photocopiers and automatic staplers..."

"And second?"

"In computing one vendor is unlikely to be able to economically source the spares of another, and..."

"And..?"

"And Jim couldn't tell the truth if you paid him to."

"Weeeellll, I think that's a little harsh," the Boss says, shaking his head in a sign of mild disbelief.

"It's true!" the PFY gasps. "And he knows bloody EVERYTHING! If your server reboots because a chunk of memory has crapped itself, he'll be telling you how it'll be a seating fault, how memory seating is an art unto itself and that he learnt how to seat memory properly from Michael Dell himself."

"At Michael's home, over a few beers," I add. "Because that's the other thing about Jim. Whatever you do, he's done something better!"

"Three times better," the PFY chips in. "For instance, say you said you had an exciting drive into work this morning."

"Jim would say that was nothing," I comment, "as he used to Rally drive."

"In 'Nam," the PFY adds.

"For the V.C.," I offer.

"In a car with a jet engine."

"Powered by a fuel he created from his own urine," I finish.

"So you're suggesting..." the Boss asks

"He's a bullshit artist, yes," the PFY concludes. "And one topic that he believes he qualifies for 'world authority status' on is computing."

"It can't be that bad," the Boss says. "He'll just be a user with more experience than most."

"Less experience than most is probably more accurate," I reply. "But that doesn't stop him from professing his expertise to anyone who listens. But don't take our word for it, bring up a topic, any topic at all. Religion, say!"

"Because he met the Pope," the PFY says.

"And the Dali Lama."

"Sadly he missed out on meeting Mohammed, but he has read all the books and went on a spiritual quest to find the source of the prophet's teachings."

"Before he was made a grand potato of the Kabbalah."

"And he's not one to let complete ignorance of a topic stop him from having an opinion."

"Oh..." the Boss says worriedly.

"What?"

"Well, I thought you might appreciate the input... I invited him up."

"PREMO!" the PFY snaps dryly.

Moments later Jim arrives and proceeds to tell us how the viewing window in our door is a security risk.

"It's bullet-proof glass an inch thick!" the PFY lies.

"I know, but it's still a security risk. Because of ricochets," Jim snaps back.

"Good point," the boss blathers, picking up a pen and paper and making a note.

"Anything else?" the PFY asks.

"The door to your computer room has wire-strengthened glass."

"Yes?"

"It's not bullet-proof though," Jim says smugly.

"Yes - we wanted to avoid the ricochet risk," the PFY chirps sarcastically. "Anything more?"

"Is that an open riser?" he asks, pointing through the viewing window on the computer room door.

"Indeed," the PFY says, leading us into the computer room and to the riser door. "But as you can see, it's behind two secure doors and has this >clank< steel bar to stop people entering, this steel tray >bonga< >bonga< to stop people falling if they do enter and this video camera..."

"To let you know if someone enters the riser," Jim finishes.

"No, that's just so we can send something into those 'most hilarious deaths' TV shows. We've had some close calls..."

"You've had some close calls!" Jim gasps. "I was working on an oil rig in the north sea one time and the drill crane pulley broke and so I had to climb the boom and..."

>clank< >bonga< >Crash< >crash< >crash< >clunk< >thud<

"Do you want to say it or should we?" the PFY says. "Still plenty of room down there..."

"I... uh... t-t-there's been a terrible accident??"

"BINGO!"

BOFH: Vampires!

And robots. We're being replaced by robots

Published Friday 29th February 2008 12:02 GMT

Episode 7 Today's going to be a bad day, I can tell. Not because of the evil machinations of the managing classes, nor the heat seeking stupidity of our users, nor even the Machiavellian plans of our suppliers...

No, today is going to be bad because the PFY has had insomnia for the past week or so. His game playing marathons have upset his body clock so badly that it has no idea of what time it is anywhere.

Ordinarily, your average garden variety geek - like me, or possibly you for that matter - would cure a bout of insomnia with the hard reset of several *more* days of non stop game playing and vast amounts of lager. When done properly this leads to a coma-like 12 hour sleep marathon sprawled over the keyboard dribbling like a retard. When done improperly it's much the same thing except it's on a Circle Line tube carriage for half of London to see...

Sadly, however, in this case the PFY decided to fight fire with fire and deprive himself of ANY sleep to teach his body a damn good lesson.

...which has lead to the paranoia and the PFY's most recent assertion - that the Boss is planning to replace us with robots. This in turn has lead to the PFY tailing the Boss around the building

"Exiting at level three," the PFY says quietly into his phone. "Going into... the library!"

Damn it! Now I know I'm going to have to go up and take a look - what with the PFY's unnatural fear of librarians and all (which I won't go into in any detail - for your own sanity). Normally the PFY'd shrug this fear off. However, in his current state of mind there's no telling what'll happen if I don't intervene.

It wouldn't be so bad if our library actually HAD a librarian instead of just a large room full of books that noone goes into. Sigh.

Resigned to my fate, I trudge upstairs to meet the PFY.

"He went in there," the PFY whispers, pointing.

"Into the library..."

"Ssh!" the PFY says. "They might hear you!"

"Who might?"

"The librarians."

"We don't HAVE librarians."

"Yes, but one might have got the daylight savings hours wrong and be using our library as a safe harbour till night-time!"

"Yeah," I say, rolling my eyes, knowing what's coming.

"I'm telling you, they're vampires!"

"Of course they are," I sigh, bracing myself for the inevitable diatribe.

"LOOK! The pasty white skin - they **never** go out in the sun! The heavily diffused lighting which gives them a reason for not having a shadow. There's NEVER a mirror in a library... AM I THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SEE IT?"

"Quite possibly," I say, realising that the only way through this exercise is to push the PFY through his retinue of proofs till we're out the other side. "But they're hardly offensive are they - they're very quiet."

"YES! QUIET!" he gasps. "They always seem to be able to creep up behind you, yet you turn around and they're gone. And they love the high ceilings!"

"You mean like the ceilings you get in most big libraries?"

"YES! And pipe work - have you ever noticed the pipework they always have on those high ceilings."

"The sprinkler pipes," I sigh. "The ones you'd expect to see in a room full of... paper."

"Oh that's just what they WANT you to think. But at night - they hang from them!"

"Yes, good point. Tell me, did you happen to knock back a couple of flagons of cider on the way to work this morning?"

"What? I... - it's made of apples, it's good for you!"

So the situation is worse than I thought – but I must forge on.

"So tell me," I say, preparing for the final assault. "Surely if they were vampires they'd be found out? Wouldn't their husbands or wives notice?"

"Ah-HAH!" the PFY snaps. "You'd THINK that wouldn't you - but they're only allowed to nest with their own kind!"

"So librarians can only marry other librarians?"

"Pretty much," the PFY nods sagely. "Have you ever met a librarian that wasn't married to another librarian - or someone who behaves like a librarian."

"Yes," I nod. "And their children?"

"Their **spawn** you mean," the PFY gasps. "The undead. SP-900 sunblock - but it doesn't fool anyone."

"I beg to differ," I say, seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. "Surely the same thing could be said about a lot of IT people - pasty white skin, live inside mostly, don't use mirrors. We have pipework in the Computer room too..."

"I..."

"And a lot of geeks pair up with other geeks..." I say gently.

"Ah... I... Really?"

"Really." I say, as the Boss emerges from the library, book in hand.

"So there's nothing to be worried about?"

"Nothing at all," I say.

"And him?" the PFY asks as the Boss walks by, attempting in vain to hide the title of the book he's carrying. "*A case study in automation of computing infrastructure.*"

"Oh he's a vampire," I say, handing the PFY a broom handle.

Who am I to stand in the way of God's work?

BOFH: The secret gentlemen's club

Never say never again

Published Friday 7th March 2008 12:02 GMT

Episode 8 It's mid afternoon and the PFY and I are sneaking around the building in pursuit of the IT director because he's acting funny...

[READER: DEGAUSS NOW FOR FLASHBACK REALISM!]

...10 minutes ago...

"Right, so you just want this signed then?" the director asks, scribbling blindly at the bottom of the page. "Okay, now if you'll just excuse me..."

"Thanks," I say, realising he wasn't the least bit interested in what he was signing. "Oh! and I just remembered that we needed to get a batch of LTO4 tapes."

"Uh-huh, well I'm sure you can bring that to me later."

"No hang on, I can fill the P/O out now," I say, grabbing a blank purchase order from a tray on the desk.

"Tell you want - how about I sign it and you just fill it in at your office?"

"Sure."

>scratchy< >**DASH**<

[READER: DEGAUSS AGAIN!]

...Present day...

Now, I'm not one to check a gift horse for cavities, but after an IT director signs what's effectively a blank cheque without batting an eyelid the PFY and I want to know what's up...

"Entering the boardroom," the PFY chirps over the walky-talky.

"So he's in there?" I say, when I get there moments later.

"Yep."

"Who else went in there?"

"No one."

"Hear anything?"

"Nothing," the PFY says, opening the door...

...to an empty room ...

"He's gone!"

"Are you SURE you saw him go in here?" I ask.

"Positive!"

"So there must be some other way out..." I say, checking the carpet for... "THERE!"

"Where?"

"There - see there's a wear pattern in the carpet which ends there. There's a door there. And that - that's not a blanking plate, that's a prox reader!"

"Wow!" the PFY says, holding his card up to the reader. "Nothing!"

"I'll try mine," I say... Nothing. "Wait a minute, what about if I try..."

>bip< >bip< >hummmm<

"What card was that?" the PFY asks as we step into a small alcove. The door humms closed behind us and a fan above us whirrs into life. "This is like a bloody airlock!"

"Indeed," I agree. "The card was a diagnostic one that happened to fall from the wallet of our alarm and lock installer."

"Just happened to 'fall' did it?" the PFY asks sarcastically as another door hums open in front of us. "Bloody hell!"

I concur with the PFY as we enter a well-lit office-sized white room with a couple of armchairs, a small table and a selection of today's newspapers. At the other side of the room, another door with a red light glowing above it.

"This is like a Bond movie!" the PFY gasps "What's behind the door, do you think?"

"Let's find out shall we?" I say, trying the handle. "Locked - and no prox reader. But wait, if I slide the card between the lock and the back of the door frame..." >click<

"Oh," the PFY says, disappointedly as we enter the next - smaller - room and the door >clack

"Yes, a bit of a disappointment," I admit as we find the room contains only a small handbasin and a cupboard with a selection of men's toiletries. "You know, I think this might be a..."

>FLUSH!<

"...executive toilet," the PFY finishes disappointedly. "I thought they only had these in B-grade sitcoms."

!!!

>click<

"What the hell are you doing in here!?" the director snaps as the door >clack

"I could ask you the same thing!" I say.

"I have a KEY for this room," he responds, waving a card at me. "Given to me by the CEO himself. It's a huge honor to get access to this room - half the board don't even know it exists!"

"And how'd you come to get one?"

"I... helped the CEO with a sensitive matter."

"Not the sensitive matter that the PFY and I were working on a couple of weeks back - recovering the images from a digital camera card?" I ask.

"I..."

"So TECHNICALLY it should be us using this and not you?" the PFY asks.

"Oh you'd never get access to this place, it's worse than a gentlemen's club," he responds. "There's rules! Put one foot wrong and you're out! But if you're in, the world's your oyster - you're fast-tracked for success!"

"I see," the PFY says. "So how do we get out?"

"What do you mean?"

"We seem to be locked in."

"You shouldn't be in here in the first place - it's all computer controlled. You've probably upset it. But I'll just try >Gush< >Whirrr< >Click< There!"

"Ah," the PFY says as we exit to the large room. "You have to wash your hands before the door opens."

"Yes," the director says, pointing at the exit. "But **that** door's supposed to open at the same time."

"So we **are** locked in?" the PFY says, looking at the ceiling. "I could trip the fire alarm, which'll probably open the doors."

"**NO!**" the director blurts. "If there's any upset - however small - they'll find out from the card that I've been in here and I'll be blackballed."

"Let's think of this logically," I say. "The place isn't on the normal access network and has some form of door control logic. I'm guessing that the controller is local to this room, so scan the place for an access panel..."

"Found it!" the PFY says seconds later after moving an armchair. "Let's have a look then... Ah, the door logic's based around a PIC! Those are the input lines, those are the outputs and they're the power transistors."

"But can you open the door without raising an alarm?"

"Yeah - if you give me some time - but all this talk of toilets and everything, I'm bursting!"

"Use the toilet!"

"I can't, **THAT** door's locked!"

"I... use.. the basin then," the Director says. "But you must **NEVER** tell anyone!"

"Ok."

>click< >clack<

Two minutes later...

>click< >clack<

"So you're ok then?" the director snaps hurriedly.

"Yeah.. but uh... do any of you have any paper?"

"Oh, he's passed out!" I blurt. "Skip the donkey work, power the controller down and it'll probably fail open."

>prod< >click< >clack< >whirr< >hum< >hum<

Out not a moment too soon either, as the CEO skulks past us towards the boardroom..

[READER: DEGAUSS FOR FADE OUT]

BOFH: On the brink

Every time a bell rings an SCO disk gets its wings

Published Friday 14th March 2008 11:58 GMT

Episode 9 “You don’t have to do this,” I say calmly to the PFY as the wind and rain washes and whistles around us on the roof of the building.

“I do!” the PFY says. “I have to!”

“You don’t – it’s not... necessary” I say.

“It IS!” the PFY counters urgently. “I must!”

“Let’s just think about this clearly,” I say, speaking quietly so the PFY has to lean back from the edge of the building to hear me.

“I have,” the PFY whimpers. “I have thought about it carefully. It’s the only way!”

“It’s not the only way,” I proffer. “There’s other ways. It doesn’t have to be the end.”

“It MUST!” the PFY shouts. “I can’t go on like this!”

“You just have to be strong,” I say, trying to reason with him now.

“I’m not strong,” the PFY sighs. “I can’t do it!”

“Of course you can,” I say, reaching out my hand towards him in a gesture of understanding. “Now... hand over the SCO install disks.”

“I CAN’T!” the PFY squeals. “I can’t bear the thought of installing it again. It was bad enough when I didn’t know better, but now it’s just too horrible.”

“Think of the children!” I gasp, as the PFY’s hand again moves over the edge.

“What bloody children?”

“The children on the streets below. What if a child found those CDs? They might take it home, boot their machine off them and think that sort of thing is... normal, good even.”

“No!” the PFY gasps. “Not even a child is that stupid!”

“But you can’t be sure, can you?” I say. “It might happen. Just hand the disks over and it’ll all be ok.”

“How do I know I can trust you?” the PFY whimpers again.

“Because I’m a professional,” I say “Because we’ve worked together for years. Because we have mutual respect. And because there’s a SWAT guy climbing up the ledge behind you.”

“Wha..” the PFY says as I quickly slip the cattleprod onto his neck...

. . . Three days later in a room that doesn’t officially exist . . .

“Well, it’s the real thing,” says a white-coated bloke carrying a CD Caddy with a large lock on it. “The full SCO install media with all the maintenance packs probably has a street value of... next to nothing.”

“So it’s the latest version then?” I say.

“Oh yes. What I can’t understand is how he managed to get his hands on it - I mean in this country we have very strict import legislation which is supposed to cover indecent, objectionable and just plain crap material.”

“Careful – you’ll affect the Spice Girls comeback with talk like that!” I caution. “Has my assistant come round yet?”

“Oh yes, he’s up and about,” labcoat says, pressing a button which turns the wall into a viewing window of the PFY wandering blearily around a white room. “We initially had him under sedation, but once we realized he’d actually booted off the media we thought it prudent to induce an artificial coma for a couple of days.”

“You made him read the Richard Stallman story?”

“Yeah – though he only got as far as the foreword.”

“Really?” I say “I can only remember the dedication.”

“I know - most people do. They say the typesetter was on adrenalin and speed for his own safety. After the first three deaths leastways.”

“So he’s free to go?” I say, pointing at the PFY.

“Sure,” labcoat says, pressing a button to open the back door in the PFY’s room which now exits onto a Soho side street. “He’ll find his own way home but will have no memory of the last few days - he’ll think he’s been out on a vendor-bender.”

“And what do I tell his girlfriend?”

“Just tell her you think he caught a 72-hour virus,” labcoat says. “And that he needs to be kept on a diet of meat, veg and *Blackadder* reruns.”

“And he’ll be ok?”

“Hopefully. Most people make a full recovery though some have relapses – he’s certainly not the worst we’ve seen. We had one guy in here who’d accidentally bought the full OS2 Warp install

media on eBay thinking it was a *Star Trek* movie. Now he was hard work because it was both crap and ancient. We made him read Stallman four times before he was able to be released.”

“Ah, D...” another labcoat says walking in. “Speaking of that Warp install media, you haven’t seen it have you?”

“No, why, when did you last have it?”

“Uh... Not sure. I know I had it in my pocket when we brought that last guy around...”

. . .

I could go on about Tranquilizer guns in Soho but the D-Notices are fairly specific...

BOFH: Impatience

The PFY goes nuclear

Published Friday 21st March 2008 14:18 GMT

Episode 10 "You're not listening to me!" the Boss snaps.

"Hmm?"

"You're not listening to me!"

"Course I am," I say distractedly.

"What did I say then?"

"The users are unhappy."

"I... What about?" the Boss asks, temporarily foiled by my Geller-like guesswork.

"Some user thing or the other – their stupidity, the computer doing what they told it to do, or.. their stupidity."

"No, I was saying that we need... *blahblahblatherblahblah...* **you're not listening to me!**"

"Hmm?"

"You're not listening to me!"

"Course I am," I say distractedly.

"What did I say then?"

"You said I wasn't listening to you."

"Before that."

"I... Actually, do you know, I've completely forgotten!" I gasp.

"I was saying that we n... *blahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh* **this is ridiculous, you're still not listening!**"

"It's a fair cop guv!" I admit, before the recursion of our conversation overflows his stack and he brownloads himself.

"Why aren't you listening?"

"I..." I say, trying to think something up but getting distracted. What the hell, I decide to play the truth card... "I'm watching the IT Director and the PFY."

"What about them?" the Boss says, peering over to where the Director and PFY are standing.

"As you can see, the PFY is playing a quiet game of Spider."

"Yes, it's his lunch hour, I'm sure no one would begrudge him that."

"Yes, but he only ever plays Spider to calm down after something *really* annoys him."

"*Really* annoys him?"

"Yes, you know, like when someone asks you to rebuild an entire directory tree from three month old backups, which you do – taking hours - only to find out they only actually needed one tiny text file from the whole thing and they'd found a copy of it on a USB key 10 minutes after asking for the recovery. But they didn't think it was worth telling you that at the time..."

"I see."

"And *that's* happened twice to the PFY this week," I add. "So now, if you watch very closely you'll see the IT Director is helping the PFY with his card placement..."

"Yes?"

"Which is something that really **really** annoys my offsider."

"I... see."

"How's your nuclear physics?" I ask.

"What?"

"Nuclear physics," I repeat. "You see, the theory of relativity says $E=MC^2$ which means that because the speed of light is so incredibly fast even a very tiny mass can produce a huge amount of energy."

"I... see."

"And this energy is generally expected to be released at the splitting/destruction of atoms."

"If you say so..."

"And most atomic bombs use the result of the destruction of atoms to trigger the destruction of more atoms which in turn trigger the destruction of a much more atoms, and so on and so on - all in an incredibly short time."

"Yes?"

"And they generally start this chain reaction by bringing one or more pieces of dangerously fissile material into foolishly close proximity?"

"Mmm."

"...By making one of piece of radioactive material show the other piece that the ten should go on the Jack and the Jack onto the Queen."

"I..." the Boss says, penny dropping. "Are you sure we shouldn't stop this?"

"I would," I say, trying to casually slip my fingers into my ears without the Boss noticing. "But the outcome of a reaction like this tends to be somewhat... unfocussed... and one doesn't want to be too near to the fissile material when it eve..."

...seconds later...

"What the hell just happened?!" the Boss gasps, picking himself up off the floor and looking over to observe the PFY calmly playing cards acapella. "And are your ears ringing?"

"What happened when?" I ask.

"That bang?"

"You mean the bang, almost like a sonic boom, as air rushes to fill a human being like space now that the human being has ceased to exist?"

"No, a bang like a scream, a door opening and slamming, another door opening and slamming in the distance – maybe the cleaners room – then another scream, a door slamming in the distance, a door opening and slamming close to us, and.. the squeak of a wheely chair. Only all happening in what seemed like a fraction of a second."

Damn, he's *good*! Unfortunately...

"The cleaner's cupboard you say?" I ask, giving the Boss a chance to revise his story.

"That's what it sounded like."

"Are you sure?" I ask. "I mean you're... positive?"

"Yes!" "Oh, well, in that case I suppose I'll go and take quick look. In any case I think we should put him out of harm's way so I'm going to suggest my assistant plays minesweeper or something instead. You just stay over this side of the office, just in case."

Moments later, after pretending to check the cleaner's cupboard, I'm on the way back to Mission control and musing at the special uncharted realm of physics that underpins computer games everywhere. The Boss might even be interested in hearing about things like the compression of time that makes a four-hour gaming session seem like 10 minutes, the gravitation-like pull of minesweeper which can draw a person in from acro... or did I forget to mention that?

>EeeSLAMslameeslamSLAMsqueak<

Ooops.

BOFH: Fun with automatic doors

If it can recognise the Boss...

Published Friday 28th March 2008 12:13 GMT

Episode 11 "Really, I thought they'd be right up your alley!" the Boss sniffs disappointedly.

"They're just sliding doors!" I comment.

"Yes, but they're *intelligent* sliding doors – they've got scanners and a computer interface and everything!"

"That's as may be, but they're not *secure* doors."

"Yes they are, they use face recognition for access control."

"Yes, but they're not secure."

"You could make them secure - you could program it to be secure!"

"No, You can't program them to weigh about three times as much as they do now, have etched smash-proof glass and pry-proof mountings. They're just lightweight access doors designed to be used as a first line of defense – to be backed up by security personnel."

"I see."

"I mean were these doors even purchased with server room access in mind?"

"I..."

"So you admit they weren't? You put your hand up for something that was going free, didn't you?"

"They weren't exactly free - we had to pay security the purchase price when it was decided that they shouldn't go on the front of the building."

"Why."

"Uhhhhmmmm, I think Security had some concerns about the door's... robustness."

"I rest my case!"

"Perhaps you could put them somewhere more useful – like controlling entry to the cafeteria?" the PFY suggests.

"Why?"

"I dunno, prevent people coming back for seconds, stopping outsiders like our engineers snaffling all the onion Bhajis – maybe controlling access to the bar?"

"Actually," the Boss says, thinking about it a bit. "That might actually be a good idea! I'll put it to the catering staff."

...Moments later when the Boss has departed...

"You've been rather quiet on all this?" I ask the PFY.

"Yes," he responds. "I've been reading through the installation guide. Micro thin door glass and TV-dinner-grade aluminium extrusions aside these doors are pretty good!"

"In what way?"

"They have an inbuilt processor which isn't too shabby, a face processing offload engine which uses 18 facial regions for recognition from up to 60 degrees from head on **and** they even have expression templates."

"Expression templates?"

"Yeah, you can let the doors make decisions on both on whether the face is known or unknown **and** what sort of mood they're in."

"So you could block someone who has access if they look irate?" I say, starting to like this idea a bit.

"Oh that's just the tip of the iceberg! You can create door profiles with operational settings for a particular person in a particular mood."

"Really?"

"Oh yes," the PFY blathers. "Any one of the configuration settings can be matched to a profile - opening/closing speed, opening/closing distance, opening/closing force, open time, door-held behavior, multiple person acceptance. Say the Boss has just had a crap day - you can make the door open at light speed when he's x meters from the door, slam again at light speed when he's y meters from the door, not open if his wife's with him, you name it, it can be done. **AND** there's hierarchies so that if the door's not opening for the Boss and his wife it **WILL** open for the CEO - and slam shut if the Boss and his wife try and sneak in behind him!"

"So... in the interests of... uh... cafeteria security... we should investigate the full gamut of door control options."

"As an aid to the... analysis of the... facial recognition door controller... genre," the PFY finishes.

"OK then, let's do it!"

...Three days later...

"Have you, uh, got a moment to speak with security about the sliding doors you had installed in the cafeteria?" the Boss asks.

"Sure, what do they want to know?"

"Oh, not a lot, they just want to hear from you about your experiences with the programming of the access control program thing."

"What do they want to know precisely?" the PFY asks helpfully.

"Uuhhhm, just how it works. How to use it."

"So they're thinking of getting some of them for the building then?"

"Not exactly," the Boss responds.

"?"

"They've decided that they do want to remove the doors from the cafeteria - but at least they've reimbursed us for the purchase price."

"Don't tell me, they're not happy with the way they've been programmed?"

"It's not that exactly - although I have heard through the grapevine that they weren't impressed with the daily sweepstake on who'd get a cup of scalding hot coffee down their front when the doors slammed closed as they were about to exit."

"Just a glitch in the facial recognition software," the PFY comments.

"The same glitch that slammed the door repeatedly on the Head Accountant's laptop just before he was due to give his presentation on right-sizing the company?"

"Quite probably," the PFY says. "Tricky business, debugging facial recognition code - it's all in assembler for speed you know. So the door's are to be dumbed down and taken away then?"

"Not exactly."

"?"

"They want them on the front of the building with the hot-coffee thing armed with a button on the desk."

"And you said yes," the PFY says disgustedly.

"I was hanging over the side of the building with a hood over my head at the time!"

"Ah right, good point!" the PFY says, packing the installation guide and his notes into a brown envelope and handing them to the Boss.

. . .

Well, we've had our fun I suppose. Besides, I'm sure the PFY's USB Wi-Fi adapter is still plugged into the controller...

Plenty of time to help security... uh... downsize...

BOFH: The London Underground vending machine conspiracy

No crisps for you

Published Friday 4th April 2008 12:30 GMT

Episode 12 >crash!< >stomp< >stomp< >stomp< >stomp< >clump<

"Nice trip in then?" I ask the PFY as the Boss looks on warily. "Straight through was it, no stopping every ten seconds then?"

"The tube was fine," the PFY snaps back.

"Something else the matter then?" I ask. "Did someone get up on the wrong side of the traffic island?"

"I had a **fine** sleep, thanks."

"So it was after you got up, before you got to work and wasn't anything to do with the tube problems we're trying to perfect before the Olympics?"

"It's that BLOODY VENDING MACHINE again."

"Oooh, is it misbehaving?" I ask, even though I know the answer.

"Yes. I put the coins in, selected the number for salt and vinegar crisps and a bloody Turkish bloody Delight bloody chocolate bar came out!"

"Are you sure you pressed the right number?" I ask – knowing full well that after the PFY's history with this particular machine he's especially careful.

"Course I did. D4. It's always D4. The tab says D4, if you look up the row and column and work your way across it's D4 – IT SHOULD BE D4!"

"But D4 was a Turkish Delight chocolate bar."

"NO, the Turkish Delight chocolate bar is F5 – miles away. Not even a bad keypad matrix should do that!"

"What about," I suggest, "if there's a strip connector in the back which was put on upside down?"

"D and 4 aren't mirror images of F and 7."

"What about if they put it on badly registered?"

"What, both of them?"

"Yes."

"It's not likely – and besides the matrix calculation's all done on the keypad board."

"So the machine's busted then?" the Boss asks, unfortunately.

"Oh, it's not busted," the PFY says, nodding his head slightly in thought. "It knows EXACTLY what it's doing."

"Are you suggesting the machine is somehow sentient?" I ask.

"No," the PFY says, to my internal sigh of relief given his propensity for conspiracy theories. "No, it's the Underground that's doing it."

Bugger.

"They make deals with the consumables companies you see – they get all their expired and almost expired stock and load them into their vending machines. Then, as the expiry date comes closer the probability of you 'miskeying' your choice increases, till it gets to 1. I think they even track the stuff you hate the most and weight that higher – just to annoy you."

"Yes, I suppose it's something to think about," I say, not wanting to argue. "Still, aren't the machines independently operated?"

"So they say. But there's always an Underground person watching on the cameras."

"So it's all a conspiracy run by the Underground."

"Yep," the PFY says, rifling through his drawers and pulling out a set of door keys.

"So why don't you ring the number on the machine and get your money back?"

"A. They never give your money back, and B. The moment is gone – I needed crisps and they robbed me of that."

"Did you give the machine a little shake?" the Boss asks helpfully. "Bang it a couple of times?"

"No, that money's gone," the PFY sulks. "The only thing I can get now is revenge..."

Uh-oh...

"...I'll be in the lab."

...

"What lab?" the Boss asks once the PFY's stormed downstairs. "We don't have a lab."

"No," I agree. "We don't. But we do have a storeroom with all the kit we've not got rid of over the years – which we sometimes dip into on occasion for parts to make useful workplace items."

"So what's he making?"

"It's a large storeroom with several huge decommissioned UPS units, piles of old server gear, photocopiers, a couple of line printers, miscellaneous other building machinery – he could be making *anything* down there.""

"Should we stop him?"

"Yes, good plan. You go down, I'll wait here."

"I... think I'll just see if he calms down a bit," the Boss says, smelling the fear in my tone.

Three hours later the PFY's back, wheeling an all-too-familiar chunk of large luggage.

"Is it in there?" the Boss asks, not knowing whether to expect an atomic bomb or a chemical weapon.

"It is," the PFY says ominously.

"So you're using **my** pinch then?" I enquire.

"It's not a pinch and it's not yours," the PFY snaps back.

"I **made** it."

"You made part of it," the PFY responds.

"Now, now," the Boss says, trying to defuse the situation. "I'm sure you can both claim credit for it – whatever it is."

"A pinch," I say.

"Not a pinch," the PFY argues.

"Okay, so it's just a ginormous momentary effect electromagnet."

"That's what it was – but I've modified it."

"How?" I asked, interested.

"Since you originally made this we've scrapped two UPS units – so I paralleled up the capacitors from them with the existing ones in your device. I also converted your 240v trickle charge to a 415V trickle because the caps are rated at 450V, **and** I changed the direction and speed of the coil triggering."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning it's far more powerful, optimized for discharge and much better focused."

"And you're sure whatever it is safe?"

"Not entirely," the PFY says. "Which is why I tested it in the basement."

"And?" the Boss asks.

"There's a reasonable chance no one parked along the north wall will be driving home tonight."

"And you intend to use this on the vending machine?" I ask, horrified.

"Well if I used a hammer I'd probably have the life expectancy of a Brazilian electrician!"

"And what do you think your chances are if you're caught wheeling a bunch of electronic equipment around after a chunk of your tube station suddenly goes haywire?" I ask.

"I... didn't think of that," the PFY mumbles.

"Of course you didn't!" I snap back. "You just don't think things through. However, were there a history of... power anomalies... in London, people would be far less suspicious."

"What are you suggesting?"

"I'm suggesting that we go and visit one or two of our hardware vendors, then maybe the electronics shop that refused to repair my amplifier under warranty, the bank on the high street that wouldn't extend my overdraft, the..."

"...RESTAURANT THAT CUT UP MY CREDIT CARD LAST YEAR!" the Boss adds.

"Only if we can stop off at the beancounters before we leave," the PFY agrees.

"Course we can!"

Well, it's God's work, isn't it?

BOFH: Lift laughs

Someone's gonna pay for this...

Published Friday 11th April 2008 12:20 GMT

Episode 13 "You HAD to push the button, didn't you?" the PFY snaps angrily at the Boss in the dark of the elevator.

"I only just TOUCHED it!" the Boss snivels. "It's not like I actually PRESSED it!"

"Now, now," I say. "No use crying over fried control panels. We need to take a look at how bad it is before we start getting upset. And bear in mind that they're bound to find out one of the lifts isn't working in a day or two..."

One of the hazards of trying out experimental technology is the inevitable risk that it will somehow backfire on you, and in this case we have a doozy. After a whirlwind tour of the beancounters' floor, a number of underground vending machines, the kebab guy with the radio that's always a bit off-channel and finally the location of a congestion camera via the open deck of a tourist bus, the Boss, PFY and I have set off back for the comfort of mission control safe in the knowledge of a job well done. The only mistake we made in the process was charging the PFY's makeshift pinch up again in case we'd need its services on the way.

"What about the security camera?" the Boss says, pointing at the lift ceiling.

"Good point," the PFY says. "It may have missed the full force of the pinch."

"So we could maybe write a note?" the Boss suggests.

...

"Nothing," the PFY says half an hour later. "I think it's fair to assume that Security has not seen our messages."

"So the camera's broken too then?" the Boss asks.

"It would seem so," I concur.

"And the alarm button doesn't work?"

"If the panel's dead it's all dead."

"MY CELLPHONE!"

"You mean you took yours with you!" the PFY gasps. "After about 30 discharges of this baby I'm surprised the battery didn't explode!"

The boss checks his phone only to find it completely dead.

"So surely security will come to investigate?"

"Yeah, I don't think you really understand how security guards work," the PFY says carefully. "Say they've got 20 images to keep an eye on and one of them suddenly goes blank. That's like giving them the morning off. They're not likely to fix that problem as doing so will cut into their cartoon time."

"Or their 'reading *The Sun* at childishly slow rate' time," the PFY adds.

"So they're not going to come?"

"Not before we're drinking each other's sock-filtered urine, no," I feel obliged to reply. "So how do we get out then?"

"Hmm?" the PFY says.

"Well you two have apparently been trapped in more lifts than anyone in the building. You must have escaped somehow."

"Ah yes, you mean like they do in the movies?" I ask.

"Yes."

"OK, well you know how movies aren't real?"

"?"

"And that 99.99 per cent of lifts have their roof access hatch locked from the outside to prevent people from damaging the lift - or themselves."

"I didn't know that," the Boss sighs.

"No, and I'm betting you also didn't know that OUR access hatches are spot welded shut in any case?"

"Why would someone do that?" the Boss asks.

"I don't know," I say, looking pointedly at the PFY. "Why WOULD someone do that?"

"YOU did it!" the Boss gasps.

"It was a long time ago," the PFY says. "I hadn't thought to change it."

"So we're REALLY stuck here?"

"Possibly – and possibly not. Givvus a hand muscling this door open will you?"

The PFY, Boss and I pry the door open to reveal the slab wall of the lift shaft.

"Bugger," the PFY says. "We might have been able to lever open an outside door and exit that way."

"So..."

"So socks off and watertight containers out!" the PFY replies, trying to add a bit of levity to the situation...

"You can't be serious!"

...Four hours later...

"Where **are** they?" the Boss moans.

"Oh it's early days yet!" the PFY says, getting a comfortable position on the floor.

...Two hours later...

"Are there any pipes we could maybe tap on?" the Boss asks, before going silent under a barrage of withering looks.

"The fire alarm," the PFY says, pointing at the detector above us.

"Electronic," I say. "If only we still used the old mechanical ones. Still, can't hurt to give it a bash!" >CRUNCH<

Less than half an hour later we hear some thumping from above and the clatter of the hatch - which doesn't open, of course. Luckily however, our rescuer tells us he's going to flip the lift over to master then trip the return-to-ground signal – whatever the hell that means.

"Oh thank goodness!" the Boss gasps, mopping away at his brow furiously.

A minute or so later we're safely on the ground floor and a couple of minutes later our rescuer from the fire safety contractors has made his way back to us.

"The hatch is welded shut!" he says. "I've noted it on my report along with the faulty fire sensor."

"I have to say, I'm impressed with the speed of your response," I say.

"What do you mean?" the fire bloke says, acting a bit defensive.

"Half an hour – unheard of!"

"Half an hour?" he replies. "I got the sensor failure call just under seven hours ago, was onsite about four hours ago - but the blokes from security wouldn't let me sort it out at the time."

"Why not?" the PFY asks.

"They said something about operational security but in reality I think they just had a bet running on what would happen in the lift. I've been here before, you see."

"RIGHT!" the PFY says, plugging his luggage into the nearest power socket.

"You didn't happen to leave anything of any value at the security desk did you?"

"Just my laptop."

"You might want to just go and grab that. Quickly!" I say, as the PFY sets out for security with a determined expression on his face...

BOFH: Licensing model

I'd strongly recommend an upgrade to Platinum support

Published Friday 18th April 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 14 So the Boss had sensed a touch of animosity between us and one of our main software vendors after a recent bill and decided to grab the bull by the horns and invite them in to press-the-flesh and explain the new charging model they applied to us - without notice.

Apparently, their reasoning ends up being that the new licensing model is one that's both fair to us and fair to other lower-use sites by applying a model which truly reflects the use their application's being put to, number of concurrent users, CPUs it's running on, the potential benefits to an organization our size, blah, blah, blah.

"Cup of coffee?" the PFY asks, stepping over to the espresso machine once the presentation is over.

"I... don't know," the Rep #1 chuckles. "Are you going to charge me for it?"

"Of course not," the PFY says. "It's on the house!"

"Well in that case, sure."

"Me too," Rep #2 says.

"How would you like it?"

"I... can you make a Café Latte?"

"Sure - I can even make a Mocha if you want."

"A Mocha would be great!"

"Yes, I'll have one as well," Rep #2 says again.

...

"Thanks," #1 says, taking his steaming mug of chocolate infused caffeine and sipping vigorously.

"Ta," #2 adds, following #1's lead and sucking down several steaming mouthfuls.

"Okay, so all up that'll be £47, uhh... 83p" the PFY says, thinking hard.

"Sorry?"

"£47.83"

"What for?"

"Your drinks."

"You said they were free!"

"No, I said the coffee was free, but there's the chocolate to consider, cup licensing, cup hardware maintenance, cup support line subscription."

"What do you mean cup licensing?"

"It's our cup and you're making use of it. Obviously, it will be returned to us, at which time it'll probably need some preventative hardware maintenance."

"You mean you have to wash it?"

"We prefer to think of it as a total maintenance solution aimed at providing the best possible cup experience for the user."

"So what's the support line subscription about then? I hardly think we'd want to be paying that!"

"Cup support line subscription is a compulsory product - you can't elect not to take it."

"So what do we get for the support line subscription?"

"You get the ability to call our support line 24 hours a day."

"And what, you'll give us help if the drink has... made us ill?"

"Possibly - if you ring us during work hours."

"You said it was a 24 hour line!"

"The phone will ring any time of the day or night."

"So we'd have to leave a message then?"

"Leaving messages would require an update to our Gold plan."

"So say I got ill tonight, if I'm on your Gold plan you'd sort me out with a medical attention?"

"We'd sort you out with a doctor's phone number. From the Yellow Pages. On Monday morning."

"So we're not really getting much for Gold support then are we?"

"No, you're right, Platinum is the best option" the PFY responds. "With Gold support we can probably help you with phone numbers, but Platinum support would get you my cellphone number and my firsthand knowledge of the way the coffee was made and what potential

problems might arise - determined from our extensive logs of previous coffee drinkers. We also have an in depth knowledge of the various mocha ingredients - which may have contained traces of nut, I'm not sure."

"Neither of us has a nut allergy," #2 blurts.

"And we welcome coffee clients with a proactive attitude to their own maintenance programs! As I've said, neither the Gold nor Platinum support models are compulsory by any means - because we like to be fair to all our coffee clients, big and small, and try to tailor our coffee support model to truly reflect the use the coffee's being put to, the number of cups the user has a day, the size of the cup and the individual blend choices which each client may desire."

"So what if we choose not to buy your coffee in the first place?"

"As you've already had about a third of the coffee you've pretty much already committed to the coffee experience - what with the restocking fee of £50 and all - and to be brutally frank the cups you're drinking from were washed in a porcelain device not normally associated with food hygiene so I doubt that finishing the cup would have much difference at this stage. I would, however, stress that we would **strongly** recommend your upgrade to the Platinum support model so that we can aid in the 'debugging' exercise should you become violently ill in say... six or seven hours time..."

"You..."

"I know what you're going to say - you like the cut of our licensing gib?"

"No," #1 responds. "I was just wondering what your manager will think about this extortion?"

"Not a lot I shouldn't think", I respond. "Given that the muffins he had at the beginning of your presentation was made in a certain porcelain mixing bowl."

"I had one of those muffins!" #2 gasps.

"Then I would suggest an immediate upgrade to Platinum support line subscription, uptake of our return-to-hospital user support and the additional no-questions-asked trouser replacement option."

"How much?" #2 gasps, feeling the burn and half doubling over.

"Call it an even hundred," the PFY says, grabbing the proffered wallet while it's still touchable. "Or one fifty for a two client pack..." he adds as #1 starts greening up a bit...

BOFH: PFY's mum pays a visit

You can choose your friends...

Published Friday 25th April 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 15 "And this is... uh... where I work >click<" the PFY says, opening the door briefly before closing it again and walking off.

Curious...

Moments later, the PFY is back and the door opens again briefly with a quick, "Ahh, my desk is the one over there. >click<"

Curiouser...

A short time later the door reopens once more and the PFY enters leading an elderly lady into the room.

"Goodness, this is spacious isn't it?" she exclaims. "Although a little bit cluttered don't you think?"

"Yes mum," the PFY says, bowing his head slightly.

"Why do you need such a big space for the two of you?" she asks.

"It's a technical support environment," I proffer, reeling off the excuse that has maintained the highest floor space-to-employee ratio in the building for many years. "And as such we often need room to set up testbench hardware as proof of concept trials - or simply to diagnose tricky computing problems. So... you'd be... my assistant's... older sister?"

"Mother," she responds, not indulging the obvious lie too much.

"Pleased to meet you," I say, offering my hand in welcome – much to the PFY's discomfort. "Here, have a seat – would you like a nice cup of tea?"

"Yes, that would be nice," she replies, easing herself into the PFY's chair. "Milk, one sugar please dear."

"And an espresso for me, thanks," I add, opting for a drink best suited for saliva detection.

A few minutes later the PFY's back with our drinks while I'm stepping the PFY's mum through a tour of the PFY's desktop icons.

"And this file here is a movie about a young woman called Amber who, because of the foibles of the 80s job market, is unable to pay her many bills and has to devise alternative methods to do so."

"Like raffles?"

"Yes, like raffles, cake stalls and suchlike," I say, giving the PFY a couple of moments as the colour returns to his cheeks.

"I've never heard of it," his mum replies.

"No, it was a bit of an... arthouse movie, with a cult following."

"Like Rocky Horror?"

"Not so much."

"Your tea," the PFY interrupts, before I can continue, passing the cup over while "accidentally" standing on the power cord to his monitor.

I grab my coffee and examine it closely for foreign bodies, sniff it for the presence of undiluted industrial cleanser and take a small precautionary sip. Lovely. As I'm taking a larger sip it occurs to me that the PFY's demeanor is that of a completely changed man. Gone is the ruthless technical professional with a penchant for petty larceny and mindless violence and in its place is a... a... nice person?!

Could it be that the PFY's mum is some form of... PFY Kryptonite?

?!

But then I realize that if this were truly the case and the PFY was some form of alternative IT superman, struck down by his proximity to his weakening agent, then surely at this juncture he would encounter his arch-enem...

"Who sent this?!" the Head Beancounter says, storming into Mission Control waving a piece of paper about angrily.

"What's that?" the PFY asks, oozing helpfulness like one of those nice people you see on bank commercials

"One of you sent me this reply to my request for administrative control of the financials server!"

"Really? Do you mind if I have a look at that?" the PFY asks, taking the page "Hmmm. It does seem to be rather inflammatory – and that bit implying that your early family history was an experiment in recursion is particularly unkind – but neither of us would have written such a thing. Are you sure it wasn't one of your own people doing this as some form of bad joke?"

"Are you suggesting that this wasn't your doing?" "It doesn't sound like us," I respond. "And besides – it's been sent from your email address."

"Everyone knows you sent it!" he responds. "And I can prove it! Our consultant has pointed out that the company's SMTP host adds an extra header line of the sending host – THAT address,"

he snaps, pointing to a sticky label on the side of the PFY's machine. "You're for the high jump now."

"I..." the PFY's mum says, the excitement a bit much for her as she swoons back into the PFY's chair – illusions of her offspring shattered. "M... My handbag please."

"Are you alright?" the Head Beancounter asks, handing over the requested item to the PFY's mum as he mentally contemplates his liability for her attack.

"I'll be fine once I get my angina tablets," she says, reaching into her bag and retrieving...

>KZERRRTT!<

"Now THAT's what the doctor ordered!" she says, sitting back up again. "How many times have I told you about leaving paper trails?"

"Yes Mum," the PFY says, downcast.

!

"Tell me," I say, addressing myself to the septuagenarian with the unlicensed stunner. "One thing I've always wanted to know... Is everyone on your home planet a psychopath?"

BOFH: The Boss gets Grandpa Simpson syndrome

So he's an old computer buff, apparently

Published Friday 2nd May 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 16 "...And we used to do pretty much everything from the switches on the front panel – bootstrapping, diagnostics, machine code reprogramming – all on toggle switches!" the Boss bumbles happily "...those were the days!"

"I'm sure they were," the PFY says dryly, rolling his eyes out of the Boss' view.

"Oh, that was just the tip of the iceberg," he continues. "When I first started computing we used to send out cards across London to get processed, but then we bought our own reader connected to a phone line and used it to transmit them over the phone lines with what was the forerunner to modern modems."

"You don't say," the PFY adds.

"Oh yeah! And then we bought our own Burroughs and did the whole thing ourselves, start to finish. We even got our own cards produced for the data entry and replaced our punch card system with mark sense cards – which was a process in itself, but I'll save that story for another day!"

"Oh, don't feel obliged," the PFY says, stifling a whimper.

...Which you can't blame him for. It seems that the Boss has the Grandpa Simpson gene which causes him to recount endless stories with no apparent relevance to what's happening at the moment and which are more stream of unconsciousness recollections than monologues of any value. And today, now that half the IT department is on user-centric service training, the Boss is all ours and has taken us under his wing in an effort to teach us to be more... well, boring.

"Nonsense!" the Boss gasps. "It's my pleasure. You know once we had this machine which had a symmetrical four prong plug in the back of it with a little arrow on it and it turned out that when the arrow was pointing in a vertical direction the machine ran at about two thirds of the speed of what it did when the arrow pointed in the horizontal direction – only no one knew this of course. Anyway, we'd paid for a machine that ran as fast as the vertical position only one day one of the vendor's engineers came and moved the plug from the vertical to the horizontal position for the testing (because they had to test the machine at it's full speed) and forgot to turn it back when he'd finished. Instant upgrade!!! It was only a couple of years later when we had something go wrong that **another** engineer discovered the plug was in the wrong orientation from what we'd paid for and said we'd have to pay for the upgraded ability that we'd been using. Well, that caused a stir, let me tell you!"

"I'm sure it did," the PFY says, picking up a pager from his desk and pressing the test button.

>BEEP< >BEEP<

"Oh!" the PFY continues. "Looks like we've got a server down – I'll have to pop off to sort that out."

"That's ok," the Boss says. "I'll come with you – I haven't told you about the time we were using one of those old acoustic couplers for remote diagnostics and our throughput from 300 baud to around 20! We searched for that problem for weeks before realizing that when we shut the lid on the receiver it was squashing the foam in just the right way to generate a bit of feedback through a channel in the coupler's casing – which of course we didn't know because when the cover was closed you couldn't hear a thing."

"DO TELL!" the PFY snaps, walking into the computer room to fake a server outage with the Boss in tow.

Minutes later I notice an icon turn red on the monitor as the PFY probably presses its power button to 'clear the fault' for the Boss' benefit, with a restart shortly thereafter.

"...and so it turned out that the punch cards had been eaten by weevils," the Boss blathers. "Which explained all the parity errors we were getting!"

"I see," the PFY says before making excuses about the calls of nature.

"I was just telling him about having to reread all our old punch cards," the Boss says, wandering over to my desk.

"Oh yeah, when you were getting data errors and found that insects had eaten holes through them," I say. "I remember you telling me that!"

"Weevils," the Boss says. "But before that we had..."

"An acoustic coupler with feedback, yes, I heard that. And the one about the plug which set the speed on your machine."

"Oh," the Boss says in a hurt tone as the PFY returns. "But I know you've not heard about the time..."

"One of your large disk drives head crashed and the whole floor shook?"

"Oh," the Boss sniffs. "What about the time..."

"You bypassed the door-open switch on your 9 track tape drive and it lost vacuum and tape spewed out all over the floor?"

"Oh," he repeats, sounding even more wounded before slowly wandering off.

"That was a bit cruel wasn't it?" the PFY asks. "And how did you know about that disk drive thing – I don't remember that story?"

"EVERY old computer buff has a head crash story," I said. "Anyway, I thought you'd done a runner when you ducked off to the bog."

"Nah," the PFY says holding up the home modified cattle prod wrapped in swathes of insulation tape. "I was just changing the batteries on this. Honestly, if I had to hear one more story about how they debugged 11/34 crashes I was going to let him have it!"

"And a good thing too. The 11/34 was a piece of crap. The 11/70 was a sack of cack as well and their only redeeming feature was they were the forerunner to the VAX series. We had a couple of 11/780s when I started work complete with 8 inch boot floppies and you could always tell when one crashed because the attention light came on followed by the furious clicking inside the cabi
>KZZZZZEEERT!<"

...Can anyone else smell burning?

BOFH: Shiny new computer room

What's the catch?

Published Friday 9th May 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 17 "I think I have some good news..." the Boss chirps happily as he skips into Mission Control.

"Good news?" the PFY says.

"Very good news!" he gushes.

"On a scale of one to ten?"

"Ten - at least!"

"Really," I say. "And what could possibly register as a ten?"

"You're going to get a new computer room!" he blurts.

"A new computer room?"

"Yes, what you've been after - for ages - by all accounts. AND you'll get all new plant and state-of-the-art environmental monitoring and fire suppression."

"Really?" I say, suppressing my natural urge to blurt PANTS ON FIRE! "Who's moving out?"

"We **all** are!" he gasps cheerfully.

"All of us?"

"The entire building!"

"Why?" the PFY asks.

"Well it's an interesting thing. An audit at the end of last year found that the only thing the company carried sufficient insurance for was workplace accident and associated liability. For some reason. Most importantly the building insurance was flagged as being seriously underestimated given the appreciation in value since the building was purchased - because of its proximity to certain parts of the city which are more desirable than they once were."

"Uh huh," the PFY says doubtfully.

"So what you're saying is that the building that was a bit of a fire sale special a number of years ago is now a valuable chunk of London real estate?"

"Exactly! As a result of this the company decided to capitalize on its good fortune by selling up, buying elsewhere for vastly less and..."

"Misreporting the capital gains as revenue?" I ask.

"No, by buying elsewhere for less and using a portion of the profit to refurbish the new building into a Head Office. And it just so happens they've found an ex-government building not too far away from here which is an absolute bargain and about twice the size!"

"Right," I say dubiously, waiting for the 'but..'. "Got an existing computer facility then?"

"No, one will be purpose built onsite - using all-new plant and materials."

"Cabling infrastructure?"

"All new cabling to be installed top to bottom to **your** specifications."

"Sounds okay so far," I say slowly - having learnt from harsh experience that when encountering a goldmine one must prepare oneself for the shaft. "When's it going to happen?"

"Three weeks," he gasps excitedly.

And there it is, complete with pit props and canary...

"You can't do a build like that within three weeks!" I cry. "It'll take months just to plan for it!"

"Oh, they're not planning the **build** for three weeks time," the Boss blurts. "We just have to be out of the building by then."

"I..."

"...because we've sold it. Obviously some interim measures will need to be taken and some less than optimal configurations might need to be borne for the short term..."

"Who the hell sells a building in three weeks?" the PFY gasps, as in my mind I recall the server rooms of my youth and suppress a scream.

... Rows of tables in carpeted rooms with servers stacked on and around them....

...Portable aircon units leaking water onto the floor...

...IPS power!!!!...

...Rats' nests of network cabling and power cables strewn all over floors and tables, in doorways, across light fittings...

"It's not going to happen!" I snap decisively.

"Has to happen - the building's been sold!" the Boss responds.

"It may have been sold, but we can't possibly move the equipment in time. We need a temperature and humidity controlled environment, with UPS power, generator backup, security!"

"Not to mention up-to-date racks, raised floor and a structured cabling system," the PFY says.

"How long would it take?"

"Well, if we could get the people, 24-7, and the plant and hardware, I'm guessing... a couple of months."

"A COUPLE OF MONTHS!"

"If they were working 24-7."

"We don't have a couple of months. You're just going to have to make do. I think I can get you allocated about half a floor where you could put all the servers and stuff - till the work's complete in the other half."

"With workers moving in and out of the gear, carrying building supplies?"

"There might be a bit of building activity which might overlap..."

"How about this - you sell the building and LEASE BACK the computer room and operations room until such time as the server room is built?"

"I'm not really sure that makes financial sense – besides I've already told our risk people that we'd be okay to move. I mean, it's only some servers..."

"You'll have to get the buyer to delay the purchase then," the PFY seethes.

"Never going to happen. They're moving their computer room as well and they've cancelled their lease. I can't think of anything that'd make them want to delay."

"Really?" the PFY says.

"Nothing."

. . . One day later . . .

"And apparently the WALLS of the computer suite may be made of asbestos," the PFY explains to the IT Director. "Presumably because of its fire retardant properties. One of their technical people discovered it yesterday afternoon when they came to take some measurements and moved a panel."

"Are they sure it was asbestos?"

"Oh yeah, it had **CAUTION, ASBESTOS** stenciled across it."

"And do we know how long it's been in the building?"

"No, Could be 20 years, could be 20 minutes – But obviously now they're delaying the purchase for a couple of months until they can have the entire building checked to know what the removal costs would be..."

"Awfully convenient for you, don't you think?"

"What, the daily exposure to an environment that might kill me horribly in 20 years?" the PFY replies. "That's not what my solicitor thinks. He *is* thinking out-of-court settlement though."

"I think we'll wait for the outcome of the builder's report," the Director responds.

"No skin off my nose," the PFY says. "It's all billable research time for my counsel, time for further discovery, examination of documents to see if anyone in the company has a history of signing off building works with substandard materials."

"I see. Well perhaps an out-of-court no-admission-of-guilt deal might be best," the Head mumbles.

"Meantime, I guess we'd better plan this new computer room properly," I add, nudging a stencil into the darkness under my desk...

BOFH: The PFY's comeuppance

He got a bit zap-happy

Published Friday 16th May 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 18 Some things you just don't want to waste half a day doing. Like talking to the company's shrink about whether the PFY should be referred to the authorities or not...

"Okay, so my name is Catherine, I'm just gathering some background on what occurred a couple of days ago and would like to ask you some questions about Stephen's behavior leading up to the... incident."

"Sure," I say, taking a seat.

"Would you say that your assistant is liable to... uhhhm... flights of fantasy?"

"Only in certain situations," I say.

"Such as?"

"The Swedish volleyball team are visiting a jelly factory just as a fire breaks out, and the sprinklers come on and one of the jelly crystal tanks bursts, just as one of the team members makes an unkind remark about one of the other members hair styles," I reply. "But apart from that..."

"No paranoia, delusions?" she asks, scribbling something down on a separate sheet of paper and writing my name at the top...

"Paranoia, delusions? No, not really," I say, suppressing more evidence than Lord Hutton, knowing it probably wouldn't help to mention the PFY's conspiracy theories about moon landings, vapor trails, petrol prices, UFOs, train spotters, global warming, ECHELON, mind control and scoutmasters (to name but a few) - even if most of them are true.

"Can you give me some background on the new Director of IT then?"

"What would you like to know?"

"As I understand it the former Director resigned after the company was forced to pay a large amount of compensation over an unexpected delay in relocating to a new building?"

"Yes, we found asbestos in one of our rooms - and I'm sure that the stress of realizing that you'd been exposed to potentially lethal airborne material for such a long time possibly had something to do with my assistant's actions."

"The asbestos later found to be mislabeled plasterboard?" she asks.

"Yes, but the PFY wasn't to know that at the time."

"I see. So can you tell me what your assistant has against... short people?" she asks.

Bugger, I was hoping that wouldn't come up.

"Yes, it seems he was attacked by a garden gnome when he was little," I lie.

"I think we both know that's not true."

Double bugger.

"OK, my assistant has a pathological mistrust of short people, believing them to be pint-sized dictatorial, publicity seeking types."

"And the same can be said for beards?"

"Yes, one of those attacked him too."

"Let's just stick to the facts, shall we?"

"OK, he doesn't like beardies either; he thinks they're the mark of the idiot. So when - like last week - he's got a bearded Davros telling him we'll use wireless in the new building after he's just spent four days doing duct surveys and drawing up cable runs... well, it was bound to happen."

"He *said* you tried to kill him."

"He didn't!"

"He did. So if you don't mind me asking, what speed were you doing when your assistant pushed him out of the back of the van?"

"He fell!" I gasp. "The back door wasn't closed properly. And anyway, we were still in the basement!"

"And you backed up?"

"An accident, I thought I'd put it in park - I'm not used to driving an auto. In any case, I thought this was supposed to be about the PFY?!"

"Yes, OK, back to your assistant. Do you recognize this?" >clunk<

"Oh yes, that's his... insulation tester."

"Insulation tester, or cattleprod?"

"Insulation tester - for checking the insulation rating of network cables."

"It's a cattleprod - I know, I had someone look at it."

"Really?"

"Yes - they said it'd been modified." she responds, turning a couple of pages. "The uh... duty cycle of the inverter had been increased along with the... supply current and the handle had been hollowed out to take an extra battery."

"You can't be too careful checking insulation," I say.

"So which setting do you use for insulation checking?" she asks, pointing to the PFY's hastily applied labels. "Stun or stir-fry?"

"Stir-fry - stun is a self-test setting."

"In that the 'stun' setting is hardwired to the metallic handle and with the increased amperage the holder would be unlikely to be able to let the thing go until the battery ran out??"

"I don't know - I've never tested it."

"But your assistant used it - on the director?"

"It would seem so."

"Because he claims the director 'fondled his arm'."

"Fondled his RAM!" I say, "He'd removed some RAM from his machine when the director picked it up - and as you know the static voltages present in the body are more than enough to destroy the intricate nature of RAM. In an effort to counter the dangerous electricity in the Director's body he attempted to apply an equal and opposite harmful voltage."

"To the testicles."

"That was just..."

"An accident?"

"I was going to say 'a bonus' - but accident will do," I respond.

"And the names?"

"We all have joke names for each other - I call my assistant 'the PFY' he calls me 'Sir'..."

"And you call your director, uh... R2D2, Yoda, and 'the Bollard'."

"Harmless fun!"

"So you're saying that the van incident was an accident, as was the attempt to back up over him; the cattleprod thing was a spur of the moment solution to a technical problem and the names are just workplace fun."

BOFH: The Batcave

We've got to win it first

Published Friday 23rd May 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 19 "You know," I say to the PFY as I pore over some building plans. "I don't think the beancounters are as big a set of idiots as we've given them credit for."

"How's that then?" the PFY asks.

"This building they've bought - I've done some admittedly rough sums based around the floor space and previous sales in the area, and I think we may have got a real bargain!"

"Really?" the PFY says dubiously. "But what does it have to recommend it?"

"There are seven pubs and two Indian joints within a one block radius, a tube station a couple of blocks away and a women's fitness centre across the road."

"Oh," the PFY says. "What about the building?"

"It's an old government department building - from the days when they were all self-contained."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning this place had a vehicle workshop, a huge store, cafeteria, plant rooms, the works!"

"So where's the server room going?"

"There's two options - the one that the architects have selected, taking into account the needs of insulation, access to services and security..."

"And?"

"And the place we're going to go - immediately above the vehicle service bays - taking into account the proximity to pubs/curry houses and that Mission Control would then overlook the fitness place."

"But why above the service bays?"

"We could install all our plants in the service bays as opposed to the computer suite and just duct everything up."

"Doesn't seem to be much of a gain to me..."

"We could section off another part of the bays and use it for tape safes."

"Yes, but it d-"

"We could cut off another chunk and keep all our spares in it."

"Still..."

"WE COULD CUT A HOLE IN THE FLOOR OF MISSION CONTROL, INSTALL A POLE, KEEP A CAR IN THE SERVICE BAYS AND CALL IT THE BATMOBILE!"

"Now you're talking!" the PFY says enthusiastically. "But we'd need to have electric doors with fake windows painted on them. Or trees! Yes, a real batcave! But won't we have a bit of trouble changing the architect's minds?"

"Nah, we just use some airy-fairy palaver about that location being ideal for input into building heating, carbon neutral, etc. They eat that sort of thing up."

"You lost me."

"Well, with the push for being carbon neutral we just say that we'll use the heat from the computer room to heat the building."

"And in summer?"

"We use it to heat the pool."

"What pool?"

"The one in the women's fitness centre. Obviously there'll need to be the odd bit of maintenance work..."

...

"You can't go there," the Director says.

"Are you sure?" the PFY asks, waving the 'insulation tester' around.

"It's not me!" he snivels. "Security want it for their main office, stores want it for the main store and the accountants want it for storing our paper records."

... One large building fire later ...

"Someone's going to have to pay for this," the head beancounter sniffs as the fire brigade hose a stack of ashen paper out of one of the basement storerooms.

"And so they should!" the PFY says. "Who was it said we should only do the mandatory servicing on our fire and intrusion alarms?"

...

"So it's just you, security and stores then?" the director asks later in the day. "And I take it there will be no more suspicious fires?"

“You have to be joking – no, this has to be settled amicably between colleagues. The PFY will see how they’d like to do it.”

. . .

“So it’s a game of darts then?” the PFY says to the stores and security managers.

“Uh-huh,” they respond in unison. “Cider darts!”

. . .

“You’re really going to play darts for your rooms?” the Boss asks.

“*Cider* darts,” the PFY corrects.

“What’s that then?”

“A pint of cider to start,” the security manager says, trundling over under the weight of a pile of lunchtime kebabs. “A pint of cider per round, a pint of cider if a dart misses the board or bounces back onto the floor. A pint of cider to finish.”

“Catch it with your foot?” the PFY asks.

“If you catch a bounced dart with your foot before it hits the floor, you can replay it without forfeit,” the stores manager nods.

“Injury time?”

“Forfeit the game.”

“Are you sure you want to do this?” the Boss whispers to me, moments later. “They look like they’re pretty good.”

“They should be – they’ve both got pub teams, and one of the stores guys brews his own cider.”

“You don’t stand a chance!” the Boss gasps.

“Least we’re having a go though!” I say, as the PFY wanders off to set up the board and grab a couple of dozen boxes of pikey mouthwash.

. . . The next day . . .

“How did it go?” the Boss asks.

“Mint!” the PFY says. “Touch and go for a while, but in the end we won by forfeit.”

“How?”

“Foot injuries from trying to catch a bounced dart.”

“Both teams?!”

“Yep.”

“Don’t they both wear steel caps?”

“They do, but a steel cap boot is a poor protection from a dart body made out of a rare earth magnet, expelled from the board by a toned down pinch...” the PFY continues.

“I...” the Boss says, after we explain the basic concepts. “And so you won?”

“Well after the PFY had nailed one of the stores guy’s feet to one of the security guy’s feet to the *wall* behind them it was a bit of a non-event.”

“And there’ll be no... repercussions?”

“Nah, we let them keep the cider!”

BOFH: Testing the obscenity filters

You can't say 'can't'

Published Friday 30th May 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 20 "Hi, I'd just like some help setting up my Macintosh for access t..."

>SLAM<

...

>Ring<

"Hello?" the PFY says.

"Hi, we must have got cut off, I was ringing for a bit of help setting up my Mac..."

>SLAM<

...

>RING<

"Is there something wrong with your phone?" the voice asks.

"I don't think so," the PFY says. "But just let me check something... >SLAM<"

...

>RING<

"I keep getting cut off - you're not hanging up on me are you?"

"Hanging up? No, no, everything's fine here - perhaps it's one of our PABX features," the PFY says.

"What do you mean, PABX features?"

"The PABX. It's got some filtering firmware in it to prevent foul language - a bit like Mail Marshall, but for voice streams."

"You can't be serious?"

"Oh yes, it's the latest thing to stop office harassment. You enable the filtering and then it just terminates conversations that contain foul language before they get the company into trouble. That way the company is seen to be proactive about preventing workplace harassment. Funny thing is I don't think we enabled it on our phone system."

"So it's not that?"

"It might be - I'll have to check. C*cks*ck*r." >SLAM<

...

>Ring<

"Was that it, all I heard was c..."

"Ars*B*ndit!" >SLAM!<

"MY TURN!" I gasp, as the phone rings again.

>Ring<

"NUMBKN*TS!" >SLAM!<

>Ring<

"CHUTNEY FERRET!" I shout. >SLAM!<

Classic! The PFY has discovered a way to call users names with impunity! He's a bloody genius!

>Ring<

"George W Bu..." >SLAM!<

>Ring<

"STOP IT!" our user gasps, before I can think of something really inappropriate.

"Stop what?" I ask.

"Stop testing your system on me! And why are two of you doing it?"

"Oh," I say. "I was just trying to eliminate the possibility that it was only happening on certain extensions."

"Well all people at this end can hear is you shouting names at me!"

"Oh, right," I say. "We were just doing some debugging as well and it seems that heightened volume - which indicates vocal stressors - has a higher weighting than the ordinary spoken word. So just saying c*cksuc*r..." >SLAM<

>Ring<

"My mistake," I say. "It seems that at any volume c*cksuc*er..." >SLAM<

>Ring<

"This is ridiculous! You can't..."

>SLAM<

>Ring<

"Hello?" the PFY says.

"What happened then?"

"I'm not sure?" the PFY says.

"All I said was you can't..."

>SLAM<

>Ring<

"There's no need to be like that," the PFY says. "It's not our fault - it's the software!"

"I said CAN'T!"

>SLAM<

>Ring<

"Now just take it easy," the PFY says. "We're only trying to help you sort this out!"

"I'm not swearing at you!"

"Oh right!" the PFY says, feigning enlightenment. "You were saying the abbreviated version of 'cannot'?"

"YES!" the user cries.

"Gotcha. I think it's probably just an accent or dialect thing on the part of the voice recognition circuit. I can probably adjust the settings on it if you like," the PFY says, nodding meaningfully to me.

The penny drops and I login to the PABX management console.

"OK, how do I do that?"

"All you need to do is just repeat, I dunno, 20 or 30 times the 'you cannot' abbreviation and we'll recalibrate it to your particular inflection and you'll be sorted - it'll never drop your conversations again."

"OK. You CA..."

"NOT NOW!" the PFY interrupts. "It'll just get messed up with the rest of this session. You have to create a NEW session so that ONLY the words you want recalibrated get recalibrated."

"Oh. So I just ring you back and repeat the words?"

"Yes. But hang on, what's that?" I say, joining the conversation.

"What's what?"

"I've just noticed that our PABX monitoring software is running on overclocked processors - which is probably part of the problem. So you probably need to repeat the phrase as quickly as possible, 20 or 30 times. Loudly. As soon as we answer to reduce white noise."

"OK - so I just ring you back and do it."

"Yes - but remember, we won't talk because then it'd recalibrate us, not you."

"OK, I'll call right back!"

And that, as they say, is that.

He hangs up, I repatch our phone line to the CEO's humourless PA and he recalibrates himself out of a job.

No one believes the story about the voice filtering of course.

The PFY fakes an email from him to the aforementioned PA, just in case there's any doubt in her mind...

"That was a hell of a lot of work to go to just to avoid telling someone you don't do Macs," I say.

"Yeah, but it had to be done," the PFY replies. "Anyway I'm thinking we should tell everyone the new building isn't compatible with Macs."

"Go on, say we can't do it!"

Like I said, he's a bloody genius...

BOFH: Dealing with engineers

Sometimes it takes a bit more effort

Published Friday 6th June 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 21 It seems the cunning machinations from last week have come to no avail - someone at the colored pencil office still wants the PFY to give them a hand installing some Macintoshes.

"I **hate** going to see the designers," the PFY whines. "They're a bunch of overfed smelly beatniks who think that buying expensive desktops makes them important."

"Spare a thought for me," I mumble, nodding over my shoulder at the upset engineer behind me. "I've got to deal with *him* for an hour or so."

...

"I mean who the hell sharpens the blades on a bloody cooling fan!" the engineer gasps angrily as he wraps another couple of turns of gauze around his fingers in response to the seeping of blood through the existing wrapping.

"That would be me," the PFY says. "I was reading an analysis of propeller design with a view to increasing the efficiency of fans and it appears that sharpening the leading edge can lead to efficiencies of up to 0.7 per cent in power consumption."

"You did this just to save 0.7 per cent of a 200mW fan?!"

"That's a 500mW fan - because of the metal blades," the PFY counters. "But anyway, I did it because it was funny. The 0.7 per cent saving just justified me doing it during work time."

"It's bloody irresponsible!" he whines, directing the focus of his annoyance at me.

"No it's not - the fan's got a guard!" the PFY says.

"Not on the inside of the case it doesn't!"

"Yes but it does say on the outside of the case that you should ensure power is disconnected before opening it - we always do."

"I was diagnosing a power supply fault!" he snaps.

...and so it goes...

The trouble with getting rid of an engineer who's become a royal pain in the arse is that it takes so much time to wear them down. Whereas your ordinary engineer will start crying if a power supply fails twice in a row, your RPITA variety of engineer is quite happy to come on site time

after time to replace the same part over and over again, without ever wondering why or trying to diagnose the real cause. By the time the roulette wheel of engineer assignment spins in your favor and you get someone who knows what they're doing that dodgy capacitor on the motherboard has been responsible for more outages than a union official. Stronger measures need to be taken...

"And quite frankly you should earth your racks - I could've been killed!" the engineer adds.

"Yes," the PFY says, disguising disappointment as thoughtfulness.

It's a twofold upset for the PFY and myself - firstly the fan didn't result in some sick leave and the desired engineer reassignment and secondly the hour or so that I put into separating an earth lead from its tab **inside** a power supply then gently teasing the phase wire into contact with the metal body (all through the cooling fan grill so as leave the tamper-evident seals intact) was wasted.

The hour spent insulating the rack from any earthing was a waste as well, but at least we can write that off as planning for future requirements...

The 'great' thing about crap engineers is that they don't let something like not knowing anything about the product hamper them in any way. They're quite prepared to lift the cover on something, pull the memory out, hold the memory in their mouth while they bend a couple of heatsinks out of the way looking for a loose wire, shove the memory back in the slot, reseal it with a small amount of pressure, a medium amount of pressure, a large amount of pressure, then realize it's in the wrong way and repeat the pressure install method, shut the cover then realize they've been working on the wrong machine the whole time - and maybe they should have turned the power off first...

The PFY, while I've been recounting this, has been fielding calls from beatnik central about when their machines are going to be configured... Things look like getting a little, well... testy. Especially as I notice the PFY reverting to his newly mastered 'predictive obscenity filtering' technique...

"What's going on with the Design Office?" the IT director cries, stomping into Mission Control with a definite bee in his bonnet.

"Design Office?"

"Yes, the design office! They say that an important company brochure about the relocation is being held up by their inability to use their desktops."

"Oh that," the PFY says. "That's because they're Macs. I don't know anything about Macs!"

"Oh they're easy," our Engineer pipes up, playing right into the PFY's digits. "They're just like PCs."

"Really? Well how we trade jobs and I fix this while you fix the Macs upstairs."

"I... Well, it'll cost you a few beers."

"Done!" the PFY snaps.

Moments later the engineer's off to do battle with the inbreds while the PFY and I have a live chassis server to install. If only...

"Uh - you couldn't give us a hand getting this back into the rack could you?" the PFY asks, nodding.

"For Pete's sake, there's two of you! What do you need?"

"Basically someone just needs to hold the machine into the rack while we power it up..." the PFY says.

KZZZERT!

And then there were two...

BOFH: Shafting the consultants over the new layout

Marking territory

Published Friday 13th June 2008 10:55 GMT

Episode 22 So we've got some external consultants here blundering through the requirements for the new building as a QA thing...

"It's not that we don't trust you," the Boss explains. "Far from it. It's just that senior management would like some assurance that everything you've asked for is a requirement and not just a nice-to-have."

"A nice to have?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, you know, something that's not essential - or something which we might be able to purchase at a later date when there's a little more capital available."

"Let's face it," I say, going for the honest approach. "The company has made an absolute *pantload* on their building transactions - even with the penalties we've paid to remain here in the interim. If they don't have the available capital now they'll never to have it. This is about trying to wear us down to the point that we'd accept space in a coolstore at a butchery if it were available. And it's not going to happen!"

"I'm on your side," the Boss hastens to assure us. "I think that if we're going to do this we need to do it properly, but I have to say that even I have difficulty explaining the requirement for a 150 inch plasma screen."

"It's for the status wall!" the PFY gabbles. "Instead of having a cluster of smaller plasmas all over the place we'd have a single screen which would encompass all we need to know about."

"Like what?"

"Systems and networks reporting, video feeds of server and comms areas, localized information that might be pertinent to the computer facility like Council, Electricity, and Telco works underway," I respond.

"Not to mention weather conditions likely to affect our wireless comms," the PFY chips in.

"Or countdown to happy hour at the local," I add.

"Supermodel-in-the-area alerts," the PFY suggests.

"I'm dubious about those last examples," the Boss says. "But I can appreciate that a single portal for status information might be useful. Still, it's not me that will be deciding, it's these people."

The Boss hands over a document from a consultancy firm and the PFY bashes the name into a search engine.

"Hmm," he mumbles, looking at the company's website.

"What?"

"They say that the partners have a combined experience in computing of over 60 years."

"And the company consists of a couple of COFs?" I suggest.

"COFs? What's a COF?" the Boss asks.

"Crusty Old Fart. I.e. someone who was there when dirt was invented."

"I hardly think..."

...

Our worst fears are realized at the first site meeting when they start questioning the amount of space we want to get our hands on...

"I can't see what the problem is," I say, walking with the consultants through the gutted heart of our soon-to-be-created computer suite.

"Leaving aside the assumption that we'd approve the separate comms room with the advances in structured cabling in the past 10 years," one of the COFs says. "The size you're proposing is huge! You've allocated about 1/5th of the floor!"

"Just planning for the future," I say as my dreams of a rent-free city flat hiccup briefly.

"And what part in the future does this plant access shaft play?" the other COF asks, tapping the area of the plan where we're planning to put our fireman's pole.

"Where's that then?" the PFY asks shoving a builder's trolley loaded with concrete out of the way.

"Here," the first COFs says, stepping over to a section of the floor marked out in yellow chalk and concrete dust.

"Oh that! That would be a central riser for all the supporting plant - the access path for power, chilled coolant, makeup air, etc." the PFY lies. "It's key to the build."

"It doesn't look all that key to us," he counters. "You could put all your plant in the computer suite and save a valuable amount of what was once car parking space in the floor below - not to mention the loss of floor space on this level."

"How much floor space are we really losing?" the PFY asks.

"Fifteen square meters – roughly," the second COF says.

"How much **exactly**?"

"Okay we'll tell you," the second COF snaps, entering the chalk outline and handing his partner the end of a measuring tape. "... 4.4 meters by 3.7 meters is >tappity< sixteen point two eight square meters. So you'd lose sixteen square meters of floor space for no good reason. I'm sorry, but there's no way we'd support you cutting this slab out."

"Oh don't be sorry," the PFY says, pushing the laden builder's trolley towards them. "They cut about 99% of that slab out yesterday."

...

>Ring<

"Yes?" the Boss answers, on the second ring.

"There's been the most terrible accident," the PFY begins...

BOFH: The all-clicking, all-whirring Roboboss

Logic can be a wonderful thing

Published Friday 20th June 2008 11:06 GMT

Episode 23 I've got a particularly vexing game of multiplayer Enemy Territory on my hands when the new Boss rolls in and spoils everything. I say *new* Boss, as the previous one that everyone liked left for greener pastures and then **his** replacement left on medical grounds after accidentally pushing a paperclip into the live pin of a power socket - being misinformed by **someone** that it would improve his AM radio reception - scant MINUTES after telling the PFY and I that he was concerned about our high internet usage...

Coincidences abound.

More importantly, with the new building and the forward thinking the whole company has signed itself up for an "Into the Future" initiative for which we're beta testing a robotic brain as a boss while we wait for the appointments process to grind on... I've no idea whose bright idea it was but apparently it came down from 'the very top' so we're now lumbered with a first generation beta test android with a particularly slow processor, limited memory, noisy paging disk and resource contention problems - so no change there.

The large packing crate outside the office was a bit of a giveaway, as was the couple of whitecoats who came from 'an IT personnel consultancy' to help him settle in. The saddest thing, however, is that even without human emotion the robot still gets on better with the staff than his immediate predecessor.

I note a couple of sheets of A4 in the boss's claw, which tends to sway the argument of the Boss's purpose in favor of a technical problem. However, we *have* been a little barren in the toilet tissue department since the PFY complained to the buildings maintenance manager about the toilet fresheners in the bottom of the urinal, saying he preferred the menthol to the eucalyptus flavor...

Sigh.

"Back the way you came, first left, second right after the lifts!" the PFY says, before the Boss has a chance to engage his voice circuits. "Leave them in the cubicle."

"What?" he starts, stopping mid roll, scanning the room slowly for signs of intelligent life.

"The toilets."

"Oh. No. I was looking for.... >grind grind grind< the person who signed this form."

"No L2 cache at all," the PFY mouths at me before he turns back to the Roboboss. "Which form?"

"This form," the boss responds, releasing the paper onto the PFY's desk.

"Let's have a look at this, blah blah blah, secret weapon, blah blah, maintenance... Yes, it's the maintenance contract for our telephone exchange."

"For 13 thousand pounds. Annually."

"Affirmamundo," the PFY chirps back.

...

"Pardon?" the Boss asks, after his word recognition 5-second timeout expires.

"RogerDoger."

"Pardon?"

Realizing that both the PFY and the robot could play this game all day and night - at overtime rates if applicable - if someone let them, I decide to step in.

"He means yes."

"Ok. >whirr< Analyzing the number of faults, and age of the exchange, I have determined that we could change the maintenance to per-call for the next two years, after which point we would re-evaluate both the exchange and its maintenance contract. I estimate this would save the company ten thousand pounds per annum," the Roboboss warbles.

"But then we won't be invited to the telco end-of-year bash," the PFY whines. "They have cider girls!"

"This would not factor into the calculation of savings."

"Yes, but it's a really good party!" the PFY says. "The place is next door is a boutique cider brewery and they have some sort of contra arrangement for phone support which makes for a pretty exciting event!"

"This would not factor into the calculation of savings."

"So what are your priorities for your role?" I ask. "If that's not leaking too much of your programming to us."

"Prioritized targets are cost savings, stability of service, risk assurance and potential liability."

"And staff morale?"

"This would not figure into my calculations."

"Health and safety?"

"This would not figure into my calculations."

"So what you're saying is that savings are your priority and people are not?"

"They do not factor into my calculation of savings."

"Did you realize that the finance department of this company allocates IT budget and by increasing **our** budget you could increase **your** savings targets exponentially?"

">whirr<"

"...and that a large portion of the budget that is **not** allocated to us is made up by the salaries of the people who staff the finance department?"

">whirr<"

"...and that if less people worked for the finance department you could achieve the exponential savings?"

">whirr<"

"...and that there's a chainsaw behind my assistant's desk fuelled up and ready to go?"

">whirr< >click< Savings computed!"

As the robot grasps the chainsaw and heads to the lift I can't help thinking that... ...the new Boss is shouting at me.

"YOU'RE ASLEEP!" he snaps, as I lurch forward in my chair.

"Just resting my eyes," I say. "The screens are very harsh on your eyes."

"You weren't listening to me, I was saying your internet usage figures are outrageous."

"Oh, yes, of course. We'll look into it immediately. Now, you were saying something about problems with your AM radio reception?"

BOFH: The admin gene

That mysterious gift

Published Friday 4th July 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 24 "Woah!" the PFY breathes, looking up quickly.

"Woah what?" the Boss asks, looking around cautiously, as I re-enter the room from the passage to the server room.

"Nope, it'll be OK," I say to the PFY, ignoring the Boss for a moment.

"What'll be OK?"

"Are you sure?" the PFY asks. "It was quite noticeable."

"What was noticeable?"

"Yeah, but it was quick. Ten quid says it'll be fine."

"WHAT WILL BE FINE?!"

"I'll take that bet!" the PFY cries, before turning to the Boss. "We're talking about that power glitch."

"What power glitch?"

"The one a couple of moments ago."

"When?"

"When the lights dimmed briefly."

"The lights didn't dim!"

"They did," I counter.

"They most certainly did not!"

"I beg to differ," the PFY snaps with a measure of self-satisfaction. "Behold!"

Following the PFY's finger I note a couple of red icons where green switches should be.

Bugger. That's a tenner down the gurgler.

"I didn't see any power glitch!" the Boss says.

"You wouldn't," I say. "You've either got it or you don't... and you don't."

"Got what?"

"The admin gene," the PFY explains. "The ability to recognize things that users don't. A slight flicker of lighting, a whiff of hot component in the air, a fractional change in the pitch of a cooling fan - all of which the garden variety user misses in the headlong rush to read their email."

"Well, it can't be that good if you can't agree about whether the glitch you saw would have any effect or not."

"There's miles of power and data cabling in this building, a large transformer in the basement, UPS in the machine room and smaller UPS units in the comms rooms. Predicting the effect of a power glitch here is about as easy as predicting the landing of space debris."

"Yes, but anyone could look at a monitor and notice a red icon," the Boss comments.

At this point I realize that our Boss will never care that both the PFY and myself can extract, over the top of meaningless conversation, aging air-conditioning, canned music and fan hum, the muffled urgent tones of a piezoelectric beeper warning of a hardware fault - from three rooms away.

"It's not about seeing a red icon," the PFY says patiently. "It's about knowing a red icon is **about** to light up or sensing that something is wrong. You can't **teach** someone that."

"It's hearing a subtle change in the hum from a UPS and knowing that it needs a coolant top-up," I add.

"And you get all this from the admin... gene?"

"Oh yes," The PFY says. "If you're born with the admin gene it's just... instinctive."

"And I don't have that gene?" the Boss says.

"No."

"So what do I have instead?"

"I dunno - what's the one that causes Asperger's?" the PFY asks unkindly.

"So tell me more about this gene then," the Boss says dryly. "You make it sound like a superpower."

"Well, in a way it sort of is," I say. "There's no seeing through walls or anything but there's a lot of that sixth sense stuff."

"I find that very hard to believe..."

“It’s true,” the PFY says.

“I...”

“He’s right,” I interject. “It’s just an inbuilt ability to KNOW things – like when to put a cleaning tape into a drive before it tells you.”

“Or how hard to hit a stuck hard drive to get it moving again...” the PFY says.

“...without breaking it completely,” I add. “But it’s not just about systems – it’s also about the environment.”

“Like when not to answer the phone.”

“Or when to hide behind the door.”

“And how to tell when a door handle might be electrified,” the PFY continues.

“Not to mention the computer suite environment,” I add. “Like when it’s 17.8 degrees instead of 18.”

“Or 60 per cent humidity instead of 45.”

“Anyone can do that,” the Boss snaps – obviously feeling left out. “You never know – I might have the gene and just not know it.”

“I doubt it – but we’re happy to test it if you really think you have what it takes.”

“I DO!”

“Okay then, go into the server room and tell us what the humidity is – without looking at the aircon unit.”

“You’re on.”

“How’s he doing?” the PFY says, as the Boss stalks down the corridor to the computer room.

“Well... he’s just about to fail the electrified door handle test.”

“Woah!” the PFY says, looking up quickly.

"Woah what?" the helldesk supervisor asks, walking into the room.

"Nah, it'll be OK," I say to the PFY, ignoring the helldesk supervisor for a moment.

Well, it passes the time, doesn't it?

BOFH: The PFY wants a reference

Immediately my suspicions are aroused...

Published Friday 18th July 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 25 "So let's just get this straight," I say to the PFY as he hovers about my desk. "You want me to write a reference for you lauding you as a veritable workplace IT savant who can leap laser printers in a single bound, bend RFPs in his bare hands and generally manage an IT project with the ease of a veteran?"

"Yes."

"So you can get a job somewhere else and leave me with the task of moving all the IT infrastructure to a new site - at which time you'll no doubt reapply for your old position, and blame any integration issues on my workmanship?"

"No!" the PFY gasps. "I want to join a particular group of IT professionals and they won't accept nominations without the support of five people in the industry."

"Five? So who are you using? Me, right, but who else?"

"A couple of fellow bastards from the place down the street that frequent the pub, plus the Boss and the IT Director."

"Really - and you think that'll cut it?"

"I'm not sure they actually look at the references too carefully - and anyway I faked some reference templates and inserted them into the Boss and Director's Word hierarchy. If they deviate too far from the template they'll have to write the whole thing themselves and I think we both know they're about as creative as..."

"The team that nicked the Mac look and feel - yes. OK, well I suppose it can't hurt. It'll cost you a couple of beers though."

"No problems - when do you think you might have it?"

"It must be pretty bloody good if you're in that much of a rush."

"No, not really, but Richard Stallman is talking next week and I've been having some insomnia problems recently."

"Ah, OK, enough said, I'll get right onto it."

Half an hour later I'm looking at a masterpiece of fabrication. Not only have I alluded to the fact that in his preschool years the PFY singlehandedly made a Babbage engine out of Meccano, I've also suggested that he was in fact the original developer of Windows but lost all his designs

when he accidentally left his school bag on the tube while Bill Gates was in town on holiday. Able to perform long division in hexadecimal in his head while writing Lisp code to parse foreign languages, the PFY also has a hidden side to his personality that many people don't know of, where he donates old computers to schools and helps senior citizens master the basics of computing.

So he should be sleeping soundly by the end of next week.

And so it was that the next afternoon my web-based study into the hobbies of supermodels is interrupted by the incessant ringing of the PFY's phone. He's still not back from lunch and he left at nine!

Realizing that I won't be able to concentrate on the selection process a supermodel goes through to choose a volleyball outfit with the phone ringing, I pick up the PFY's extension.

"Hello I'm looking for Simon Tr..."

"That's me," I say.

"Oh good. I'm just doing a referee check for an Operations Management position and one of the candidates has produced a reference from you and I'd just like to validate the content - purely a formality, but something we have to do."

THE LYING BASTARD!

"Fair enough," I say, suppressing the urge to slam the phone down.

"So I'll just read the reference out to you and then ask you to confirm its content," she says, before reading my words back to me. "Is that the reference you supplied?"

"Not exactly," I say. "But it's pretty much there."

"Are there some alterations you'd like to make?" she asks.

"Oh no, no - the gist of it is there. The illegal dumping of computers, his time helping out the older lags in prison..."

"*Prison?*"

"Oh don't worry, it's not as bad as it sounds. It was only remand and in the end the whole case was dismissed because the goat lived and the prosecutions vet just... disappeared."

"I..."

"But what I said about his technical ability is spot on. He can honestly look at the hexadecimal numbers in an image file and tell you how many women are in it and what clothes they're wearing - if any! Honestly it's uncanny and I wouldn't believe it myself if I hadn't had the misfortune to see him do it."

"You say he started in computing at a very young age with Meccano?"

"Oh yes, I've seen the family photos. It's such a pity that the police returned the set to his neighbors' place - but luckily being only four they didn't press any charges for burglary. That time."

"I..."

"I know what you're thinking - he must be a handful to manage with all that... enthusiasm, but I just try and stick to the basics of computing and rein him in. You know, keep customer-focused and supply a reliable and robust infrastructure for the best money possible."

"Really," she asks. "You're not looking for a change in career are you?"

"You know," I say. "I was just thinking that the other day..."

BOFH: Server room secret panels

This beancounter's asking too many questions...

Published Friday 1st August 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 26 “It's a little... uh... large, isn't it?” one of our beancounters says as he scans the computer room in the new building during a site visit.

“Optical illusion,” the PFY counters. “Machine rooms always look oversized when there's no kit in them. Take my word for it, once we install the racks and the cable trays the place will look half the size.”

“I... still think it's rather large.”

“No, no, it's fine,” I say. “Like my assistant says, wait until you see it with the racks and stuff in place – honestly, it'll look tiny.”

“Are you sure this is the same size as your existing room?”

“It's a *little* larger, I admit,” I say. “But who's going to quibble about a foot or two in the scheme of things – and like we've said, it only LOOKS large. When the machines are in place you really **will** believe it's halved in size.”

Which it will have. In a rare moment of self-sacrifice the PFY and I have actually dipped into our own pockets to pay the builders for several nights of private work of installing four mammoth but silent electrical motors and building a remote control movable steel wall through the middle of the computer room - creating two suites, the work one and the private enterprise version.

It was the beancounters' idea really – they'd been reading so much about SAAS recently that they were convinced that we were over-investing in our infrastructure and should instead utilize the resources of an external vendor.

Which is where the PFY and I came in. By halving the size of the computer room and installing the best of our existing servers in a virtual cluster in the ghost facility, we'll 'migrate' our desktop functionality to the most competitive 'external provider' who responds to the RFP. And who's going to be more competitive than a provider that doesn't have to pay for kit, power, plant or real estate?

It just makes financial sense – at least that's the way the beancounters saw it when they pored over the RFP responses. In an effort to be scrupulously fair the PFY and I did try and nudge them toward the other more costly respondents so as not to unfairly bias the decision in our favor, but even after our best endeavors they still decided to go with the cheapest model.

Ah well.

So the only problem we have is that we overlooked the segment of the RFP which stated that the company wanted a seamless transition...

The computer room meanwhile progresses nicely. Within hours of the beancounter's visit the racks are in standing in what will be their final locations and the wall is now the only structure I know of with the ability to alter its location to GPS coordinates which have been texted to it. A work of bloody genius!

"I... It really does look smaller!" the beancounter gasps as he returns to the room. "But surely that's never 40 meters?"

"Forty meters?" I say grabbing the plans from his hands. "No, I see the mistake – this measurement is in chains - point four chains."

"Chains?"

"Yeah, it's an old building, it'll be from the original surveyors notes."

"But then four chains would make that about... uh... about five meters."

"That's about right isn't it?"

"No, you see, the room is the correct width – *in meters* – but the length of the room is ridiculously small – about two-thirds of what it should be."

"It's probably a typographical error."

"No it's not - the picture shows it as being as long as the corridor over here plus the length of your office."

"No, there must be a room missing somewhere. How far is it from the security doors to the end of the room?" the PFY asks as we step out through the doors concerned.

"I'll check >stomp< >stomp< >stomp< 12. So that's probably just over nine meters."

"What about from the end of the room to the doors?" the PFY asks.

"The same as the other way."

"You're not taking into account Earth's rotation and doppler effect," the PFY says, TXTing furiously behind his back.

"Eh?"

"The wall, it won't be in the same place because of the earth's rotation," the PFY says. "Just put your back heel on the wall and count the steps this way."

...20 seconds later...

“It’s strange,” he says. “It’s just over 10.5 meters now.”

“Check it again,” the PFY suggests. >tappity<

“12 metres, it just doesn’t make sense!” he says. “It’s like this is moving >clonk< >clonk< Hey, that wall's made of steel! You know I think the wall really is...”

>SLAM< >CLANG< >CLANG<

>tappity<

No one believes the beancounter’s tale the next day when he turns up to work reeking heavily of bodily outputs after being crammed between some crushed racks overnight thanks to the PFY’s coordinates being about six inches into the back wall... His fanciful tales of rooms closing in on him are put down to his abuse of the many empty boxes of cold medication that the PFY planted in his rubbish bin...

The subsequent site visit shows the server room is exactly as specified in the plans.

“Though it looks half the size when the racks are in there,” the PFY adds, as our visitors depart.

>tappity<

BOFH: Smash + grab

RIP an awful lot of hardware

Published Friday 8th August 2008 11:08 GMT

Episode 27 The long-awaited weekend has almost arrived! The migration of the server room to the new site and the transfer of our 'crucial' services to the successful tendering party (ie our ghost facility) is about to commence.

"But I still don't see why we need to pay a data transfer fee!" the Boss whinges.

"Because they'll need to put a high speed link into the building for the weekend to enable them to transfer out data to the new hardware," the PFY says, never one to miss an opportunity to gouge the company for an extra couple of hundred quid. "Otherwise they'd have to copy over the VPN link, and that'd take days to complete."

"Why do they need to take a copy anyway?" the Boss whines. "They're taking the servers with them!"

"It'll save on recovery time if the servers get damaged in transit," the PFY says.

"But surely that's their problem?" the Boss says. "In any case why don't we just buy more tapes and you two backup the systems before they go?"

"It's the least costly option," I respond, not wanting to spend a Friday night at work pretending to backup data just to claim the overtime. "If you were to pay us overtime it'll work out to be more expensive than putting the temporary data link in."

And so it goes. The work the PFY and I are putting into convincing the Boss that he should pay us some lager money is starting to be more effort than we first thought. It's getting to the point that one of us is likely to say...

"You're right!" the PFY snaps. "I'm sure nothing will go wrong. We'll say no more about it!"

"Yes," the Boss concurs. "After all, we're dealing with professionals now."

. . . Later that night . . .

>Crash!< >C-Crash!< >Bang< >Crash<

...

>Bang!< >Crash< >Kerash< >Clatter!<

...

>Crash!< >Crunch!< >Bangity< >Crash!<

. . . Early the next morning . . .

"W-what happened?" the Boss gasps, surveying the wreckage at the bottom of the stairwell - a pile of computer hardware and cases liberally salted with inventory stickers removed from the premium servers we moved to the ghost facility, along with a selection of computing hardware picked up from the local Oxfam shop.

"Bit of a trolley disaster," I shrug. "I was on the front and the PFY was on the back when one of the castors fell out of its socket."

"What the hell were you doing carrying the computers down the stairs in the first place?!"

"The freight elevator was in use with the furniture."

"I... this is going to be an insurance job," the Boss whimpers, looking at the crushed equipment.

A couple of hours later an annoyed insurance rep shows up, and things start looking a little hairy. Instead of looking blankly at the rubble and reaching for the checkbook, he starts sorting things into their component piles. While the mess - the guts of half a dozen inkjet printers, several 10 meg hubs, a pile of old servers, a broken portable air conditioner (the PFY was 'in the zone'), and two filing drawers of ISA cards (still in the filing cabinet - the zone is infectious) - might be enough to dupe the Boss into believing that half the contents of the computer room have done a two-floor freefall, this bloke isn't fooled as easily.

"Hmmm" he says, doing the full CSI workup on the stairwell banister. "Yes..."

"What?" the Boss asks.

"Just a moment," he says, climbing some more stairs. "Mmmmm..."

"What is it?"

"Well, let's see," he says. "I can see from the marks on the wall and on the banister suggesting that the servers fell a completely different way to the networking gear. And the filing cabinet fell another way altogether. At first glance it would look like someone had simply... thrown all this equipment off the 2nd floor landing, and that no accident took place at all."

"Are you absolutely sure?" the PFY asks, waving his money machine card out of the Boss's line of sight.

"Er... as I said, at first glance you'd think that was the case - and that the wreckage at the bottom of the stairwell was just the usual end-of-life crap that only ever gets moved anywhere when an IT crowd has to vacate their workspace - but I'm not so sure. I'll need to take a better look. And I'll need your technical people to give me a hand with the investigation. Perhaps we could meet up again in... ten minutes?"

...Ten minutes and one extortion (so large it verged on being proctology) later...

"Yes, well I think we've sorted it out and we'll accept your claim," the agent says, while patting a large lump of the PFY's cash safely stashed in his pocket. "It obviously happened as they described and you've lost several expensive top-of-the-line servers. This >scribble< is your accept claim number, which I've rung through to our 24-hour line so you should be able to replace the kit as of Monday. So if there's nothing else..?"

"Only my laptop," the PFY says. "The trolley ran it over - which was what caused the castor to fall off the trolley."

"Sigh. OK. I'll take a quick look before I go."

"It's just up here..." the PFY says, disappearing up the stairs.

The Boss has barely begun to discuss what we'll do with the insurance money when our conversation is interrupted by a >crash!<

"What was that?" the Boss gasps.

"Well, I'm no expert," I say. "And I'm not up with the insurance game. But I think that sounded like... a tragic accident?"

BOFH: Burying the hatchet

In someone's back, naturally

Published Friday 15th August 2008 10:51 GMT

Episode 28 There's something about a newly refurbished building that just appeals. Whether it's the contrast of old and new (i.e. the ancient glass fronted axe cases in the stairwell which no-one in their right mind would install these days, versus the almost ubiquitous security cameras which everyone seems to be installing these days) is hard to say....

One thing that remains the same, though, is the users. While the PFY's engaged in some scheme to disguise the true size of the server room, I'm spending my valuable time teaching a user how to fix the poorly designed software with the cowboy installer that he's just downloaded from the web and stuffed onto his machine – with the usual unexpected results.

And the worst thing about teaching a user how to do something is that it's always about ten times slower than doing it yourself and akin to using the world's laggiest KVM solution as you instruct them where to put their mouse, which button to click, when, and what do once they've clicked it. It's all because of a new policy the Boss has decided to adopt for IT support – something to do with teaching a person to fish (which, once we considered the high levels of mercury in seafood, was fine by the PFY and myself).

Still, it's a challenge to even the most patient of people when your user fails to grasp the simplest point and click concepts – especially when you know that the **moment** you leave the room they'll be paraphrasing your instructions in an effort to pass themselves off as an IT guru.

“You want to open the INI file with WordPad and remove the line which says 64 bit,” I say.

...

“No, the INI file,” I repeat.

...

"The one with DOT I-N-I at the end," I say helpfully. “No, NOT THAT ONE! The one with the same name as your application. Just quit out of that one, that's your machine's boot order. No DON'T SAVE IT, you've chopped a line off the top! DON'T Re..! Why the HELL did you reboot?!” I snap, thinking for a moment about the 'sanity instillers' in their easily-broken display cases in the stairwell. Then about the security cameras...

“I'm... going to have to go back to my office and get a boot CD,” I say, exiting before something bad happens.

My trip to our new Mission Control for Knoppix therapy is intercepted by the Boss.

"I suppose this ridiculous plan is your idea!" he snaps, oozing the sort of sarcasm which will see him second in my mental list of "people most likely to come into contact with a rusty fire axe in the next few hours if they're not careful".

"What plan, what idea?" I ask.

"Follow me!" he snaps, leading the way through Mission Control, down the shiny new services corridor, into the server room, stopping momentarily >bip< >bip< to read a text message from the service desk's call escalation paging system.

"It's... beautiful!" I say, admiring the PFY's handiwork as I step into the server room.

"It is isn't it?" the PFY says proudly.

"It's like being in a geeky Tardis!" I gasp, looking around me happily.

"I know!" the PFY bubbles, to the Boss's annoyance.

"How long did it take to put them up?" I ask.

"I started last night," he admits. "And finished about half an hour ago."

I have to hand it to the PFY, it's like a work of art – there must be at least a thousand mirror tiles covering the walls of the server room - making the place look ten times its half-size.

"I had a few boxes left over so I did the corridor as well," the PFY adds, still smiling away to himself.

"And the glass door?" I ask.

"Not just ANY glass door," the PFY says. "It's 42mm armor glass and weighs so much it needs special hinges. Not only can it stop a bullet, it can also stop an IT manager who has a parallax error because the corridor walls are mirrored too..."

"Ah, that'll account for the smudge," I say.

"It's a stupid idea," the Boss says, >bip< >bip< pausing to read yet another text helldesk message. "And dangerous too."

"Stupid?" I say. "But with these mirrors we'll be able to see a service lamp from almost anywhere in the room. And safe because you'll be able to find faults before they turn into something much worse!"

"It's stupid," the Boss says. "And I want them removed!"

"But they're glued on!" the PFY replies. "They'd rip all the wall lining out!"

"And it might be asbestos," I add, just for old time's sake.

"It's **not** asbestos and the walls **can** be relined," the boss snaps. "That's what we've got a decorating budget for."

"What do you think paid for the mirror tiles?" the PFY asks. "Not to mention the door!"

"I..." the Boss says, winding up for a real whine. >bip< >bip< "Oh for Pete's sake, would you go and look at that application install at finance!"

"I was on my way when you grabbed me," I respond, now feeling suddenly cheerful. "Anyway, it's only one machine."

"It was one machine before, but it's all of them now," he says, reading from his phone. "They'd all installed that application, which was fine till they used your instructions to fix it."

"MY instructions?!" I seethe, feelings of cheer gone.

"Yes - and you'd better get a wiggle on as there's a pay run due this afternoon."

"Get a wi.." I gasp, before the finality of the situation grabs me. "Of course, I'll get right onto it - but could you do me a favor and get the door to the stairwell?"

"I... suppose so."

...

>tinkle<

...

BOFH: Lock and reload

Cheap at four times the price

Published Friday 5th September 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 29 "We should sue!" the PFY snaps angrily, thumping the Boss's desk with vigor. "We can't let them get away with this!"

"Really?" the Boss asks. "I'd hardly have thought you'd want to sue a fellow professional?"

"PROFESSIONAL!" the PFY gasps. "They're cowboys! What sort of outsourcing company wouldn't put in a redundant network to their clients?"

"Well, to be fair, we didn't ask for a redundant network..." the boss admits graciously.

"We didn't ask that they didn't install our servers in a Turkish bath house, beside an oil heater with a tap immediately overhead either, but we sort of expect that they're not going to do it," the PFY counters.

"Yes but there's expectations and there's expectations," the Boss responds.

"There's not! We wanted them to host our servers and we paid them good money to do so. We had a service level around 24 by 7 access and yet instead we get limited access if and when their network connection is up - it's just not on!"

"I admit that it's not optimal..." the Boss agrees.

"Not optimal - the network went down seven times THIS MORNING!"

"And what did their helpdesk say about it?"

"They said it was a problem our end.."

"Have we checked our... end?"

"Of course we have!" the PFY snaps, "and there's nothing wrong here. The link light remains constantly on, the router shows the interface is up and has no errors - the problem's at their end."

"I still think we should go easy on them," the Boss says. "After all they're a new crowd and they're probably still getting things sorted out. And let's not forget - they were the cheapest."

"Cheapest?" the PFY blurts. "They were the most expensive!"

"No, they were the cheapest," the Boss counters. "Perhaps you didn't see the final contract - I managed to talk them down to a third of what they originally quoted."

"Do you have a copy of the contracts?" the PFY asks

"I... sure," the Boss says, rustling around in some folders on his desk "This.. >shuffle< is the original contract and... here's >shuffle< the revised one. I'm quite the negotiator."

"Yes," the PFY says, skimming the pages. "Quite a coup. You managed to get them to reduce the price to a third of the original and substitute the word Monthly for the original Annually."

"I, what?!" he gasps, snatching the papers back quickly. "THE BASTARDS!!! Why that's... uh..."

"Four times the original price?" the PFY suggests.

"The F****G PR**KS!!" the Boss shouts, knocking the papers off his desk in a fury.

"And you can bet they did it on purpose," the PFY says. "They're probably laughing their arses off now, what with the crap network and all."

"RIGHT, THEY'RE NOT GETTING AWAY WITH IT, WE'LL BLOODY SUE!"

Its funny what can pop into your mind when you're bored, isn't it? One minute you're sitting in your nice new office in a nice new building, while your assistant is pretending to work in the nice new server room - when really he's next door in the nice new ghost facility taking care of a couple of backups on the systems we're pretending to host offsite for a huge amount of cash...

And then suddenly, for no reason at all, you just reach over and type RELOAD on the core router's console window. And then you make a rule for yourself that every time you get a coffee you'll do it again. And then you start to feel a little bad - because seven cups of coffee is rather a lot for a morning...

Swapping the revised contract for the monthly one was the PFY's idea.

"You know what?" the PFY says. "Better than sue them, we should publish all this on the web. We should post just what we think about them and their crap service!"

"You're right!" the Boss says, snatching up his keyboard and tapping away furiously. "How do you spell shitcake - with a hyphen?"

"I prefer without..."

A quarter of an hour later, the PFY gives me the prearranged signal and I rock on up to the Boss's desk.

"That's that router problem sorted out then," I say to the PFY. "Turns out that the word RELOAD was stored in the terminal program's callback buffer and one of the interfaces had a control-E in its name."

"Oh," the PFY says, faking illumination. "So every time you'd show the interfaces the router would reboot and take the network out?"

"I know - all my fault," I say. "So lucky we didn't sue after all - what with one of their major investors being that rampant solicitor and all. We'd have been in court for years and he'd have sued the pants off us."

"Ah well," the PFY says, turning to the Boss. "Perhaps he'll settle out of court?"

I smell some holiday money. Well, a hint of excrement from the Boss's general direction, but mainly holiday money...

BOFH: Back in the saddle

Riding roughshod over the cowboys

Posted 12th September 2008 11:10 GMT

Episode 30 “How are you doing?” I say cheerfully, extending my hand in greeting to the two cabling guys that the beancounters got to shift some data cabling around – without telling us. “Clint and... John isn't it?”

“Ay?” One of them says. “I'm Steve and this is Dave.”

“My mistake,” I say. “I was obviously thinking of Clint Eastwood and John Wayne – two other cowboys.”

“Cowboys?” Steve gasps unhappily. “What do you mean?”

“The job you did for the Beancounters – have to say I'm impressed. Most people would just let the network admin know that they needed to extend the VLAN to another distribution closet in the building instead of running an over-length hunk of dodgy Cat-6 point to point - but you didn't let that stop you, did you?”

“I liked the joint in the middle of the cable, insulation taped to a heating pipe,” the PFY says sarcastically. “Because insulation tape holds best when it's nice and warm. And jointing Cat-6 with a punchdown block stuck to a heating pipe in the middle of a duct really *is* an underrated cabling technique.”

“We'd already cut the cable to length because we thought there'd be tie wires,” Dave mumbles.

“Of course you did,” I say. “And there was. Deceptively labeled 'Tie Wires' along with the destination closet number. That said though, which cable manufacturer training course was it that recommended stapling Cat-6 along a skirting board?”

“Tha...” Dave says, before the PFY interrupts.

“BT doesn't count!”

“The thing I don't get though is,” I continue. “Why you didn't run the cable between comms rooms and patch into the existing structured cabling network instead of running it to the faceplate and using our existing WARRANTIED Cat-6 cable as a pull wire? After breaking the faceplate because you didn't realize where the screws were, then losing the screws when you did?”

“We thought it might be over-length so we were trying to reduce it,” Dave murmurs.

“Yes,” the PFY says. “We TDR-ed it. At 175 meters you could probably have run it to the toilets and back, just to be on the safe side.”

“They made us do it,” Clint – I mean Steve – blurts, much to Dave's annoyance.

“Who made you do it?”

“The bloke in the office. He said they'd pay extra if we didn't go through the comms rooms.”

“Ah, so you're saying that one of the beancounters **told** you to link between offices on different floors – presumably so they wouldn't be subject to our patching regime?” I ask.

“I... suppose so,” Dave says, not wanting to get too involved in any office politics. Smart man.

“And the cable – it was rated for POE?”

“Which standard? 12, 24, 48 volt, 20 watts?”

“I was thinking more along the lines of 240 Volt up to 20 Amps,” the PFY says.

...One night and one small faceplate fire later...

“I don't understand it,” one of the beancounters sniffs.

“Well it was quite simple really,” the PFY lies. “It seems that a section of unapproved data cabling must have worn through some power cabling with the vibration of the aircon unit that it was cable tied to, causing a massive increase in current down the line.”

“I wasn't talking about the power thing.”

“Oh you mean the fires?”

“You said it was smoke!” he bleats. “From the wall socket.”

“We call that a fire,” the PFY says, condescendingly. “Because where there's smoke...”

“Yes, but why did you have to put an axe through my LCD monitor and my desktop machine? They can't have been on fire!”

“Can never be too careful,” the PFY says. “Fire can spread like lightning – and as we all know lightning travels at 186,000 miles per second! You should be thanking me!”

“And my iPod,” he sniffs.

“It was plugged into the desktop – no doubt charging. No telling what might have happened if the battery had exploded! And again, I was rather expecting a bit of gratitude...”

“And the server upstairs?”

“Fire's a tricky beast. I'm trust my supervisor's decision to hose it down until he was sure it was completely safe!”

“Yes but he hosed down every machine in the room - as well as our filing cabinets and my manager's bonsai.”

“Yes,” the PFY responds. “Unfortunately though, the problem was that the cable wasn't in the structured cabling system so we couldn't use netdisco to figure out which machine might be affected. Ultimately we had to choose safety first and hose down everything.”

“And this all happened in the middle of the night you say?”

“Yes, and it was lucky we were both here,” the PFY says. “Or things might have been different.”

“You'd be surprised at the number of situations we're able to resolve out of hours just by happenstance,” I add, jumping into the conversation.

“Although we'll still be putting this down as a callout,” the PFY adds.

“Well we won't be paying!”

“Now now,” I say, defusing the situation. “You say that, but I'm sure you see the value of a few pennies expended so that my assistant and myself stop off for a quick look-around before going home after a vendor presentation. Just to make sure things are OK.”

“No.”

“Not even to make sure some poor bean... accountant such as yourself hasn't had a nasty accident and been trapped in the lift for hours and hours?”

“I... I'll see what I can do.”

BOFH: Remote access malarkey

Don't mark yourself as a target

Posted 19th September 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 31 "...And so you can just log in to my machine and look at it whenever you like?" our user asks indignantly.

"Uh-huh," the PFY says, fixing the user's printer settings while he's talking.

"And I don't have to give you permission or anything?"

"I'd have assumed that was implied by ringing the helpdesk?" the PFY says.

"Yes but surely you'd ring me beforehand - as a courtesy, if nothing else!?"

"No, the courtesy bit is me looking up a helpdesk call on a Friday afternoon after three lunchtime pints," the PFY says.

"I... is this the way you normally solve problems?"

"Sometimes," the PFY admits. "Although other times I find that if I leave the call open long enough the user'll go back into their printer settings and remember they stuffed around with the local printer/network printer combo and put it right themselves. But like I say - I'm feeling courteous this afternoon."

"I'd like to speak with your Supervisor!"

"Absolutely," the PFY says (courteously). "Putting you through now!"

>RING<

It never ceases to amaze me how every now and then an otherwise sane user suddenly starts believing that they, their email, and their personal files and instant messages would become *so interesting* for an administrator that they would forgo the worlds of computer games, movie torrents, porn and piracy simply to peruse *their* desktop in the hopes of finding something which could only be - let's face it - disappointing.

I mean when the world's your oyster you don't generally settle for fish paste...

"Hello there," I say, handsfree enabled. "IT... Oh... Management, I guess." (For I too have had three pints at lunchtime, plus a couple of extremely generous shots of The Macallan.)

"I was just talking to your systems person and he was most unhelpful."

"Really?" I say. "On a Friday afternoon - after three pints? I'm surprised he answered the phone at all."

"Look, this is serious. He was logged into my machine without my permission."

"*Technically*," I say, as the Macallan is known to fire up the pedant in me, "that would be the *company's* machine, however as we're all friends here we should look into it. When exactly did he log into it?"

"Just now."

"He can't have - he's been here the past hour."

"He did it over the network."

"Oh right, remote administration - you must have logged a helpdesk call then?"

"Yes - but surely you'd call me before just rifling through my desktop!"

"No not really," I say. "But give us a minute and I'll just check the job. >clickety< . . . >Pregnant pause while I check my eBay bids, order some more coffee for the espresso machine and fire up Bioshock for some afternoon boredom relief< Yes, a printer config problem. It's been... resolved by the look of it. So no harm done with the remote access."

"But then he could do it at any time!"

"True - but it's relatively simple to stop this from happening if it worries you," I say.

"How?"

"There's two ways that we commonly recommend - one's called shutdown and the other one's not logging a call with the helpdesk. But to be completely honest, shutdown's your best option."

"Why's that then?" he asks, suspiciously.

"Look," I sigh. "It's a Friday afternoon and I can see where this is going, so why don't we just cut to the chase? We get calls from concerned users like yourself upon occasion and I'll tell you what I tell them: When it comes to an administrator's interest in your affairs you're competing against the rich tapestry of the internet - and losing. The only thing that can possibly be done to engage our interest in you is for you to complain about your lack of privacy - because then we start wondering what the hell it is you have that you don't want us to see. And before you know it the administrator concerned has passed you on to someone such as myself whose sole purpose is to keep you talking long enough to fire off a backup of the contents of your hard drive."

>**Scrabble**<

"Oh it's too late now," I say. "By now my assistant will be poring over the contents of your 'My documents' folder, skimming your instant message logs, ferreting through your browser cache and ultimately nosing through your email - which he didn't even need access to your desktop to do in the first place."

>**Slam**<

>Ring<

"Hello?" I say.

"What's this I hear about you rifling through someone's desktop machine?" the Boss snaps.

"Oh that!" I say. "It was just a remote administration thing - a user had stuffed up their printer settings and my assistant had connected remotely to fix it."

"Without talking to him about it?"

"No - we were just adjusting the settings - same as we did for your machine last week."

"You logged into my machine last week? You didn't ask me!"

"Technically it's not your machine," I say nodding knowingly at the PFY. "However as we're all friends here we should..."

BOFH: The Mandelboat virus

A handy excuse

Posted 3rd October 2008 10:52 GMT

Episode 32 If there's one thing a lifetime in computing teaches you, it's how to cover up your mistakes...

"Oopsy," the PFY says in a casual tone mid-keypress - the sort of casual tone which, by its very casualness, means it's not casual at all.

"What did you do?" I sigh, fully expecting to hear that some poor user now has a vast amount of space available where their files used to be.

"Ah... a little problem with one of my VBS scripts," the PFY says. "I think I may have changed everyone's address book surname to 'Chutney'."

"How?"

"Well I was just writing a quick script to change the Boss's surname randomly to something mildly offensive every day."

"Well it's just a surname," I say. "Fix yours and mine and tell anyone else who asks that it's a known problem with Service Pack 3. No! Make that Service Pack 3a - it sounds more plausible."

"Service Pack 3a of what?" the PFY asks.

"Now let's not get technical, SP3a should be enough for them."

"And how do I explain the missing files?"

"What missing files?"

"Well I was moving all the Boss's files into a folder called 'Ferret' - only I moved everyone's files there."

"And then clicked on 'Yes to all'?"

"Uh-huh."

"So you've mixed everyone's files up in a folder called Ferret and potentially overwritten a stack of them?"

"Yeah. The original plan was that you'd have to look at your surname and work out the second half of the offensive phrase to locate your files. Like a combination lock. Only it looks like everyone's affected."

"Okay. Drop the core router," I say decisively.

"Ay?"

"Move your network to the ghost facility LAN, drop the company core router and we'll say it's a major network outage. Then just restore the files from the early morning backups."

>clickety<

"Though we didn't run a backup last night" the PFY says as an afterthought.

"What?"

"It was a pay day - we never run backups on a pay day so that there's no bank payment data trail in case the auditors..."

"Oh yes, of course. Yesterday morning's backups then."

"But people will notice their files have changed."

"The Mandelboozer virus!"

"What?!"

"The Mandelbrot virus - it reverts the last set of changes in a document."

"You called it the Mandelboozer virus before!"

"Yes, that's another thing the virus does - changes its name."

"There's no such thing!"

"There will be once you get into Wikipedia and create it."

. . . moments later . . .

>crash<

"I think the network's down," the Boss wheezes, redfaced from the 20-metre dash from his office.

"Yes, it's the MandelBank virus," I say.

"Make up your bloody mind!" the PFY interrupts.

"It reverts files to previous versions, which causes network spikes which can lead to router reboots," I continue.

"If only we'd installed Service Pack 3a," the PFY says, not wanting to miss an opportunity.

"Mandelbank - I've never heard of it," the Boss says.

"It's in Wikipedia, look it up," I respond.

"I can't, THE NETWORK'S DOWN!" the Boss yells.

"Use your cellphone browser."

While the Boss is devoting 50 per cent of his mental CPU to working out how to use the browser on this phone (the other 50 per cent being remembering the way back to his office), the PFY completes the Wiki entry and starts the recovery process.

"Bugger," the PFY says.

"What?"

"When we took the network down it looks like a nagios script has fired off about a million messages then kicked off an automated recovery of all our crucial server images to the virtual environment."

"Cancel them."

"I can't. The switch on the admin vlan is isolated when the router's down."

"Reboot the router!" I snap.

"But then people will be able to access their files."

"Not now the Mandelboober virus has infected the building management system. >tap< >tappety<" I say, logging into the building management system. "It's back-purging the dust filters into the aircons and turning on the heating which has >clickety< tripped the fire alarms!"

JANGLE

. . . The next day . . .

"So this virus thing is all taken care of then?" the Boss asks.

"Yes," I say. "We managed to isolate the affected building components and clean the virus out of them all."

"Yes, it was a pity you didn't find them all before the security system shut the basement doors on my car as I was exiting."

"We didn't know the security system was infected till then," I say, barely suppressing a chuckle.

"And you're sure it's all fixed now?"

"Absolutely," I say. "We've run a security scan over the entire network, top to bottom and it only has a couple of small recommendations."

"So why did the doors slam on my car again this morning?"

"A booting glitch," I say, as the PFY coughs loudly to cover a snicker.

"So what were the recommendations?"

"It's technical," I say.

"Try me."

"Apparently we're supposed to install SP3a and run a VBS script to tidy up any problems it might cause - but frankly I'm not too keen on doing it."

"We can't risk it happening again," the Boss snaps. "Do it."

"OK, if you insist."

...

...

JANGLE!

BOFH: Unfriendly ghosts

The expense of defense

Posted 10th October 2008 11:02 GMT

Episode 33 "But why can't we visit the site?" the Boss bleats one morning when we shoot his idea of seeing the ghost facility down.

"It's a defense site," I lie. "They host defense computers as well as stuff for companies like us. They're probably not allowed to show people through their server rooms."

"We should just turn up unannounced and say there's some server problem that we have to fix urgently that can't be fixed over the network," the Boss suggests.

"That would assume (a) that we can create some legitimate sounding problem requiring a site visit, and (b) that we even knew where their site is," I counter.

"You don't know where our servers are?!" the Boss gasps.

"Of course not," the PFY says. "It's part of the contract. If we knew where our servers were, we could theoretically compromise the security of the country's distributed IT defense systems."

"Exactly what defense data is held at these sites?"

"We could tell you, but then we'd have to kill you."

"Perhaps we'll skip that bit then?"

"So we don't have to tell you?" the PFY says.

"Look," the Boss says, ignoring him. "We pay good money - no, VERY good money for this external hosting arrangement, and I'd like to know how it's being spent. I'm not paying top dollar for hosting when our critical services could be operating out of the back room of some office building! I want to see what we're paying for!"

"They don't let you visit," the PFY repeats "It's a security thing."

"Then perhaps we shouldn't pay!" the Head Beancounter responds, entering Mission Control from his lurk-point outside. "That's a financial thing!"

I realize now that this is a setup and the Boss has been committing IT treason in actively conspiring with the Beancounters to find some unmet SLA in our external hosting service contract, so as to derail the 'external hosting' gravy train of the PFY and myself...

"Maybe we can get some photos?" the PFY suggests.

"We'd want to see the facility," the Boss says.

"Both of us," the Beancounter adds.

"I'll make some calls," I say.

Half an hour later the PFY and I have a rough plan of them being hooded (for 'security reasons') at night (to 'coincide with shift changes') bundled in the back of a van and driven around local streets for half an hour before being brought up through the freight elevator to our ghost facility.

To disguise the server room a little, the PFY's going to flip all the floor tiles upside down, remove the rack doors and slap lots of anti-terrorism posters everywhere. We've also lined up a bouncer from a local pub to dress in khaki and 'act military', dropping the occasional bit of IT patter. To complete the picture we've asked the Boss and Beancounter to supply scans of their passports 'for ID verification and validation purposes'.

...

A day later and the Boss and Beancounter are ushered out of the freight elevator looking slightly disheveled - thanks to the PFY's high speed negotiation of a couple of the city's parks.

"So this is it then?" the Beancounter asks angrily. "All that money for this?"

"State of the art facility, this," our bouncer says.

"It's no better or worse than we have in our own building!" the Boss snaps.

"It may as well be our building," the Beancounter fumes. "We're being ripped off!"

I'm wondering if the PFY can hear any of this, watching us - as he is - from the CCTV monitor beside the Halon release in the next room...

"And we pay all that money for THIS?" the Boss snarls as our security guard departs 'to do his rounds'.

"It's a state of the art room with redundant UPS, Environme-"

"I don't care if it's got state of the art bloody environmental monitoring with round the clock surveillance..."

"Actually, it has," I murmur.

"...we're being ripped off! This is never a defense facility! I worked in defense and they'd never use this sort of equipment."

"I think..."

"There's no log book!" the Boss says triumphantly.

"Pardon?"

"There's no log book - we didn't sign in and out - I'm sure that's part of the contract!" the Boss says triumphantly.

"They got photocopies of your passports."

"Yes, but we didn't sign in and out - it says they'll do that, in the contract!" the Beancounter says happily.

"So you're going to void the contract over a technicality?" I ask, rubbing my jaw thoughtfully.

"YOU BET!" the Boss says.

"And we'll go back to hosting it ourselves?"

"Hell no!" the Beancounter says. "The current on site facility cost us a fortune - there's no way we're going to expand it to house these servers! No, we've found an excellent hosting place in Luton which is dirt cheap."

"You're going host our servers in Luton?" I ask, looking at the CCTV camera, thinking about that scene at the end of *Wag the Dog*.

"Yes. Only it's cheaper if we provide the technical support - so one of you's going to have to be relocated to Luton."

"Luton?! Yes. Yes, I'm sure we can work something out," I say, creaking the door open. "I'll just let the security guy know we'll be leaving..."

Nod

>Slam<

HISSESS

BOFH: Fine detective work

The Boss applies his sleuth skills

Posted in [BOFH](#), 24th October 2008 10:57 GMT

Episode 34 "What's this?" the Boss demands, tossing a tattered faux leather-covered book at me.

"This?" I say. "It looks like someone's diary."

"Your assistant's - but what's inside it?"

"I don't know. I'm not in the habit of reading personal stuff," I respond, choking down a chuckle.

"I suggest you do!" he snaps.

"Why, what am I looking for?"

"Just look."

>flip< >flip<

"Angela, kebab house at 7:30," I read.

"Not that, move on to nearer today."

"Boss's missus, pub, 8:30."

"WHAT?"

"Just jokes," I say, holding up the book. "The page is blank."

"Keep turning - this month!"

"Uh-huh," I say, flipping over a couple more pages. "What am I looking for?"

"What's that?" the Boss asks, jabbing his pudgy pinky at a page.

"This? What it says at the top of the page: *Schedule of Concrete Pours at poorly guarded building sites.*"

"And the next page?"

"*Woodland parks with no night time security and easily accessible backhoes.*"

"And the next page?"

"Lime storage facilities."

"And the next?"

"Crematoriums with dodgy door locks."

"And the next?"

"Pet food manufacturing plants."

"And the **next** page?"

"Glue Factories with no alarms," I say. "Look, what's your point?"

"What do you mean what's my point? Do you think I'm stupid?"

"Have you not heard the expression 'Never test for an error condition you don't know how to handle?'" I respond.

"I, uh... what's that got to do with anything? Anyway, that's not the point - look at those lists again."

"What am I looking for?" I ask, oozing innocence.

"What do you mean? You can't tell me you're not a little concerned - worried even?"

"About what?"

"About why someone should be collecting that sort information - what they might be planning to do with it!"

"You mean..." I say.

"Yes! I think your assistant is moonlighting as a security guard!"

What?

"I... Of course!" I gasp "It all makes sense now! The late-night drinking, the reality TV shows - the monosyllabic speech!"

"Aren't you concerned at all?"

"Not with detective work like that I'm not," I admit.

"We should find out what he's up to! It might be a conflict of interest!"

"A conflict of interest if he's going around guarding places at night?"

"It might be," the Boss says, less convincingly.

"Doubtful."

"But still, we should look. Where is he?"

"Off at lunch with the new woman from the pub."

"When do you expect him back?" the Boss asks furtively.

"Back? Oh, right! Um, in an hour?"

"Well maybe we should look through his cupboard, just in case there's more to it," the Boss suggests. "Where does he keep his stuff?"

"He keeps all his things in the storeroom, but I really don't think..."

. . . 30 seconds later . . .

"Oh no!" the Boss gasps as he pushes the door to the store open. "A spade and an old roll of carpet."

"Yeah," I say. "Right where those brand new, easily stolen and virtually untraceable 22 inch LCD monitors were stacked."

"But why's this stuff here?"

"No idea. From memory they've been here since around the time that auditor bloke went on holiday without telling anyone about it beforehand. Though perhaps it was all just in the boot of the PFY's car and he needed to make space for several boxes..." I hint.

"You don't think..." the Boss says, with just a hint of horror.

"What?" I ask equally mysteriously.

"...that he's a builder's labourer?"

"What?"

"Add it up," he says. "Old carpet, spade, building sites, places that need locks fixed..."

"Well now you put it that way, I suppose you could be onto something," I say.

"So it **is** a conflict of interest!"

"What is?"

"Him, he's working for other sites."

"I'm pretty sure there's no conflict."

"It is - I happened to notice that one of the building sites in that concrete pouring schedule is one of our competitors."

"Yes, insider trading and corporate espionage is rife amongst workers in the cement industry," I nod meaningfully.

"You can't be too careful. Give him a call - let's get to the bottom of this."

"You can't be serious - you want to interrupt a romantic lunch/evening to accuse the next Fred West of being a corporate spy?"

"What? Just call him!"

. . . Ten minutes later . . .

"And you're sure you don't know where those LCDs are?" I ask. "Fair enough"

"Well, is he coming in?" the Boss gasps.

"He's a bit tied up at the moment. But he did say he was happy to meet you here later on this afternoon to prove that your suspicions are totally unfounded."

"Well I suppose that will do."

"Fine. Oh, and he asked if you'd take the roll of carpet to your office so it'll save him a trip back here..."

"Oh. I suppose I could."

BOFH: Radiating sincerity

Wheely bad things are afoot

Posted in [BOFH](#), 31st October 2008 12:02 GMT

Episode 35 When you've got a problem it's always good to have a couple of bastards to call upon in times of trouble. Sadly, Brand and Ross aren't taking calls at the moment, so I have to call upon a fellow IT bastard, Jerry, for his thoughts...

"So how big is this pile of monitors?" he asks.

"180 last count," the PFY says.

"And you don't just dump them because?"

"He told the boss they cost five quid a pop to dispose of - because of the mercury."

"And the 900 quid?"

"Has been drunk," I admit.

"So you've got a basement full of old monitors that you want to get rid of?"

"Yes," the PFY says. "Soon, because I just bought a billiard table on eBay and I need the space."

"Right. And the monitors were replaced with?"

"22inch LCDs - 240 of them - or 265 including shrinkage," I say, pointing at the PFY.

"Right you are. 240 - A few Tasmanian desktop upgrades during the move?"

"Yes."

"OK... OK... Let me think... 180 CRTs, 240 LCDs, dumping cos... goddit!"

"What?!" the PFY and I ask.

. . . The next day . . .

"So walk me through this again," the new Boss says. "We have to get rid of all of the new LCD monitors because they don't have... Lead free solder?"

"Exactly," the PFY says. "We were running out of IT fitout budget because people were buying new office furniture and saying it was an IT expense simply because their PC sat on it. Or they did - to use their PC - in the case of new wheely chairs."

"And so one of your predecessors decided to buy monitors in bulk, direct from an overseas manufacturer - not realizing that the EU restrictions about importation of products with lead based solder?"

"And," I add "It turns out that these monitors have lead in them."

"So if there's concerns about lead in solders why are companies still using it in manufacturing?"

"Because some places in the third world don't have these restrictions" the PFY says "Like Africa, Bangladesh... Alambama..."

"...Luton," I add

"Who's going to know?" the Boss asks, in a rare moment of pragmatism.

"Obviously we'd be obliged by our professional ethics to let someone know," the PFY says sadly. "But no one wants to be a whistleblower."

"So what do you suggest - we tell our users that their monitors contain lead - making the company potentially liable for prosecution?"

"Goodness no," the PFY says. "95 per cent of them wouldn't care anyway. No, you've got to make them want to replace their monitors."

"Which is where this comes in," I say, handing over a glossy sheet of paper.

"What's this - a recall notice?" the Boss asks.

"Yeah, we printed it up this morning" I say. "The PFY's going to Chunnel to Belgium in the weekend and send about 20 of these to random people in the company. Then, in a couple of days we'll go and collect them in a suspicious manner saying that there's been some misunderstanding and that it's nothing to do with these monitors and that they're perfectly fine."

"But like you say - who'd care about lead?"

"The recall's about the hideous amounts of radiation they don't emit."

"They *don't* emit?"

"Yeah - if you make a particular point of saying they don't emit any, people will be sure they do. And they weren't made in that factory in Ukraine that used to be a power station. We also say it's merely a precaution and completely harmless so long as the minimum safe viewing distance is observed."

"What's the minimum safe viewing distance?"

"There isn't one - which will make them even more suspicious."

"Then there's this," the PFY adds, holding up a box.

"What's that?"

"A Geiger counter," the PFY says, "with the guts removed and a tiny circuit that just makes the occasional crackle and moves the needle randomly at the low end of the scale."

"Why?"

"Because sooner or later someone will hold it up to their ancient radium dial watch and notice that it doesn't crackle any more or less than it does any other time."

"Then they'll open it up and find there's no workings inside apart from the tiny circuit and some old batteries wrapped in insulation tape to give the unit some weight - and be positive there's a problem," I add.

"Then I'll go round assuring everyone that things are OK and the only other options are some old CRTs..."

"After shaving off small chunks of his hair," I add.

"I... do you think it'll work?"

"Hell yeah. Half of them will be off sick with headaches within the week and we'll swap CRT screens in while they're away,"

"But didn't you dump the old screens?" the Boss asks

"I did, but I'm sure we can pick up some here and there for... I dunno.. 10, 20 quid apiece."

"So what are we looking at?"

"Maybe a couple of grand?" the PFY says

"Plus the dumping fee for the LCDs - another two and a half," I chip in.

"I thought it only cost five quid?!"

"Five quid for mercury, but it's ten quid for radiation because they have to ship them to Liverpool - where birth defects would largely go unnoticed."

"And premature death is a blessing," the PFY adds.

. . . The next day . . .

"Jerry" I say "I've got those 240 LCD screens you were after - what did we say, 50 quid apiece?"

"Forty."

"Forty-five."

"Deal. Now, got any wheely chairs? The company's looking for about 100 or so..."

... That afternoon. . .

"Did you *know* that the gas piston in wheely chairs can explode?" the Boss whines, as an ambulance bears a poor unfortunate from Beancounter central away...

BOFH: Taking out a contract

Less is not actually Moore

Posted in [BOFH](#), 7th November 2008 12:21 GMT

Episode 36 "But the notes I have say you built a new machine just last year!" the Boss snaps, looking at the PFY's list of parts. "Why do you need a new one so soon?"

"It's technical," the PFY says "You wouldn't understand."

"Try me," the Boss snaps back.

"What do you know about Quad Core Processor Technology?"

"Nothing."

"L1 and L2 caching?"

"Nil."

"What about SATA2 drive speeds and Disk caching?"

"Again, nothing. Why?"

"Processor lookaside mean anything to you?"

"No."

"Maxwell's theorem - Ohm's Law?"

"Is that two separate things?"

"I'll take that as a 'No' then," the PFY says. "What about Nanometre technology?"

"Nope."

"Eldervisse's processor electron gating proposition?" the PFY asks, veering into excuse calendar territory.

"Is that even a real thing?" the Boss asks, both annoyingly and astutely.

"Of course it is," the PFY says, offended.

"It sounds a bit made up."

"I can assure you that it's as relevant to computing as the Moore's Inverse Square Law of IT Satisfaction."

"What's that theory then?"

"Well, the basic theory is that as machine processing power increases, user dissatisfaction with momentary application pauses do as well."

"I thought it was about computing power doubling every 18 months?" the Boss blurts.

"No, you're thinking about Gordon Moore," the PFY counters. "I'm talking about Reggie Moore - the famous Helpdesk supervisor."

"You're making this up!"

"I'm not!" the PFY snuffles.

"We'll just see then >tappity< >tap<"

You've got to give the PFY marks for Wikisalting. Not only has he inserted entries into Wikipedia, he's fabricated websites, complete with photos of IT types pointing at graphs (one of these quite patently the barman of the local pub in a suit jacket with some pens stuck in the top pocket).

"So what's this got to do with you needing a new desktop machine?" the Boss asks, admitting defeat.

"Look, if you take Moore's law into account..."

"Which one?" the Boss says sarcastically.

"Both of them," the PFY says. "Anyway, if you take into account Moore's' laws then my machine..."

"Which is only... ten and a half months old," the Boss points out.

"...is already over halfway through its useful life. So if I'm to remain abreast of current technology I should be replacing it every nine months!"

"As should I," I put in, not wanting to miss out on a new gaming rig either.

"Three hundred quid for a Graphics adapter!" the Boss says, pointing at a line item.

"I need one to run two screens simultaneously at high res!" the PFY insists.

"You don't HAVE two high res screens," the Boss retorts.

"They're mentioned the seventh line down" the PFY sniffs.

"We can't afford it!"

"Which, his one or my one?" I ask.

"Either one."

!!!

It's one thing to deny the PFY a new machine, what with his flimsy arguments about needing it and all, but it's quite another to deny me the chance to improve my service level to the users. Particularly when I happen to have laid my hands on a pre-pre-release copy of FEAR2...

"But this is a priority!!" I gasp. "Can't we cut something less important from the budget - like those multifunction printers - no one uses all the features on them! They'd be happy with the old lasers they used to have."

"It's too late, the multifunction devices have already been bought," the Boss says, handing another page over. "There's barely enough money left to cover paper."

"I... that's what a printer costs!?" the PFY gasps.

"No, that's what a toner cartridge costs," the Boss responds. "Apparently the contract that my predecessor signed gives the MFD outfit exclusive rights to all the company's printing at 1.25 p a page and includes all expenses apart from paper and toner cartridges. No one thought of checking the toner cartridge cost. The company either goes paperless or the IT department will go bankrupt."

"Not a worry >clickety<" the PFY says, shutting down the print server. "Now, about that new desktop?"

"I think it's going to take a lot more than that to make the printer company re-evaluate the two year lease..."

"YOU SIGNED A TWO YEAR LEASE!" the PFY gasps, horrified at the possibility of being the laughing stock of his gaming peers with the oldest desktop...

"Let's just calm down," I say quietly. "I'm sure the printer company will see reason and let us out of our contract."

...

"It's a signed contract," the MFD rep says, "and as such I'm unable to do anything about it. It's very clearly stated that we'll pay all expenses except toner cartridges and paper in exchange for the favorable per page printing model proposed."

"So you're not even going to consider a shorter contract or cheaper toner cartridges?" I ask

"I'd like to help you, but a contract is a contract..."

"Fair enough," I say, to the disgust of the Boss. "Thanks for coming and meeting with us. I'll just show you out of the building..."

. . Five minutes later outside the building . .

"No hard feelings?" the MFD guy says apologetically.

"None whatsoever," I say as an MFD sails into the windscreen of his car ">CRASH< Oh dear, someone must have accidentally bumped that out the window. Lucky ONE of us is paying for the insurance though. >CRASH< Oh, two clumsy people..."

BOFH: The paperless cafeteria

A movement builds

Posted in [BOFH](#), 14th November 2008 11:59 GMT

Episode 37 "How's that paperless office coming along then?" the Boss asks enthusiastically as he enters Mission Control on his daily constitutional.

"Paperless office?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, you were saying the other day that we should go to paperless."

"No I was saying how our printing and copying contract was extortionate," the PFY responds. "And anyway, that's all sorted out now."

"Ah! Well. I kind of mentioned the paperless office idea to a couple of people and they're quite keen."

"Are they?" I ask.

"Well if we're talking paperless, check this out," the PFY says, pointing to a web page on his screen.

"What am I looking at?" The Boss asks.

"It's the website that the caterers use for our meals."

"Really? So they use real ingredients and not just tramp vomit?" I ask.

"Yeah," the PFY says. "They subscribe to this site, which tells you what meals to prepare for what tier of punter. You choose a week of meals and it orders all the ingredients to be delivered for the food you selected."

"Tiers?" I ask.

"Yeah. You have the Platinum range, which is CEO material - escargot and all that, Gold, which is the sort of stuff you'd see at a posh catered event, Silver class, which is nice catered food, down through the various other tiers, to us."

"What's our tier?" I ask.

"Uh... it doesn't actually have a name."

"If we're talking Platinum, Gold and Silver then we're probably around Lead?" I ask.

"As in poisoning," the PFY adds.

"Indeed," I say. "But that's probably because Transuranic heavy metals may not be used where there is life"

"Huh?"

"Nothing, just a quote from the past."

"Well?"

...

"Sapphire's not an element!" the PFY cries a few minutes later, poking a rather nasty hole in TV history.

"It hardly matters," The boss interjects. "So this is just a food ordering website saving the hassle of filling out a couple of forms. Surely there's not much paper saving in that?"

"It's more than that," the PFY says. "Each day the caterers go to the website and see the recipe along with pictures and a little video showing how to make it."

"And?" the Boss asks.

"And they don't print any of it. Though it does look like the web server is particularly poorly protected," the PFY hints.

"Meaning?"

"Someone could go into the website, make some fairly minor modifications to the recipe and end up with rather nice meat balls instead of the Hungarian glue-lash that they manage to make out of most things."

"But then you'd need to make a video and have pictures," I counter.

"Yes, that's where it comes unstuck - you'd only really get away with some minor quantity changes. However, that said, you *could* just change options on the webpage..."

"You mean like... change the tier of meals we're getting?" the Boss asks furtively.

"Exactly!" the PFY responds. "You could change the tier you want for this week's meals - and they might put it down to a keyboard error if the finance people complained about the end of month bill."

"So we could get..." the Boss says.

"Chicken korma, Peshawari naan and all the poppadoms you could eat? Yes," the PFY responds.

"But surely it's password protected?"

"Two minutes with a keypress recorder." the PFY says, holding up a sheet of paper with "CH3F" written on it.

"But surely the cafeteria people would know?"

"That's the great thing! The whole site's put together by some publicity seeking pot basher who's promoting new era meals - so the cafeteria staff never know what they'll be cooking from one day to the next."

"I... Let's try it with tomorrow's meals," the Boss mumbles. "Just to see."

"Okay, I'll just pick something in the silver range," the PFY says. "And the best thing about this >clickety< >tap< Is it's completely >click< paperless, meaning..."

"No audit trail!" I blurt.

. . . Lunch time the next day . . .

"This is amazing!" the Boss says, shoveling down a prawn malibari.

"True," I respond. "People are racing back for seconds instead of to the toilets!"

"We won't get away with it of course," he replies, the voice of reason intruding. "Finance is bound to find out any day."

"Yep. But maybe for a couple more days..."

"So perhaps you should... uh... pull out all the stops?" he hints.

"You mean... Platinum, all the mods?"

"Go for it!"

. . . The next day . . .

"You're not having any?" the Boss blurts, halfway through his second Fisherman's basket.

"No," the PFY says. "I had assumed that Platinum would be somewhat better than deep fried seafood and chips."

"Smothered in tartare sauce," the Boss responds. "It's bloody lovely - so light. A bit salty, but lovely. The staff are loving it."

. . .

"So," I ask the PFY moments later. "When are you going to tell him about your recipe update to deep fry them in castor oil?"

"A couple of minutes after I've visited all the toilets in the building."

"Ah," I say. "So you're committed to the paperless office thing then?"

"Oh yes!"

BOFH: The unwanted software compo

Anything for booze

Posted in [BOFH](#), 21st November 2008 11:52 GMT

Episode 38 "So let me get this straight," the Boss says, looking at his email to the PFY's latest masterpiece. "You're proposing a software... amnesty?"

"Yes," the PFY answers.

"And what's a software amnesty when it's at home?"

"It's a chance for people to turn in software they don't use any more," I explain. "So maybe you bought a product from somewhere and never actually got around to using it, either because it was hard work or because you just couldn't be stuffed learning how to use it properly."

"Like Microsoft Project," the PFY says.

"Or maybe you used it once, but it was such a bloody nightmare that you quietly deleted it off your machine and never told anyone about it."

"Like Windows ME," the PFY adds.

"Or maybe a manager of a group decided that they were going to make a change that mattered and move all their people some new version of something but before that could happen he was..."

"Pushed down the stairs," the PFY interjects.

"I was going to say 'told that the company was moving in another direction'."

"So what will this achieve, just finding out what people aren't using?"

"Partly, but also it helps us in the event that someone else in the company ever wants to buy some software again - as we can give them one of the returned pieces of software instead of then having two people hiding their bad software purchases."

"*Sell* them one of the returned pieces of software," the PFY comments.

"Yes of course."

"So how does this help the company?" the Boss asks.

"Because we don't end up buying more copies of software and we have lots more room in the bottom drawers of filing cabinets," I respond. "Nothing gets on my tits more than buying yet *another* copy of some software from some supplier when there's an unused one sitting in a filing cabinet somewhere. The bloody vendors love it, of course! And if you ring them and ask how

many licenses you have you hit that particular portion of their brain affected by amnesia - they've no idea - until the annual maintenance payments are due..."

"But don't we just end up rebuying the software from ourselves?"

"We do, but this way keeps the money inside the company."

"Till 4pm on a Friday," the PFY adds.

"At which time it's reinvested in company morale," I concur.

"So you're planning to just drink the money away?"

"Uh huh," the PFY responds.

"I think I've got a better idea," the Boss says, rubbing his chin. "Let's talk to the finance people and see if we can't get cost centers **paid** some nominal fee for returning their software."

"I don't -"

"PLUS they get an extra, larger payment - say half the product's current buy price if the software is subsequently required in-house. That way they're getting an incentive to return software."

"What if they subsequently realize that they need the software after all? Won't we look bad?"

"No, because we saved them rebuying it at retail anyway - and as you say, it keeps money inside the company."

Both the PFY and I are not sure the Boss has fully understood the alcoholic beverage supply aspect of this proposed idea.

"I still don't think it will motivate people," the PFY says, changing tack.

"What about if we had a prizes - for the group who returned the most value, and the group who bought the most from the available software pool?" the Boss gasps enthusiastically - not really realizing that all this project is really going to achieve is the unearthing of a large portion of the worst software in history...

"How would that work?" the PFY says.

"We'd calculate the value of the software they returned and the group that returned the most would earn a prize. And we'd also calculate the value of the software that groups *bought* from the pool and give a prize for that too - maybe 100 quid on the bar."

"Ah," the PFY says, keenly interested in the money-on-the-bar idea. "Two lots of 100 quid. Hmmm. But in the latter example wouldn't people just buy up vast quantities of crap software from the pool to win the prize, leading to exactly the same situation as before?"

"No!" the Boss snaps, wagging a finger. "They'd have to show a real business case - and we could verify it."

"It's not a bad idea," the PFY nods.

"I can't fault it," I say.

"I'll send the message out now," the Boss says, after making a few additions and modifications to the text.

. . . Three days later . . .

"I can't believe it!" the Boss burbles, wading through the piles of software clogging up Mission Control.

"I know," the PFY says. "We could almost open our own Symantec store!"

"I was thinking of applying for a Microsoft Reseller certification," I say from behind a mound of Vista install media.

"So which group's winning?" the Boss asks.

"Well it was a close race," the PFY says. "Because it looks like one of the Beancounters had his heart set on a Lotus Notes and Novell installation, but there was an incredibly large trunk of enough OS2 Warp install media to serve two thirds of the company - which no one's owned up to."

"So who won?"

"Well..." the PFY says. "It was us."

"You?" the Boss gasps.

"Yes, well when you factor in all the Server OS, Database, ERP licenses that we traded in when we went virtual, we won by miles."

"But..."

"I know, it hardly seems fair - but bear in mind that the company will now be able to use all those licenses for new services."

"I suppose you'll be wanting the 100 quid," the Boss sighs, admitting defeat quite quickly, really.

"That would do nicely," the PFY sniffs, as we choose that moment to break for a liquid lunch courtesy of the company.

. . .

"So," I say, as we down the first company-funded pint. "Any idea how we're going to get the second 100 quid?"

"No idea," the PFY says. "Though I did happen to make a quick call to the piracy hotline about someone running a stack of servers with no licensing earlier this morning. By my reckoning I expect we'll be back here next Tuesday."

BOFH: The Christmas party

Treasure hunting, BOFH-style

Posted in [BOFH](#), 5th December 2008 12:43 GMT

Episode 39 "...Which leads to the next item - the office Christmas function," the Boss says to the assembled masses of the IT department.

"The office function or the building function?" one of the helldesk geeks asks.

"Just the office," the Boss says. "The director and I have been talking and he's keen that we all do something together as a team building and morale boosting exercise."

"PAINTBALL!" the PFY cries excitedly.

"Uh, no, I think I'd like to do something else," another of the helldesk geeks sniffs, knowing all too well the harsh sting of the PFY's paintballs, stored - as they tend to be - in the PFY's freezer overnight.

"Yeah, no, I think we want something that's aimed to unite us rather than divide us," the Boss concurs. "Something which we can look back on in a few years and smile at"

"Yes, PAINTBALL!" I shout.

Were one blessed with the power of ESP at this point I'm fairly sure the PFY's thoughts would be something like a cross between an Arnie movie and *Platoon* - complete with Rolling Stones soundtrack - judging by the dreamy expression on his face.

"I think we'll skip the paintball idea," the Director interjects. "How about we do something that everyone would find fun?"

"But everyone loves paintball," the PFY says, apparently oblivious to the fact that half the IT staff have regressed into a semi-vegetative state at memories of past paintball encounters with him.

"Like I say, something *everyone* will find **fun**" the Director snaps.

"What about abseiling?" the Boss suggests.

"Uh, well, we're really looking for an activity we can do in the building - so everyone can be involved but we're still close at hand in case there's any systems upsets."

"We could abseil *off* the building," the PFY suggests.

Judging by their expressions alone the thought of the PFY standing above them - possibly holding a 19" CRT monitor - as they clamber down five stories hasn't struck a chord with the assembled IT staff.

"No, too dangerous," the Director says. "And not something that everyone can get involved in all at once."

"What about..." the Boss' PA starts.

"Yes?"

"Well some friends of mine did a 'great race' thing at their work. They all got into teams of four and had to complete various challenges to find the treasures hidden in the building."

"Hmm, interesting - show of hands?" the Boss says.

. . . One all-but-unanimous vote later . . .

"So it's decided then, we'll set up a 'race' on Friday afternoon for various treasures hidden around the building, ending up back here at 4pm for nibbles and drinks!" the Boss bumbles.

. . . Friday, 7am, in a mostly darkened building . . .

"Treasure number one, back of the fire hose reel, northern stairwell, second floor" the PFY says to me, not looking up from his view of the Boss and Director on the CCTV monitor.

"Got it," I say, scratching away furiously on a piece of paper.

"Treasure two, inside the pot plant, second floor foyer."

. . .

"Treasure 22, inside the CD storage bin on the Boss' PA's desk," the PFY says finally.

"Don't you feel a little... bad, cheating like this?" I ask him.

"What, you mean after none of the staff wanted be on a team with us?" the PFY asks.

"No, me neither," I chuckle.

. . . That afternoon, one early treasure-gathering mission later . . .

"Righto, off you go!" the Boss cries, handing out the clue envelopes to us all.

. . . Five minutes later, in Mission Control . . .

"How's it going?" I ask the PFY, leaning back to check out his monitor.

"One team's just found treasure one gone," he replies.

. . . Two hours later . . .

"Treasure 19, found to be gone."

. . . Ten minutes later . . .

"And that's treasure 22 not found," the PFY says. "Show time!"

. . . Five minutes later . . .

"Well," the PFY blusters from his pile of treasure, in response to the incredulous questions from the staff. "It was pretty simple really - the clues led us straight to everything."

"But there were four separate treasure paths!" the Boss gasps.

"And there were two key problem-solving people on our team," the PFY says. "We were bound to think outside the box and discover the other paths."

"Well, er, congratulations," the Director mumbles, not wanting to be a bad sport about it and ruin the Christmas morale.

"But to show we're fair and that Christmas parties should be fun for everyone," the PFY adds. "We've decided that everyone should choose a present from the pile."

"I... well, that's very generous of you!" the Boss says, as people make grabs at the treasure pile.

"Not at all!" the PFY replies. "Christmas should be fun for everyone. And with that in mind..."

The PFY's sentence is interrupted by the sound of the doors locking and the lighting controller clicking to 'off.'

"Paintball," the PFY continues, handing what feels like a holster and some night vision goggles to me in the dark...

>pop< ... >pop<>pop<>pop< ... >pop<>pop<

Now THIS is a Christmas party!

BOFH: Blackmail and fine wine

That's how they Roll

Posted in [BOFH](#), 12th December 2008 13:04 GMT

Episode 40 "So which of you is on call over the break?" the Boss asks.

"Why are you asking?" the PFY asks.

"Just thought it might be an opportune time to do a bit of housekeeping, you know, security audits... er..."

"Our firewall has Intrusion Detection built into it," the PFY explains.

"So we're safe then?"

"As safe as a domain with Windows 98, 98SE, ME, 2000, 2003, XP and 2007 can be."

"Not to mention the Macs in the colored pencil office," I add.

"True. So 'not very' is probably the answer you're looking for," the PFY responds.

"Don't you think this might be a good opportunity to do something about it - and maybe get on top of a couple of other small jobs as well?"

"You mean gather all the ancient and fruity crap into a pile and set fire to it?" the PFY asks.

"I was thinking more along the lines of faking a break-in and chucking everything in the nearest skip."

"I MEANT upgrade everything to a safe operating system and... tackle a couple of other jobs while the upgrades are running."

"Ah. Well... We only have 15 days over the break - so that's the Windows updates out - and you'd never pay the overtime for it to be done properly."

"Yes, overtime..." the Boss mumbles, "Tricky..."

"What's tricky?" the PFY asks, smelling something in the wind...

"Given the current financial situation..." the Boss starts.

"Yes, go on?"

"...the company's... er, suspended... um, overtime..."

"Suspended overtime!" the PFY gasps, before I can get to it. "Next you'll be telling me there's no on-call allowance or Christmas bonus!"

"Funny you should mention that..."

"You're kidding!" the PFY sniffs.

"Not at all - these are hard times and management have decided to tighten belts..."

"Yes, yes," the PFY says, "but what has autoerotic strangulation got to do with overtime and Christmas bonuses?"

"Not to mention on-call allowances," I add.

"Senior Management have taken a pragmatic approach to cost-cutting by trying to reduce the larger expenses whilst keeping the company running."

"So they'll be taking a pay cut - being one of the largest expenses."

"Not exactly..." the Boss responds evasively.

"Returning their excessive bonuses from previous years? Implementing a Senior Management salary freeze?"

"Er..."

"They gave themselves a pay increase, didn't they?"

"Running a company in these harsh financial times isn't easy!" the Boss blurts. "There's a lot of pressure. Hard decisions have to be made..."

"Yes," the PFY nods knowingly. "The Clos du Mesnil '95 or the Clos du Mesnil '92 - It's a tough choice at the best of times. I'm surprised they didn't outsource the decision to one of their wives, college chums or 'nieces'."

"Ah. Yes. Speaking of outsourcing..."

"You're not... suggesting we end the outsourcing of our server room and servers?!" I gasp, watching 'the life to which I have become accustomed' draining away.

"I'm afraid so. They've done the numbers and remote-hosting our services is far more expensive than doing them in-house. We're going to have to cancel the contract."

"But there'll be penalty payments," I wheeze. "And we'll have to buy servers!"

"And get someone to extend the server room," the PFY adds.

"Yes, well, we sort of hoped..."

"!" the PFY says.

"Wait a minute," I say. "You're not suggesting we... buy some servers with no money, extend a computer room, install and migrate the entire company's computing, all in the Christmas break?"

"Well, I was hoping more that you'd be able to do it tonight and have enough loose change to buy me this car," the Boss says, holding up December's *Posh Roller* magazine.

"I'm sorry?" the PFY asks.

"Well, it's a funny thing," the Boss says. "I was looking over the building plans with a view to extending my office and happened to notice that the server room, mirrored though it is, is substantially smaller than it appears on the plans. Imagine my surprise when some gentle probing with a sledgehammer this morning revealed a hitherto unknown server facility with a hidden doorway to your office. A surprise dwarfed by that which awaited me when I looked up the directors of our server hosting outfit at the company's office. Telling senior management I could shave about 30 per cent off our IT spend was just the icing on the cake. Unless of course I don't get my new car - in which case it'll be close to 90 per cent..."

"But that's... blackmail!" the PFY says, looking aghast. "Anyway, how do we know that you've not passed this information on others who'll blackmail us as well?"

"I've told no one - this is between you two and me."

Oh dear.

"No one, you say?" the PFY says. "And I suppose you'll be wanting cash, not a check?"

"What do you think?"

"OK, OK," I say. "We admit defeat. We do keep some cash in the office."

"In the tape safe," the PFY says "at the back of the office..."

...

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BOFH: A safe bet

Bet your ass they wish to proceed

Posted in [BOFH](#), 23rd January 2009 12:02 GMT

Episode 1 "It's a Christmas miracle!" the PFY gasps, opening the safe door after our extended Christmas break to find... nothing.

"Hardly," I say, reaching down to the floor of the safe to retrieve a business card from amongst the coins and cards than no doubt fell out of the Boss's wallet. "Secure Safe Services. Protected Storage experts. 24 Hr on call."

"He had someone in to open the door!" the PFY swoons.

"Yes they did," our Boss snaps from the doorway behind us. "I managed to reach Directory Enquiries and get an answer before my cell phone battery died – and even more unbelievably the first person I called was willing to come out to sort the problem out. And I think you know what this means..."

"I won't be needing the roll of carpet, the company van and half a can of odor neutralizing air freshener?" the PFY queries.

"No..."

"That the tape safe isn't airtight like the manufacturer claimed?" I ask. "Nor does it block radio signals."

"Yes... But no."

"What then?"

"You're for the high jump!" the Boss snaps. "That's attempted murder!"

"What is?" I ask

"Trying to lock me in the safe over the holidays!"

"Nonsense!" the PFY says. "You shut yourself in the safe after having heaps of lagers and sending out that email about playing hide-and-seek on the last day."

"What email?"

"Trust me," the PFY says. "In no time at all there'll be email messages from you to the IT staff about a hide-and-seek marathon on the last day."

"And if you're not careful there'll be emails from you to the HR staff about a hide-the-sausage marathon on the last day as well!" I add.

"People would have said something!" the boss snaps back.

"Not if they didn't know they'd got a message. Like if it's sitting in their Junk Email folder. Until they get a message from the systems people asking them to check it for messages 'that might have got misdelivered over the break'."

"There's no proof!"

"Not yet - but then we're not talking court-of-law here, we're talking court-of-public-opinion. In a court of law they're looking for proof that you definitely did something, whereas in the court-of-public-opinion they're just looking for a hint that you might have done something – to fuel the rumor of you being a perverted sleaze with a fetish for enclosed spaces..."

"There's no proof I sent the messages, though."

"Oh you mean like computer forensics?" I say. "Then you haven't seen the PFY's tools for tampering with timestamps and injecting questionable phrases and image data into unallocated regions of a hard drive. Not to mention the one for manipulating the Exchange server to insert messages at certain times – from target machines. They're works of art. Honestly, as 'evidence generation' goes it's so compelling you'll be wondering yourself if you don't have some hidden tendencies that need a bit of over-voltage to sort out.."

"So... what are you proposing?"

"I'm proposing we put all these 'misunderstandings' behind us and start the year with a clean slate. We forget all that happened last year and start afresh this year."

"I... suppose so," the Boss concedes.

"And so I assume that you'll have to make some revisions to the statement that you no doubt made to security at the end of last year?"

"I... Yes."

"Something along the lines of a terrible misunderstanding when you were feeling a little tired and emotional and that you're really sorry if you made any unfounded allegations out of jealousy and spite."

"I... OK."

"Now, perhaps?" I say, picking up the phone receiver and handing it to him

Five minutes later the call is made. With a little bit of help from the PFY and myself the Boss manages to concoct a story to appeal to Security's neadertal intellect (ie an *EastEnders* episode) about a cocktail of fear, jealousy and high alcohol lager forcing him to make some rash statements that now, in the light of day, he regrets.

“So that's it then?” the Boss says. “No fake email messages?”

“Scout's honor. In fact, I'm feeling so good about it, I won't even keep all the crap you dropped in the bottom of the tape safe last year.”

“Ah yes, that. I'd better get it as it has my gym membersh... >nudge< >SLAM<

“I thought you said start the year with a clean slate?” the PFY asks.

“The year started two weeks ago. Now gimme a hand wrapping the safe in tinfoil before Directory Enquiries can answer...”

BOFH: Aspie no questions

The urge to destroy *is* creative

Posted in [BOFH](#), 20th February 2009 12:02 GMT

Episode 2 "It's... it's *destroyed*!" the Boss snuffles as he tilts the remains of his home computer up for me to see.

"True, but then he was just doing what you told him to do."

"It told him to go ahead and start the machine up if he thought it was fixed!"

"No, you said, 'OK, give it a bash' - a completely different thing altogether. He's a very literal man, my assistant."

"No one would mistake 'give it a bash' for 'hit it repeatedly with a hammer'."

"No one except my assistant, apparently."

"No, no one at all. No one in their right mind would spend half an hour fixing a machine for someone then smash it to pieces."

"Ah yes, I'm glad you said that."

"Said what?"

"The thing about right mind. Because... well..."

"What?"

"I think my assistant is partially affected by Aspergers syndrome," I lie.

"Bollocks!"

"No, it's true. It's quite common amongst IT types."

"I won't even dignify that with a response!"

"You just did, but not to mind - I'll walk you through it and you can make your own mind up >clickety< >tap< >click<. If you'd be so kind as to read that list?"

"Wha... oh, the Aspergers symptoms webpage. Uhm... ONE - Socially and emotionally inappropriate behavior and interpersonal interaction."

"I think that speaks for itself" I say.

"TWO - Limited interest or preoccupation with a subject."

"Check!"

"THREE - Repetitive behaviors or rituals - You don't have that!"

"Tell us about it at the pub every single lunchtime."

"FOUR - Peculiarities in speech and language."

"Wot, us L33t D00des?"

"FIVE - Problems with nonverbal communication."

"I think your machine is a prime example of that."

"SIX - Lack of empathy."

"With users in particular..."

"SEVEN - Clumsy and uncoordinated motor movements."

"What can I say - we tend not to be jocks?"

"So you're saying that the reason he trashed my personal machine was because he has a mental condition that inhibits him from caring about me or my problems - not because he was a spiteful vindictive bastard?"

"It's more of a sliding scale," I say, not wanting to overuse my lie quota for the day.

"And reading between the lines you're suggesting that working in IT makes you a spiteful vindictive bastard with borderline Aspergers?"

"If we're talking cause and effect here it might be that being a spiteful vindictive bastard with a mild personality disorder might attract you to IT," I counter, "as opposed to IT making you that way. Leastways, I know it is in my case."

"So now you're saying that you have it as well?"

"Absolutely - but over the years my assistant and I have evolved a clear and concise language with which to pass on instructions. For instance, we avoid terms like 'kick the server in the guts', 'give it a bash', 'ok shoot', and a whole host of other phrases which, when subject to literal translation, could be misconstrued."

"And you have all these 'symptoms' as well, the lack of empathy, the inappropriate behavior..."

"Of course I do. Uh... git," I respond.

"And you expect me to believe this?"

"Of course. Though I have to say it's not my fault. But as it seems to be important to you how about you buy some replacement parts for the damaged ones and I guess I can put the thing back together for you."

"So what will I need?"

"Uh, let's see... A graphics card, probably a hard drive, motherboard, CPU... uh... CPU fan... Hmm, I think it would be simpler if you just upgraded to a new machine and I used some disk tools to attempt to recover as much data from your hard drive as I can."

"What sort of machine?"

"Uh, let's see >clickety< >tap< There, that one - a good mid-level consumer tower with space to put an additional hard drive. We'll be able to slap your old harddrive in and see if we can transfer your data across. And look, they've got 20 in stock so we could have you up and running on new and improved hardware by the weekend. You know, if you look at it another way he probably did you a favor."

...Two hours later...

"OK," I say, plugging cables from the new machine into the old hard drive now installed inside. "The old hard drive is safely installed so we should be able - if the drive's undamaged - to copy all your information from the old machine onto here. Once that's done I can probably recover your license information from the old registry and use that to reinstall any special applications you might want to reinstall on this machine."

"Excellent"

"So we're OK to power on."

"Fire it up!" the Boss says decisively.

>Squirt< >Scratch< >Scratch< >Crackle< >Jangle<

...Later that day...

"I mean who the hell keeps lighter fluid and a box of matches on their desk..." the Boss whines from inside the Director's office...

BOFH: Cable entanglements

Copper load of this

Posted in [BOFH](#), 13th March 2009 11:08 GMT

Episode 3 "I've been thinking," the Boss says, wandering into Mission Control feigning nonchalance. "Surely with the number of movements in the building at the moment and the increasing copper price and all, we should invest in some data cable. Keep a stock of it on site. Ten boxes or so, what do you think?"

"Excellent idea!" the PFY says, knowing full well that a particular cable manufacturer is offering a 16 gig USB key with every ten boxes of cable purchased. "Or perhaps even 20 boxes - just to be on the safe side."

"Why not 30?" the Boss bids.

"Or 40?" the PFY says, upping the ante to levels which will see us needing a new storeroom.

While it's good to know that the PFY is fully prepared to let the company buy a stack of purposeless cable to land a 20 quid USB stick, the Boss doesn't seem to be at all concerned... yes, *eau de rodent* is in the air.

"So," I say, Camp-Daviding the bidding war. "Whose cable should we buy?"

And that's where the easy camaraderie between the PFY and the Boss comes to an end...

The PFY has chosen to go with the well known brand of Cat-6e warrantied cable that spans the entire building, whereas the Boss has chosen a little-known East European manufacturer whose cable warranty is measured in minutes from install.

An intense period of negotiation ensues where the PFY and the Boss both argue about the relative merits of their favored cable - the Boss arguing that he can get five boxes of his cable for one box of the PFY's preferred brand, and how it makes sense to use it for infill cabling which probably wouldn't get warrantied anyway.

It all sounds a little... coached... for my liking.

I look up the cable manufacturer on the old interweb only to find... nothing. Which in itself isn't a good sign. However, after a bit of perseverance and some liberal misspellings I manage to find the UK launch announcement of the manufacturer concerned, complete with the news article on their current promotion - the chance to win a flight in a Mig fighter...

And now I'm torn between a rock and a hard place, to mix my metaphors into meaninglessness - if only for the alliteration.

One part of me wants to help the Boss win on the off-chance that the manufacturers have used some of their own cable in the control systems of the aforementioned Jet, but then the PFY does have his heart set on those USB keys - so I do have to be a bit careful...

"Tell you what," I say to the PFY. "How about we get a couple of boxes of the Boss's stuff in just to see what it performs like and make our minds up after we've tested it?"

...Ten abortive deliveries later (thanks to the PFY's policy of chucking the deliveries straight into the bin)...

"I'm telling you, we've seen nothing!" the Boss snaps down the phone. "So there's no point in invoicing us for it. We won't pay!"

"Cheeky buggers," the PFY muses, once the Boss has hung up. "They're probably used to dealing with big companies where no one keeps track of deliveries."

"Yes," I say. "A couple of boxes of cable - who's going to know if they got lost somewhere - and as it's so cheap they probably just expect we'd pay the bill without checking. We'll probably never hear from them again."

"No no," the Boss says. "They're sending a couple of their sales people over right now..."

>DANGER WILL ROBINSON!<

"What's the problem?" the PFY says as I ferret through my desk for any personal belongings, shoving them hurriedly into my bag.

"Have a quick look at the launch announcement photos on the web and tell me what you think their 'sales people' did in a former life..."

">clickety< Uh-oh," the PFY mutters under his breath as he notes the collection of swarthy types that wouldn't look out of place on the cover of any of the magazines like *Soldier of Fortune* or *KGB Quarterly*. "Perhaps we should go bin diving and get the cable back?"

"Too late," I say, as the phone rings from the Boss's office. "I think they're already here."

"Bugger," the PFY says as the Boss summons us to his office. "I've pulled a hammy. You go, I'll try to catch you up."

Pathetic.

On getting to the Boss's office I find a vision of loveliness in place of the expected bemuscle umbrella-murderers. While the Boss scratches out a personal check in the hopes of winning another sort of free ride, I have a quiet word with the woman.

"Let's be honest," I murmur. "Your cable's probably 50 per cent copper, 50 per cent copper substitute and of a standard normally seen in Christmas tree lights. If we install it in our building we're likely to see a huge impact on our network performance and a rise in user complaints - not to mention that my assistant is liable to spend the rest of his life rerunning faulty lengths of cable. I can't understand why you'd even think that an IT professional would consider your product."

"I have gift vouchers for several major curry houses, an open tab at a number of large licensed establishments and a morally casual attitude," she responds.

"So, just the 50 boxes?" I say to the Boss moments later.

. . . the next day . .

"...and then they had one of their experts work me over," I recount to the PFY.

"Ah that explains the bruises around your neck," the PFY says. "The bastards! You were lucky to get out alive."

"I know," I shudder. "And I promised them I'd go back tonight to... uh... explain the missing cable. But looking on the bright side, the Boss has won his jet flight and their salesperson has assured me that their maintenance policy is the bare minimum required to land at a private airfield, so fingers crossed for a subterranean landing."

"Yes, fingers crossed," the PFY sighs.

BOFH: Defiling the profile

So... what are you wearing?

Posted in [BOFH](#), 27th March 2009 11:08 GMT

Episode 4 "What do you know about social networking?" the Boss murmurs quietly one morning, as I'm putting the finishing touches on my espresso.

"You mean social networking as in 'I and a group of mates would like to be able to publish our outrageous drinking activities'? Or 'The wife and I have recently separated and I'm looking to pull the first bird that'll show any cursory interest in me'?"

"I'm really just looking for a way to meet up with people and catch up with some old school chums."

"So the second option then..."

"What, I..."

"Where's the missus?"

"I... she... we..."

"Left, took the house, car and all the mates?"

"Half the house," the Boss sniffs. "And I had a bit of cash in Jersey, so I'm really..."

"...just wanting to start a whole new life, new town, new job, new mates?" I ask hopefully.

"No, no, I just thought I'd like to meet a few people."

"Women people?"

"I... yes," he admits grudgingly.

"Well you've come to the right place. No one knows iStalking like a geek. So what are you looking for? 50+, no kids, morally casual attitude?"

"I... maybe 30s, attractive, blonde."

"Good for you! Shoot for the impossible! OK, so do you have a Facebook or MySpace profile?"

"Uh, not yet, no."

"Well for that I think I should put you onto the PFY, as he's got a stack of them."

"A stack?"

"Oh yeah, he's Lord Peter someone - the 5th Earl of somewhere or other, Jerry somebody - a parking warden from Hull, Sharon - an ad agent in Luton, Candice - a trollop from London and several others."

"Why?"

"It's all about bait. He'll meet someone as Candice or Lord Peter and use her/him to introduce all the other personalities, finally organising a date as Jerry."

"But who wants to meet a traffic warden?"

"No one, but that's the beauty of it. When the woman finds out he's not really a traffic warden, the surge of relief makes them overcompensate - especially after they've had three glasses of chardonnay."

"This really works?"

"Sure. Obviously all the real spade work is done by Candice and Sharon."

"How?"

"Candice is the bait - a dirty slapper with the online persona of a Welsh prostitute - but without the leek fetish. She connects with feral blokes on the web and then through them meets women. Sharon then meets women through Candice and Lord Peter and talks up Jerry as a caring guy who's only been forced into the Traffic Warden game because he lost his job, but still wants to support the three kids in the third world that he sponsors."

"And Jerry?"

"Admits - in person - that he's actually independently wealthy but pretends to be a traffic warden to weed out the gold diggers."

"And this really works?!"

"When was the last time you saw the PFY turn up anywhere without a date?"

"So how do I go about doing this then?"

"You'll need to talk to the PFY."

... Thirty minutes later ...

"OK," the PFY says. "That's Jess the slapper created. Now add some low level royalty - nothing you'd find in *Who's Who*, then a... beauty therapist from... Nottingham and an ordinary bloke from Bristol."

"Why Bristol?"

"Because I think I've overloaded the Traffic Warden numbers and we need something to make you look like a loser."

>clickety< >tap<, etc

"OK," the Boss says. "They're all done."

"Right, fake a few open conversations between your personas, with nothing too risqué - except for Jess who'll be positively filthy. Make sure all the profiles are public, then wait to see who bites."

. . . The next day . . .

"Jess the slapper's got 47 invitations!" the Boss gasps.

"You bet!" the PFY says. "First off, reject all the women."

"Why?"

"Because they're blokes pretending to be women."

"That only leaves 17," the Boss whimpers sadly.

"17 men who probably know loads of women."

"Ah. Right!"

"Now accept all the 17 men, but only chat to one of them."

>clickety< >click<...

"Alright, but which one should I chat to?"

"THAT one," the PFY says decisively, pointing to a name on the screen.

"Why that one?"

"Because their general location is the city, so they're likely to know women here."

"I see. And what should I say?"

"You're Jess the slapper! Start off with a bit of gentle innuendo and work your way up - over a week or so - to complete muck talk when he responds. Accept all invitations from his women friends but make no introductions to your other personalities. If he responds with a bit of filth, increase your filth level accordingly."

"Why?"

"You're just establishing a profile. After a week or two we'll get your other fake personalities to start introducing themselves to all the women on your contacts list. A lot less suspicious."

"And you're sure this'll work?"

"Absolutely!"

... A week later ...

"How's it going?" I ask the PFY.

"Fantastic!" the PFY responds. "He's already talking gyno to his new friend."

"So when do we..."

"Tell them that he's been filthing up the IT Director for the past week?" the PFY asks. "Not just yet as I think the Director's going to share some photos..."

"Right, so I should make a bit of room on the company home page?"

"You bet!"

BOFH: Grand Theft Auto

The streets of London are paved with opportunity

Posted in [BOFH](#), 17th April 2009 11:00 GMT

Episode 5 "So what I'd like to know," the Boss seethes, "is what the hell took you so long?"

"What do you mean 'so long'?" the PFY asks, sounding a little hurt.

"You left here FIVE HOURS AGO to pick up a replacement toner cartridge!"

"Yeah but..."

"TWO OF YOU! IN MY CAR!"

"You offered it!" I add. "But in any case we needed to be sure it was the correct toner cartridge."

"You could have taken an old one with you. ONE of you! We've got dozens of them laying about the place!"

"We've got dozens of old ones for the Multifunction devices, but none for the CEO's personal color laser," the PFY says. "And he wanted a new one today because the replace cartridge light..."

"Otherwise known as the 'make the toner manufacturer tons of money lamp'," I add.

"...came on this morning," the PFY continues.

"And we couldn't take his old cartridge out because then he wouldn't be able to print anything today," I explain.

"But why does it take FIVE HOURS to get a replacement toner cartridge?"

"We were shopping around for the best price," I say. "What with the current financial climate and all, we thought it best to establish a supply channel for the least expensive replacement cost - which involved stopping at a number of suppliers."

"FIVE HOURS worth of suppliers?"

"To get a representative sample of suppliers we had to do a bit of leg work. And a reasonable amount of driving around."

"Yes, It's funny you should say that. You are aware that my vehicle has GPS tracking enabled?"

"We are now," I respond.

"After the third hour I took a look on the web to see where you were. Would you like to see the routed mapped out?"

"I... suppose so," the PFY says.

"You can see your trip as the red line here, stopping, here, here, here, there, there, there and there," he says, pointing to the road map on the webpage on his screen.

"Like I said, shopping around," I counter.

"And it's just a coincidence that several of the locations you stopped at were next to drinking establishments?"

"This is LONDON! Everywhere's close to a drinking establishment!"

"You smell of beer," he counters.

"We stopped for lunch," I say, a little hurt.

"Twice," the PFY adds unnecessarily. "Diabetes - I need the blood sugar."

"I..." the Boss says, deciding to abandon this topic for the time being. "Well, what's this then?"

"What's what?" the PFY asks.

"Here. The car stops, then backs up for 6 meters, forward for 6.5 meters, back 7 meters and then continues on its way."

"Oh, that," the PFY says. "We noticed our Symantec reseller walking along the footpath."

"It was a gimme," I say. "We had to take it!"

"You ran someone down in my car?!"

"Technically YOU did - or at least that's what it'll look like when the fingerprint evidence is analyzed," the PFY says.

"I... Uh..." the Boss mumbles.

"Just after you ran those red lights," I add.

"And before you parked in that no-parking zone," the PFY finishes. "The last part of that red line is on the back of a tow-truck."

"You bastards!"

"But we did manage to get a replacement toner cartridge for 3 pounds cheaper than on our standard suppliers website," I reply. "So if we extrapolate the savings on expected replacements

of toner cartridges out over the entire workable life of the CEO's printer, we've probably saved the company... oh... nine pounds - give or take."

"Three pounds, let's be honest," the PFY says, having created a Moore's law of his own about the replaceability of desktop printers.

"Nin... Three p... Where's my car now then?" the Boss asks, scrolling the webmap.

"Police Impound Yard," the PFY says. "I'd probably call it in as stolen before I went to collect it though."

"I'm not making a false statement to the Police. They'd find out"

"It's possible," the PFY replies, "but all I know is that we've been here the whole day - and we can produce the time stamped CCTV footage to prove it. Alternatively..."

"What?" the Boss asks, sniffing a ray of hope.

"For fifty quid and a couple of favors I'm pretty sure we could produce video evidence to prove that you were also in the building the whole time..."

"I bloody was!!!"

"That's not what the CCTV footage is currently saying..."

"I..." the Boss snuffles, realizing his options are extremely limited. "What are the favors?"

"Fifty quid" the PFY repeats, holding his hand out.

. . 30 seconds and 50 begrudged quid later . .

"What are the favors?"

"We actually forgot to pick up the toner cartridge," I admit. "So we need to you grab the Director's car keys off his desk..."

"!"

"Chop chop!" the PFY says. "We need to get this sorted before the weekend!"

. . 1 minute and a set of car keys later . .

"And the second favor?" the Boss asks

"Wait 10 minutes and call the Bloke that sold the CEO that Lotus Notes based CRM package."

"And tell him what?"

"Whatever you like," the PFY says. "Just make sure he's waiting on the footpath outside his building."

BOFH: Spontaneous Legal Combustion

The truth? You can't handle the truth...

Posted in [BOFH](#), 1st May 2009 11:19 GMT

Episode 6 *The following concludes episodes 4b, 4c and 5b, which are available exclusively to Register Platinum Cookie readers (with access to the content opulent Register Website). For the benefit of general (Lead Cookie) readers, the following flashback snippets have been approved for distribution:*

Boss: You Bastards! (Episode 4b)

Replacement Boss: Bastards! (Episode 4c)

Replacement Replacement Boss: You B..*Boom!* (Episode 5b)

Chief Inspector Miriam Houser: You're nicked! (Episode 5b)

And now the exciting conclusion:

"Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, at this juncture it falls upon me to review both the charges and their relative merits before giving direction to you, the jury, prior to your retiring to make your decision.

Cases of this magnitude garner considerable media attention and I strongly direct you not to be swayed by any speculation that may have appeared in the gutter press about the defendants' guilt in this matter.

The two defendants stand accused of a number of very serious charges including forgery, theft, extortion, assault, kidnapping and attempting to pervert the course of justice - to name but a few.

The charges of attempting to bribe Police Commander Reg Stapleton, threatening Police Commander Reg Stapleton and finally successfully bribing Police Commander Reg Stapleton have been dropped now that ex-Police Commander Reg Stapleton resides in Majorca after a lucrative... uh... gambling windfall.

The prosecution's contention that this windfall was orchestrated in some way by the defendants - based on a sheet of paper found at the casino containing a number of sequential keypresses apparently setting the machine in 'debug mode' and forcing consecutive jackpots to occur - is preposterous.

Indeed, the link between the defendants and this note is extremely tenuous, and were we to condemn anyone in possession a piece of letterhead paper from the IT department of their

company it would be a very sad day indeed. Who of us can honestly say they have not received such a page at one time or another? I know I have.

As you are no doubt aware, the four charges of arson have been withdrawn following an incident involving a carelessly placed bar heater in an evidence room. Drawing links between this incident and the access to the evidence by the aforementioned police commander are purely speculative and based upon the vaguest of suspicions and some very grainy closed circuit TV images - and should be discounted.

Similarly the assault and kidnapping charges may yet be withdrawn after the two incidents early this morning. If this case has cemented anything at all in our minds I would I hope that it has taught us to be more careful our footing on underground platforms when a train is approaching.

As regards the evidence proffered by the so-called witnesses, the prosecution would have us believe that their key witness, Mr. X, was so fearful of identification and retribution that his testimony was only obtained on the grounds that his identity was never revealed, and that for a trial to be fair that the same anonymity be extended to the members of the Jury. His testimony, if one can call it that, is typical of the feeble minded fabrications one all-too-often encounters when dealing with heads of financial departments located in corner offices with a South East view on the 4th floor of medium to large companies in this country. It would not come as a surprise to me if the man chose to recant his testimony as a drug fuelled flight of fancy in the next day or two in a fit of remorse.

My impression of him is that he is neither to be trusted nor relied upon - entirely the sort of individual to leave the country in the middle of a major trial on the spur of the moment for an extended holiday without telling anyone of his whereabouts and never contacting his friends or relatives again. Were he not under the protection of a single police officer with a history of narcolepsy, staying in room 203 of the Dorchester Hotel, I might seriously consider ordering the confiscation of his passport.

And now a word or two about the defendants, who have conducted themselves with the decorum of the true IT professionals that they are throughout this harrowing ordeal. Whilst one might quite reasonably expect them to harbor feelings of resentment and outrage at the perjurous casserole of untruths we have been served in the past week, their composure has been a glittering example to us all of the ability of honest men to shrug off vicious slights.

And finally, a few comments on the relevance of evidence on the most serious charges as they pertain to the law. Although the prosecution have proven beyond a shadow of doubt - through both DNA and fingerprint evidence - that the defendants were in the office concerned around the time of the alleged offences, they have chosen to pursue an intricate and convoluted conspiracy involving secret doors, tampered security cameras and access locks, cleaning alcohol and rolls of carpet when in fact a far simpler and more believable explanation for what transpired is blatantly

obvious - though neither noted nor investigated - that of Spontaneous Human Combustion. The jury is directed to contemplate this fact in their deliberations.

And so I would like to direct the jury to retire to their chamber to review the case they have seen and heard in the past few days, setting aside any external influence they may have been exposed to, and reach a unanimous verdict of not guilty. They should set aside my personal opinions and the fact that I am so sure of the defendant's innocence that I have already ordered that they be freed on bail pending an appeal - should that be necessary - and judge the case on its merits. Finally, prior to my departure for my extended Majorca holiday, I would like to thank each and every juror personally for their selfless attention during this trial. Juror number 1, Steven West, 34b Windsor Drive, Peckham, Thank you very much. Juror number 2, Sumit Singh, Apartment 2, 41 Badger Close...."

BOFH: Snout, meet trough

Dirty rotten swindling swine

Posted in [BOFH](#), 29th May 2009 11:02 GMT

Episode 7 "How can you be broke?" I ask the PFY as I carry our lunch back to the table in several pint glasses.

"I dunno."

"But you were only paid yesterday!"

"Yes, but I had expenses!" the PFY sniffs.

"What could you possibly blow a month's cash on in a day?"

"A Home Theatre PC ensemble," the PFY responds defensively.

"Ah. OK, I can see how that would happen. So you're completely broke?"

"Yes!"

"And you need some money?"

"Yes!"

"And you want me to help you get some?"

"YES!"

"Alright then, I suppose I can help. But it's not going to be easy - we're in a recession after all, and there's only one thing that sells in a recession..."

"What?"

"Fear."

"Really? The first set were OK, but FEAR 2 was pants!" the PFY burbles. "But I get your point - people stay at home and play more games."

"No!" I snap. "I mean real fear. And if our friends in the pharmaceuticals industry have taught us anything it's that you can ride out a recession on a tidal wave of fear. Fear, and a few strategically placed incidents."

"Huh?"

"Wait one moment," I say, making a few hasty changes to our bandwidth configs.

...

"So?" the PFY says five minutes later.

"Give it time," I say.

Ten minutes later...

"How much time?" the PFY asks.

"No idea," I shrug. "It's a waiting game."

"Can we wait at the pub?"

"I thought you had no money!"

"I don't."

"I see."

... Later at the pub ...

>beep< >bippy< >beep< >bippy< >beep< >bippy<

"Well, that's the seventh text message and the fourth unanswered phone call," I say. "I think it's time to go back."

"One more round?" the PFY says "You know how I hate to cut short a lunchtime."

"OK, just this one" I say, looking at my rapidly evaporating wallet contents.

... Three rounds later ...

"Where the hell have you been?" the Boss snaps.

"Uh, meeting with vendors," I ad lib.

"Didn't you get my messages?"

"I... I guess not," I lie. "We got sort of wrapped up in the presentation. Then the guy from the antivirus company was telling us about this new wave of infections they're seeing. Apparently the attack vectors are so varied it looks for all the world like someone's compromised your firewall and permitted the world to attack all your poorly protected desktop machines, which in turn leads to massive user problems and network overload!"

"I don't care about that!" the Boss snaps. "My machine's not working and my email is taking ages to download."

"You don't think..." the PFY gasps.

"That OUR site has been infected by this terrible virus?" I gasp.

"I was going to say that we should go to the pub and work out what's wrong with his machine," the PFY says, "but come to think of it you may have hit the nail on the head!"

"A virus - but how could that possibly happen? We have a top of the line firewall device!" the Boss says.

"True," I say "But firewalls only really protect you from outside threats. If someone introduces the virus inside the firewall.."

"But how?" the Boss gasps. "Don't we have that Network Admission thing installed?"

"We do - but that doesn't help when a device already on the network gets infected by a device off the network."

"But how could that happen?" the Boss asks.

"Very easily. We're talking about Sympathetic Access Recombinant Software - that passes from one type of device to another."

"What devices?"

"My money's on portable media players and cellphones," I say "Everyone has one and a lot of them have Bluetooth. A PC virus has morphed to one of them and morphed back to a PC as something new."

"So this could be a.... pandemic!" the Boss whispers.

"There's no need to panic," I say. "We'll get security to lock all the outside doors and screen anyone coming or going for mobile phones and mp3 players. And confiscate them. We'll collect them all and find out which ones are infected."

"But what about the infection?"

"Don't worry, I think I know where we can buy a couple of hundred PC-cillin licences," the PFY says. "But they'll want cash - five quid each."

"PC-Cillin?" the Boss asks. "Isn't that ancient? Hasn't it expired? Wasn't it free?"

"All good questions, the answers to which are yes, almost and in your dreams."

"So to fix this we've got to buy some almost expired antivirus software and confiscate everyone's MP3s?"

"Yes. The company may want to reimburse owners of infected devices if they turn out to be unrepairable," the PFY says.

Three days and one exceptionally lucrative car boot sale later...

"Who could have guessed?" I ask the Boss as I hand over some 'licences', hot off the MFD. "Only the very newest, most expensive devices couldn't be disinfected."

"I'm sorry, but I still don't understand how on earth this could be related to someone's phone. The Director wants me to explain it to him!"

"Bluetooth and 802.11 apparently," I say. "I'll get the PFY to stop in and explain it to you when he gets back from the doctors."

"Nothing serious I hope?"

"Nah, just something his Mexican cousin gave him after his holiday."

"Oh! Right! Well, no explanation necessary - The Director can get stuffed. Well... if anyone wants me I think I've got a bit of a cough myself and will be home for a few days. Or weeks - who can say?"

. . . Ten minutes later, inside the Director's office . . .

"...And there's absolutely no link between the current office absences and any computer virus," I say. "None whatsoever - unless of course you've got one of those credit cards with a smart chip in it..."

BOFH: Stick this

Extinguishing stupidity, one skull at a time

Posted in [BOFH](#), 12th June 2009 11:02 GMT

Episode 8 "You've got to think of it in terms of sticks and carrots," I say to the PFY, "because users are complex - but stupid - stubborn animals, like donkeys."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning they respond to both rewards and punishment. So what you've got to do is find a balance between rewarding them for good behavior - like not calling you and not playing with their desktop configuration... and punishing them for bad behavior - like calling you or playing with their desktop configuration."

"I'm not sure I follow. So what you're saying is that no one method will guarantee good users?"

"Exactly. I mean you could use the stick all the time - because after all there's no Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Users. And you'd probably get reasonable results."

"But..." the PFY prompts.

"But in practice you can't use the stick all the time. If you want a user to do something you must choose whether the correct method is to encourage them to do it with the carrot, or compel them to do it with the stick."

"What's the difference?"

"How they feel about you at the end of the process."

"Again, what's the difference?"

"Perhaps you should just give it a go - you might be surprised how users respond to a positive rather than a negative," I say.

... An hour later ...

"How did that go then - did you encourage our user to empty some of the crap out of his mailbox?"

"Uh, not really. He just said we should buy bigger hard drives for the server."

"Really? How odd, I was sure he'd resp... I... You offered him a real carrot, didn't you?"

"That's what you said to do!"

"I meant FIGURATIVELY! A *figurative* carrot. Not a real carrot, but something like a cup of coffee or a hot chocolate."

"Oh I see - so not a carrot, but some other form of food."

"Something like that," I say. "I'll pop down and see him and see if we can reach some amicable solution."

. . . One ambulance later . . .

"So was that a figurative stick?" the PFY asks.

"It was a fire extinguisher, so technically, yes it was."

"And how is this different from what I usually do?"

"Because we tried the carrot approach - you with a carrot and me with a couple of lagers at the pub before we tried the stick approach."

"Yet neither worked," the PFY observes.

"The stick worked," I counter. "His mailbox is empty."

"Only because you deleted it."

"So I used *two* sticks. However, the point of the exercise is not about sticks but that people can sometimes respond to the carrot - and they should be given that option!"

>CRASH!<

"What the hell happened in finance?!" the Boss fumes. "They say you hit someone with a fire extinguisher!"

"I didn't," I lie. "I was talking to one of their users about reducing the size of his mailbox when an extinguisher fell off the bracket, bounced off his desk and hit him in the head."

"The size of his mailbox! You hit someone because they wouldn't empty their mailbox"

"Like I said, the extinguisher *fell* off the bracket, bounced off the table and hit him in the head. And his mailbox was huge - it took up 98 per cent of the mailstore and was mostly funny movies."

"Why didn't you just make the mailstore bigger?"

"Because the recommended size for mailstores is..."

"Who cares about the recommended size of mailstores?! Just buy bigger disks!"

"Bigger disks don't help - there's plenty of space on the existing disks but the recommended size of the stores is..."

"So if you've got spare disk space why don't you make another mail store?"

"BECAUSE... HE'S... USING... 98 PER CENT... OF... THE... LARGEST... POSSIBLE... MAILSTORE... SIZE."

"Then just make the mailstore bigger!"

"Perhaps I can help," the PFY says, stepping in before something really bad happens.

"We have a number of mailstores, all at the absolute maximum supported size. One of our users, who has been collecting video funnies for many, *many* years has been storing these movies in a folder in his mailbox. This mailbox has now grown so large it has pushed all the other users out of the mailstore and so we asked him nicely to remove some of the data from the mailstore and put it somewhere more appropriate - like a desktop folder or portable hard drive. He refused my request, so Simon went to show him the options available to him as far as storage goes - during which discussion the faulty bracket dropped a fire extinguisher."

"You expect me to believe you can't make a larger file!" the Boss says. "A bloody monkey could make a larger file..."

...

"Hang on," the PFY says, a couple of seconds of silence later. "I've got an off the wall idea."

"Yes?"

"Would you like this carrot?"

"What? No!"

"Oh, OK, suit yourself..."

...

>CLONG!<

BOFH: A spot of bother

The doggone call is yours

Posted in [BOFH](#), 3rd July 2009 11:02 GMT

Episode 9 It's a bloody Friday afternoon. People should know not to bother us when all we're wanting is a slow glide to the weekend...

>ring<

"Our system isn't working."

"Really," the PFY says, putting his newspaper down with a sigh. "What system is that then?"

"The one which does the ticker tape thing at the bottom of my web."

"So not really a system, more a java applet in your browser?"

"I don't know - all I know is that it's not working," the user burbles, "and I need it working. It was working this morning and it's not working now."

"OK," the PFY says helpfully, asking the standard IT support question - "What has changed?"

"Well it's afternoon now," the user responds.

"Yes, very good, but let me rephrase the question - What, TO DO WITH YOUR MACHINE, has changed?"

"Nothing."

"You've not installed something, uninstalled something, moved something, plugged something in, unplugged something, changed a setting or two?"

"Nope, nothing."

"Used a different browser maybe?"

"What do you mean, different browser?"

"Nothing, just talking to myself," the PFY says, realizing that he almost opened Pandora's hard drive. "Tell you what, I'll be up to have a look at it as soon as I can."

Which is complete porkies, as evidenced by the PFY's dive back into the newspaper.

That's the thing about non-specific complaints about 'the system' and 'not working' - they don't motivate you.

Moments later the phone rings again and I answer it so as not to disrupt the PFY's cartoons.

"Yep?"

"I've got it too!" the user at the other end of the line gasps.

"Canine herpes?!" I gasp, picking two words at random from the sewer of my mind.

"WHAT?!" the user gasps back.

"Is this not the vet?" I reply, realizing that whilst there's no motivation to get involved in user problems late on a Friday there's a rich seam of enthusiasm to be tapped when user torture is on the cards.

"Uh... No?" our user says, confused

"Oh, my mistake - you see I was just talking to the vet about the dog that was caught in the basement and had to be put down because of its.. uh... diseases. And when you rang and said you had it too..."

"I was talking about the software failures in accounts."

"Oh the java thing, not canine herpes?"

"No!"

"Alright then, no problems. And you don't own a dog?"

"Ah... yes, but that's got nothing to do with it!"

"Of course not," I say, clicking my way furiously through my caller's personal documents to his photos folder. "Nothing at all. Anyway, the dog we captured was a... golden retriever with a red collar. You don't have a golden retriever with a red collar do you?"

"I... Yes, but it doesn't have canine herpes."

"However would you know that?" the PFY asks, smelling blood in the water, dropping his newspaper and jumping into the conversation. "I mean the vet had to take a blood sample to find that out for us! What sort of person tests their dog for canine herpes?"

"I didn..."

"More importantly," I ask, pursuing the PFY's topic. "WHY would someone be routinely testing their dog for canine herpes? I mean I assume it's routinely by the way you said No instead of Not that I know of. That was fairly definitive..."

"I don't routinely test my dog for..."

"So it was a one-off test then?" the PFY interrupts "Something made you decide to test your dog? Maybe you had a party - a few close friends, a few too many drinks - things got out of hand - we've all been there."

"Except for the dog bit," I add

"WHAT?!?! I don't know what you're talking about - I'm just calling to say I can't get the financial information ticker tape thing to play on my screen!"

"Oh right!" I say. "So this has nothing to do with the dog in the basement?"

"NO!"

"Oh, right then! OK, I'll open a new job for you on the helpdesk system and it'll keep you updated. You'll get regular email updates or you can call the helpdesk if you need an urgent update. Your job reference code is... DOGHERPE - just use that if you need to know what's happening..."

"DOGHERPE?!?!?"

"Yeah well, I'd already typed it in and clicked Next," I say. "Anyway, I've fired that off to the helpdesk and they'll be able to track the call for you."

"In fact," the PFY says, "you probably don't even need to remember the DOGHERPE bit because it'll be tied it back to your username - all you need to do is ring them."

"But if it makes it easier we could change your caller ID to that so that when you run the helpdesk it would show up on their display??" I add

. . seconds later . .

"Well he's never calling back," I say, hanging up from handsfree. "EVER. About anything. Demons from hell could be using his USB key as a portal to this universe and he won't touch the phone..."

"It's God's work," the PFY says, reaching for his newspaper once more.

>RINNNGGGG<

. . .

BOFH: Hammer time!

All through the tower, not a creature was stirring...

Posted in [BOFH](#), 24th July 2009 11:02 GMT

Episode 10 "Ooooh, watch this!" I gasp happily to the Boss as he and I observe the PFY, from the relative safety of the webcam monitor in Mission Control.

"What?" the Boss asks.

"He's going to take a look at her PC!"

"Isn't that part of his job?"

"No this isn't a work machine, this is a home machine!" I snigger.

"Still, if it's a favor..."

"Oh it gets better," I say, gazing back at the screen. "It's not her machine - it's her parents' machine. This is so sweet!"

"I'm not sure I follow."

"OK, Basic facts about IT people time. We hate it, HATE... IT... when people bring their home machines in for us to 'take a look at'. HATE IT! Hate... it. Normal procedure is to take it out back, give the hard drive a couple of solid whacks with a rubber mallet so as not to leave any evidence (while the drive is running) - bend one or two pins of any removable chip over, then use the memory as a coffee coaster for the morning before returning it in the afternoon as DOA."

"I... Is that what happened to the machine I brought in two weeks back?"

"No, that really was stuffed. Like I said, the power supply had surged the capacitors on the motherboard, causing a backfeed of hysteresis to the hard drive's convection circuits. We were just lucky we were able to save the case!"

"Oh. But why was the case so dented?"

"The magnetic field caused by hysteresis is very unpredictable," I lie. "Anyway, here it seems that this attractive, seemingly single young woman has used her feminine wiles to lure the PFY into agreeing to look at her machine. Only it's not her machine, it's her parents' machine."

"How do you know?"

"It's a tower."

"What does that mean?"

"No one buys towers anymore, except for furry teeth geeks like us. And even then they wouldn't be the yellowed plastic jobs with 52 speed CD readers. No, that's something that's been in someone's front room hoovering up dust for the past eight years. It'll be her parents' one. Or even her grandparents'."

"It might be her..."

"It doesn't even have front USB ports! What self-respecting young person doesn't have an MP3 player than needs plugging in every now and then? No, it's her grandparents' machine alright. Tell you what though - let's make this interesting - five quid says it's full of fluff and cat hair."

"Cat hair?"

"Because it's nice and warm under the fake wood mini computer table in the corner of the lounge, and the cat probably sleeps on the top of the machine."

"But wouldn't the fan..."

"A machine that old's not going to have a working fan - and if it did, it'd sound like a woodchipper trying to digest a cat. A live cat. No, that baby's pretty much just a fractional bar heater with email and access to *Coronation Street* chat groups."

"They might use it for keeping in touch with friends," the Boss says defensively.

"They're old people," I respond. "Their daily routine is: don't die, login, check for email, see what's going to happen in the next episode of *Coronation Street*, then use the online death notices to remove names from their contact list. In a couple of years the only people they'll be able to email is themselves..."

I've gone too far, I can tell. The Boss looks like he's going to burst into tears at the thought of his parents' final days being spent deleting names from Outlook Express.

"I..." he says, preparing to make some statement about seeing his folks more in their twilight years.

"HE'S GOING TO TAKE THE COVER OFF!!!!" I interrupt. "This is the best part!!!"

"Why?"

"Two reasons. One: in the olden days cases were designed with about 20 hidden screws that were designed to make the case as impenetrable to lay-people as possible - each manufacturer having a different secret method of putting them together."

"And two?"

"The cat hair. Oh look, there's a couple of open PCI slots too - double or nothing there's a dead mouse in there as well!"

"I'll..."

"That's TEN QUID you owe me!" I roar as the PFY prises open the case, releasing a couple of dust bunnies and some shriveled rodent corpses.

"Technically I hadn't accepted the wager..."

"That's OK, you can pay me later. Ooohhhh, he must really like her."

"Why do you say that?"

"He's actually looking inside. LOOK at the size of that motherboard!"

"Is it large?"

"Not really - if you were looking for a place to land a light plane. Wait a minute, he's powering it up... Windows ME!!"

.. Five minutes later . . .

"So how's the computer repair going?" I ask innocently, as the PFY stomps back into Mission Control.

"I couldn't do it," he snaps.

"What was it? The ancient hardware, the cleanliness of a vacuum cleaner bag or the crippled OS?"

"No, none of that."

"What was it then?"

"Turned out to be her machine," the PFY says.

"SO THAT'S TEN QUID YOU OWE ME!!!" the Boss shouts.

The bitch!

BOFH: Trussssst in me

Beancounters and bricks don't mix

Posted in [BOFH](#), 11th September 2009 11:02 GMT

Episode 11 Things have taken a strange turn - the Boss is trying to broker some form of peace between us and the Beancounters...

"I'm just trying to understand the animosity," the Boss says.

"It's historic," I say. "It goes back centuries."

"It can hardly go back centuries - computers have only been around for half a century, and you've only been working for a few years!"

"It transcends mere computing," the PFY chips in. "It's about expertise, trust and experience."

"It's timeless," I add. "Stone Age man was the same. One would have the ability to hunt animals, skin them and cook them to perfection, while another would harp on endlessly about how the windows security policy was affecting their ability to save a document to their desktop."

"Ay?" the Boss asks.

"Some can - and do, while others can't but keep the dream alive by rabbiting on about it," the PFY translates.

"I'm not sure I get your point..."

Sigh.

"Certain occupations," I say, "have for historic reasons had a head start when it comes to computing. Accountancy, for instance, was one of the first areas of business to adopt computing in business - because of the need to jiggle large amounts of numbers around at the same time..."

"Yes, I appreciate that..."

"...and as Beancounters started using computers before other people they were often held to be experts by the non-computing unwashed they ran into on a day to day basis."

"I... I see."

"To a point where they truly believed the hype," the PFY adds.

"And so you don't get on with them because...?"

"Because they're not experts, just idiots who've not been caught out yet," I explain.

"And what do they think about you?" the Boss asks.

"That we're irresponsible children who'd bankrupt the company with expensive computing equipment, that we prevent things from happening with overly restrictive firewall and security rules, and that our quest for perfection is as out of place and irrelevant in a business environment as Steven Seagal at a MENSA meeting."

"Well I'm sure none of this animosity is likely to be addressed unless we can find some common ground. I think we should have some sort of meeting and thrash out some ideas."

"A geeky Camp David you mean?" I ask.

"Er... something like that," the Boss says slowly. "I just feel that if we meet with them we can maybe find some common ground and set up some form of demarcation that ensures we're not at cross purposes."

"Yeah, well.."

"I've already organized it! AND I've organized an independent facilitator."

"It's not some fruity trouser bandit who's going to have us doing 'Trust exercises', 'Paraphrasing' and 'Reflective Listening' is it?" the PFY shudders.

"No no, these guys are professionals!" the Boss burbles.

. . . Two days later . . .

"I can't believe you let him fall!" the Boss snaps at the PFY and myself as an injured Beancounter is carried out by a couple of burly ambulance men.

"We weren't ready!" the PFY said. "He should have said he was falling backwards".

"THAT WAS THE EXERCISE!" the Boss snaps. "THEY SAID, 'NOW FALL BACKWARDS OFF THE TABLE SAFE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT YOUR TEAM WILL CATCH YOU'!"

"Yes but to be fair. it was a Beancounter," the PFY says, "and they never do what you tell them!"

"Perhaps a change of exercise?" the Boss prompts the facilitator.

. . . Fifteen minutes later . . .

"So what you're saying," the PFY says to his partnered Beancounter, "is that we should relax the restrictions on the VPN so that virus-infected home machines can still connect to our network?"

“It’s just a bit of spam...” the Beancounter says.

...

“...and so we decided to do a one-on-one trust exercise,” the PFY explains to me moments later as another beancounter is helped from the room. “He was going to lean forward and I was not going to hit him in the head with the first heavy item that came to hand. Only he leant too far forward - because he didn’t trust me - and a brick which I found in my suitcase came into contact with him.”

”So when you look at it from a trust exercise viewpoint it was really his own fault?” I suggest.

“Yes, I suppose you’re right.”

“And the incident with the half brick was a by-product of us trusting them to trust us?”

“It was a whole brick when I started, and yes, true.”

“Tell you what,” I say, grabbing the spare half brick, “Why don’t you do some reflective listening with that chap over there who thinks we should let him send full-length movies in email while I go and talk to the one who wants us to use Gmail as the company email system.”

...

“And so in effect,” I explain to the Boss. “We trusted them too much.”

“We thought we could trust them to trust us,” the PFY says sadly. “But they let us down.”

“I’m not sure the facilitator would share your interpretation of events,” the Boss observes dryly.

“Well there’s the interesting thing,” the PFY replies. “Before he slipped down those stairs he told Simon and myself that it might be beneficial for us to re-establish trust with all users who feel in some way underserved by our expertise.”

“So we’ve programmed the lift so that when those users swipe themselves into the lift at home time, it’ll bypass the ground floor and go straight to the basement where we’ll be waiting in the company van to do some quick trust exercises.”

“I... don’t think that’s a very good ide...”

“What, you don’t trust us?” the PFY asks, reaching for his brick...

BOFH: Weapon of choice

Some day my prints will come

Posted in [BOFH](#), 2nd October 2009 11:02 GMT

Episode 12 "...and it turns out that he'd ordered the 157-H43 instead of the 157-H44 unit," one engineer says, walking into Mission Control. "And as we all know..."

"...the H43 has the tab on the other side!!!" the other engineer finishes. They both burst out laughing.

Good times.

The PFY has heard more than his fair share of Multifunction Printer repair stories in the past three days and is starting to get a little... edgy.

I do a quick mental calculation of the PFY's mood, judged solely by the location of his hand under the desk. Top drawer: cattle prod. Middle drawer: enhanced cattle prod. Bottom drawer: claw hammer with the fingerprint-resistant grip.

I cough loudly and shake my head slightly as I see the bottom drawer ease open - we need this printer fixed as it's the only one with the financial signing authority signatures loaded into secure ROM. And after all, it *is* pay week...

The PFY's hand trembles slightly, but he pushes the drawer closed. In an effort to give him some respite, I decide to escort the engineers up to the fourth floor and handhold them today.

"So how are we doing fellas?" I ask, keeping it casual as the lift doors close. "Any nearer to knowing what's going wrong?"

"Oh, printers are pretty tricky things to work out," one of them responds condescendingly, "because they're a mixture of hardware, firmware and software - not like your systems which are pretty much just software."

"Sounds technical," I nod, hearing the faint 'call of the hammer' in the distance.

"It's often a matter of perseverance to determine the true cause of the problem," the younger engineer explains slowly, "by determining the most likely causes of the problem and then working through the extensive diagnostic lists."

"So it's not just swapping parts in and out till the problem goes away or the printer catches fire?" I ask, momentarily losing a small portion of my intended objectivity.

"Beg pardon?"

“Well it looked to me like you were just swapping out boards.”

“Well I suppose to the general public it would *appear* to be all we do, but there’s all sorts of BIOS configurations to change,” the head engineer says.

“From a single menu,” I point out.

“And upgrades to apply,” the younger engineer adds.

“From another menu...”

“And diagnostics to examine,” the head engineer chips in.

“From the eight LEDs on the back of the unit...”

“Yes, but we need to diagnose against condition fault sheets.”

“The one page chart in the back of the manual?” I add.

“Are you suggesting this is easy?!”

“Well... it has been three days,” I reply. “And there are two of you. And it’s not a very big manual.”

“It’s not like a computer where you just keep restarting it till it works!” the younger engineer says defensively.

“No, no, I wasn’t suggesting that it was!” I say, pondering how close my bank balance is to being in the red (technical lager expenses). “I’m just concerned that we get the printer up and running by 4pm today.”

“Four pee em,” the older engineer says, in a doubtful tone. “You’re not giving us much time.”

I hesitate to bring up the ‘three days’ thing again, but I’m starting to appreciate what the PFY has been putting up with.

“Look,” I say, being reasonable. “How about we approach this from a logical point of view. The jammed paper has a clear image on it, but the image isn’t fused onto the page yet, which suggests that the problem is occurring somewhere between the imaging and the fusing process - so perhaps we should look to see if all the sensors are correct, the feed rollers are not slipping - that sort of thing?”

The two engineers smile and share a knowing glance.

“OK,” the older one says. “I know it must look like we’re new at this game, but we’ve actually been doing it for a while and I think we’d know whether it was a simple thing like that.”

"It's got to be in the setup," the younger one says. "I think we need to adjust the gear timing from the factory defaults. Put in totally new values..."

"Won't that make the problem a lot worse and exponentially harder to fix if it is just a sensor or feed roller thing?"

"Trust us," the older one smiles.

. . . Three hours later . . .

"Well, that *is* odd," the older engineer muses, extracting a dozen pulped pages from the heart of the printer.

"OK..." I say, massaging the vein in my forehead. "Can we move the Secure Rom into another printer and just fix this one next week?"

"No, the ROMS are linked to the serial number of the machine - they have to be programmed at the factory."

"So in order for me to get paid this printer has to be working," I say.

"...yyyyes."

"Alright, out of the way!"

. . . Two minutes of twiddling later . . .

"Would you look at that," the younger engineer says. "That must have torn off on the microswitch lever and blocked the sensor the whole time!"

"So we can put it all back together then?" I ask.

"Yeah - but..."

"*But??*"

"I changed all the timing settings... and I can't remember what the factory ones are."

"Can you find out - on the web or in your manual?"

"Ummm..."

"Phone a friend?"

"Nah, you're not supposed to change them, cos they're set at the factory..."

>beep< >beep< >beep< >beep<

“Hello?” the PFY asks.

“It’s me,” I say. “Hammer time!”

BOFH: Baitin' switch

The old ones are always the best

Posted in [BOFH](#), 16th October 2009 10:02 GMT

Episode 13 "OK, let's just take a look then," our recent office addition says, clicking on the network management tool.

"Ah, there's your problem - your port is only set to 10 megabits per second, half duplex. If I just change that to auto you'll notice a short outage while your machine's network interface readjusts itself to 100 meg full duplex and then everything will be working tickety-boo for you.. No, No, don't mention it - and have a really great day."

...

"Did you know that all the data ports on that switch are hard configured to 10meg half duplex?" Graham the temp asks.

"Yeah," the PFY says, feigning interest. "It's probably something the previous admins did."

"But didn't you install those switches?"

"Yes - from the old building - but we didn't configure them."

"Really? You didn't take the changeover as an opportunity to revise the configs?"

"Not at the time, no," the PFY says, never one to seek out work unnecessarily - a stickler for the adage 'if it isn't broken, who gives a crap'.

I live my life by that.

"So these are configured the same way as they were..."

"In 1997, yes."

"You don't have a switch replacement policy?"

"Of course we do," I say. "If it's on fire it can go on next year's replacement schedule!"

"But what happens meantime?"

"Oh, we've got a cupboard full of 10 meg PoE hubs that are still working perfectly!" the PFY says. "Which is why we don't like to set the switch speed too high - they might notice."

"You mean PoE switches?"

“No I mean PoE hubs. I tell you, they are as rare as rocking horse shit,” the PFY says. “But we’ve got stacks of them!”

“So there’s no QoS on them then?”

“No chance.”

“Doesn’t it affect the VOIP phones?”

“You’d think so wouldn’t you - but what we do is when we install a hub we slap it on a VLAN which has all the non-voice services deprioritised.”

“But doesn’t that make the servers and internet appear slow?”

“It sort of does, but with the desktops configured the way they are...”

>ring<

“Hello, Graham here, how can I help?”

“It’s still as bad as it was before. Would you hold please? >tappity< Yes, well it looks like your machine is requesting 10 meg half du.. can I get back to you? Thanks >click< You’ve set everyone’s desktop machines to 10 meg half duplex?!”

“Bingo,” the PFY says.

“And if he had *his* way,” I say, gesturing at the PFY, “We’d have upgraded to coax.”

”But you’ve got high spec copper to the desktop.”

“Uh-huh.”

“And multi-gigabit core and distribution network hardware.”

“Uh-huh.”

“But prehistoric access switches???”

“Indeed,” the PFY says. “Back in the day some beancounter configured a cable warranty period as an active switch hardware lifetime figure in the asset depreciation schedule. Those ancient 100 meg switches are all about halfway through their book-rated lives.”

“Now we’ve done what we could about this,” I add. “My assistant here managed to back a van over a couple of boxes of them during the building move - which was quite tricky as they were being carried by the movers at the time - but we have stacks of them to replace.”

“So in the meantime you just... manage expectations?” Graham asks, seeing a glimmer of the light.

“Manage user expectations and actively assist in switch failure,” the PFY counters.

“By assisting you mean?”

“We mean backing the cage nut screws on the switch off so far that the slightest touch (by a beancounter wondering why his port speed is 10meg half duplex) will cause the switch to fall from its lofty perch.”

“Onto the floor,” Graham nods.

“No,” the PFY says, “onto the switch below it - with the loose cage nut screws - which falls onto the switch below it - with the loose cage screws - and so on and so on until all the switches fall...”

“Onto the floor,” Graham nods.

“No,” the PFY says. “onto the beancounter. Because after all, they started it.”

“I see,” Graham says. “And so I’ve pretty much put a spanner in the works.”

“Not entirely,” the PFY says. “Just ring the beancounter back and tell him it’s all working perfectly.”

“But won’t he...”

“Think you’re lying? Of course he will. Then he’ll get the key that he thinks we don’t know he has and just check the comms room for himself...”

“Several crashes and a small cry later we’ll have an insurance claim ready to be processed,” the PFY finishes.

“I see. But isn’t it a bit... cruel?”

“You only say that because you’ve never seen a cupboard full of aging 12-port 100 meg access switches wheezing away,” I say, gesturing at the access comms room. “Just take a look for yourself and see what we mean.”

...

“I see,” Graham says, as the warm cloud of heated components envelops him. “These things are ancie-”

>CRASH< >CRASH< >CRASH< >CRASH< >CRASH< >CRASH< >aggg<”

“Two in one day!” I say, shaking my head.

“Two?” the PFY asks.

“Well we’re ringing that beancounter back, aren’t we?”

BOFH: The stupidity criticality

C no evil - OK, maybe just a bit

Posted in [BOFH](#), 30th October 2009 12:02 GMT

Episode 14 "I just don't understand him!" the PFY snaps.

"Yes, well, you've got to remember we're talking about a new Boss, so we're really looking at one of three types of people," I reply.

"A - a grizzled professional who's seen and endured the stupidity of users.

B - an idiot with no idea who just keeps his head down and waits till hometime.

Or C - an idiot with no idea who's not going to let incompetence slow him down. They all have different approaches when confronted by users in their first few weeks."

"How do you mean exactly?"

"Person A will know users are idiots and take everything they say with a pinch of salt and an tablespoon of chili powder.

B will think that users know everything and will consult us about every little complaint or 'good idea' that gets reported to them, and

C will proceed blindly, promising solutions to users' problems, whims, flights of fancy and poorly thought-out technical aspirations."

"But why do we always end up with Cs?" laments the PFY.

"We must have been very bad in former lives," I sigh. "Or the end of the world is so near that karma has decided to clear the backlog of crap lives."

"He's recommending we use Windows NT as our server OS because the number of new security vulnerabilities is so low!"

"Yes, he was talking to one of the Beancounters about it yesterday," I respond. "He was also talked into considering securing everything in our file shares with non-inherited access lists."

"How can someone be that stupid?"

"It's hard to say how it happens," I shrug. "Some pundits claim that stupidity has a similar payload to that of the atom."

"You've lost me," the PFY says.

"Well, in equation $E=mc^2$," I explain, "the vast power of the atom, which has such a tiny mass, is bolstered because of the immense value of the speed of light squared."

"Nope, nothing."

"The energy of the atom is so huge not because of the mass of the atom itself but because of the speed of light, squared," I go on. "And so it is with stupidity. While IQ is extremely low, stupidity is vastly high."

"So there's an equation for that then?"

"Of course - $N = IQ \times S^2$."

"S being Stupidity. But what's N stand for?"

"Nightmare. It's worse when there's blind stupidity in the mix - with the equation $N = IQ \times bS^2$."

"What's the difference between S and bS?"

"It's like the difference between miles and knots. It's stupidity++. With normal stupidity the person might occasionally experience self-doubt. With the blind version they just forge on regardless and hope that it'll be OK."

"So things are looking bad because the boss has blind stupidity?"

"No, things are looking really bad because the Boss has *blatant* stupidity - BS, which is even worse than the blind kind - because the person knows they're probably wrong but won't back down. And we also have to bear in mind that the IT Director has bS and has always liked Windows NT - because he can 'understand' it..."

"That can't be good!"

"No. When the blatant stupidity of the Boss meets the blind stupidity of the IT Director we're looking at $N = IQ \times BS^2 \times IQ \times bS^S$, which is, as everyone knows..."

"A stupidity criticality!" the PFY gasps. "We must do something!"

"Already in motion," I counter. "I've bought us some time with the administrative 'carbon rods' of a ten page business case proposal but I've been working on the business equivalent of stuffing them in lead-lined drums, encasing the drums in cement and dropping them in the North Sea."

"How?" the PFY asks.

"I've formed a 'Technology Committee'."

"Oooh!" the PFY burbles. "A strategic technology committee?"

“Even better, a strategic technology *working* committee,” I smirk.

“With an overly broad remit, ensuring they’re too busy considering things to ever reach a decision?”

“Uh-huh, And no evaluation criteria or due dates. Still, they’ll meet both regularly and often to hammer out the important stuff...”

“The Mission Statement, the Committee Vision and the Core Values?” yelps the PFY.

“Uh-huh,” I reply, suppressing the inevitable gag reflex. “That’ll waste six months, no problems.”

“But there’s no guarantee they won’t come up with something in the meantime!”

“Sure there is - I’ve loaded the committee with technical know-it-alls, each pushing their own barrow and each with their own hidden agenda.”

“And if that doesn’t work?”

“They meet in the private committee room with the high security,” I say.

“The soundproof, airtight, two-way locked one on the 4th floor that’s swept for bugs every six months?” the PFY asks.

“Yep. And right alongside the duct that carries the generator exhaust. An exhaust duct that recently developed a couple of stress fractures around the 4th floor vicinity.”

“So if there’s any danger of a resolution being reached?”

“We just cut the power to the building.”

“Which would lock the doors, start the generator and gas them like badgers?” the PFY says.

“Which *did* lock the doors, start the generator and gas them like medium-sized stripey-faced mammals,” I correct.

“?”

“They had a meeting early this morning while I was still testing it.”

“Damn! So this whole conversation was about nothing?”

“Not at all. I just had to tell someone...”

BOFH: Slab happy

The PFY needs to play his cards right

Posted in [BOFH](#), 13th November 2009 12:02 GMT

Episode 15 Isn't it annoying when senior management simply has to have access to every door, room, system and application in the enterprise - even if they have no idea what to do with the access once they get it.

Like our new IT Director (after the previous Director tragically stepped over the protective railings and into the path of the number 94 bus late one night outside Marble Arch tube station just as the PFY, he and I were walking home from a vendor's drinks evening. He never did finish that conversation about looking through the company's web usage to see who was wasting the most time during work hours...).

"He's reset the aircon again," the PFY says in annoyed tones, turning from the wall. "The remote's only letting me choose setpoints between 20 and 21 Celsius."

"Don't worry, he'll get tired of it soon," I respond. "It's just a phase he's going through. He'll find something more interesting sooner or later. Meantime if we just abstain from acts of gratuitous violence..."

...Moments later...

"Wondering if you could help me out?" our new Director says, entering Mission Control. "Just trying to sort out some of these access cards and keys..."

"Yes?" I ask.

"I've worked out what all these cards and keys are for," he says, waving an impressive ring under the PFY's nose, "but I'm just a bit confused about this one?"

!

"Wherever did you get that?" I ask, fingering an access card not unlike the card sewn into the lining of my wallet.

"Security."

"Security?" I say, in tones not unlike the ones used to say 'Look, a genuine #94 Routemaster from Queensway!'

"The security company - the one that keyed the building. I ordered masters of every key issued to the building - only they can't tell me what this card was for."

“Did they?” I respond, in tones not unlike the ones used to say ‘You might get a better view from the top of those railings’. “Tell you what, leave it with me and I’ll get back to you.”

. . . Moments later. . .

“So what’s the card for?” the PFY says, turning it over. “And what’s the XS legend stand for?”

“I... Uh... Exit Strategy,” I respond, deciding to come clean. “When they built the place I had some embedded card readers installed in the walls around the building.”

“And what do these readers do?”

“Oh, just administrative functions,” I respond, playing it casual.

“Like?”

“Just routine stuff - override the CCTV system, unlock and lock doors, trip the main circuit breaker for the building, that sort of thing.”

“And you were planning on giving me a card when?” the PFY asks, a touch miffed.

“Oh... I was just waiting for the security company to deliver it,” I lie. “It completely slipped my mind.”

At this point I figure that telling the PFY that it was an exit strategy for any eventuality - including his megalomania - might not be well received.

“So it’ll be OK if I take this one then?” the PFY asks.

“Of course!” I cry, faking bonhomie. “Just...”

“Just?”

“Just be... careful.. where you put the card. Keep it a foot or so away from any flat surface. Particularly flat surfaces with one of those fire emergency exit maps or large red X characters.”

“Like this one?” the PFY points to the diagram on the wall beside my desk.

“Particularly that one,” I say, deciding to tell all. “Unless you want to hear four explosive bolts simultaneously firing pieces of badly rusted reinforcing rod in place of the high tensile steel rods currently holding the one-ton slab of concrete in place in the roofspace above your desk.”

The PFY looks shocked. “How long’s that been there?”

“Since the place was built.”

“But... you let me choose my desk location!”

“Which is why I said to be careful around any flat surface,” I respond. “I... ran out of fire exit signs.”

“So... there’s probably a reader near my desk for a slab above *your* desk?”

“Er...”

“Only you would’ve made allowances for desks being moved around - which probably means the roofspace is riddled with slabs.”

“It’s a possibility...”

“And the walls riddled with readers?”

“Again, it’s a poss...”

AND THE GAME OF OFFICE CHESS BEGINS!

“There might be one over here somewhere to drop a slab onto you over there,” the PFY says, waving the card dangerously close to a missing sign location.

“Or one over here to drop one on you over there” I say, moving to Queen’s Bishop 4.

“But then you’d have built a booby trap - just in case someone found this card.”

“I think you’re over thinking it a little,” I say, before the PFY can warn me about going against a Sicilian when death is on the line.

“Oh, really?” the PFY says, disappointedly, just as the Boss comes back in.

“That card please,” he snaps. “Apparently security found a card reader in a wall downstairs which doesn’t show up on the system but they think is connected to a door to the outside world immediately below this room!”

“Really?” I say, in a tones not unlike those used to say 'Careful, those railings might be slippery'.

“Thank you!” the Boss blurts, heading for the door.

>ba-ba-ba-bang!< >crash-crunch<

“How did you...” the PFY asks, glancing away from our new office footpath momentarily.

“I didn’t. Maybe there was a booby trap after all. Maybe it was in the big X on the exit sign.”

“And you were planning on telling me about that when?” the PFY asks.

“Oh... it completely slipped my mind. And now there’s only the one card. Perhaps you should get back to work...”

...

BOFH: Made of win

Pushing the gold envelope

Posted in [BOFH](#), 27th November 2009 12:02 GMT

Episode 16 “We should enter one of those Innovation in IT awards!” the Boss burbles one day, sidling up to the PFY and myself in a pseudo-ingratiating manner.

“We should what now?” the PFY asks.

“IT awards. We should enter one – it’s a great way of raising the company’s profile.”

“Oh, the company’s going to some awards?” I ask.

“No, just me – representing the company,” the Boss explains.

“I see. So what you want is for us to come up with something that we could get an award for so that you can attend an awards ceremony?”

“The company can, yes.”

“So instead of doing our job you want us to fabricate something that we might win an award for?”

“I’d have thought you’d already done something you thought would be innovative?”

“Nah! What award ceremony are you talking about anyway?”

“I just noticed this one looked... um... interesting,” the Boss mumbles waving a magazine vaguely in our direction.

“We don’t do anything innovative,” I grunt, letting the mag fall into the bin once I saw the ceremony didn’t have an open bar. “Leastways not something we’d get an award for. Possibly something we’d get a ten year stretch in Belmarsh for.”

“Can’t you just... uh... make something up? I could get our PR people to...”

“Polish the turd?” the PFY says. “Refabricate a friction reducing rotary transportation instrument using the algebraic equation $x^2 + y^2 = r^2$...”

“Beg pardon?” the Boss asks, sounding excited.

“The wheel,” I mumble “He’s talking about the wheel.”

“Oh, right,” the Boss responds, deflated.

“Indeed. But if we’re honest that’s what half these Innovation awards are - finding someone with the *cojones* to go up on stage and claim an award for implementing a cross-company document standardization platform to increase productivity and reduce document translation anomalies with a view to vendor independence and license consolidation...”

“?”

“Install Microsoft Office on the terminal server,” the PFY translates

“Surely no one would...”

“Don’t you believe it!” the PFY says. “All those plebs from IT marketing who for years tried to sell us some lame pieces of software which did the same thing as public domain programs are now working for other companies, trying to scrape up kudos for even more work that they didn’t do.”

“But still, they wouldn’t...”

“They’d front up for an award for wiping their backside after crapping if they could think of wording it properly,” I point out.

“Yes,” the PFY says thoughtfully. “Something about log-based carbon emission paperwork would do. You’d need to work emissions trading into it though - given it’s a buzzword now.”

“So you think we could... get an award?”

“Course we could,” I assure, leafing through an industry paper till the ubiquitous glossy brochure falls out. “Bingo! Here’s what you’re after! Innovation in IT into the 21st century. Open bar, celebrities and three-course meal.”

“And you think we’d win something?”

“Trust us,” the PFY smiles. “Half the people that judge these IT awards have back episodes of *Beyond 2000* on Beta tape behind the couch. Still, they’re highly placed in the industry - and that’s what you need to legitimize an award.”

“See, being at the forefront of IT is a bit like having the yellow jersey in the tour-de-France,” I explain. “It’s a lot of work to get there, a lot of work to stay there and sooner or later the performance enhancing drugs - in this case the lager - will catch up with you. So it’s far easier to buy a yellow jersey, sew a couple of foreign-sounding bike name badges onto it and agree with anything anyone on a moped says.”

“?”

“We’ll bluff them,” the PFY clarifies. “We’ll think of some weaselly words which sound like we’ve split the IT atom...”

“When in fact we’ve just cut some cheese,” I finish.

“But won’t they...”

“Nah, we’ll slap it in as a late entry with 4000 pages of supporting code cut and pasted from sourceforge and they’ll just take it at face value - if you can get PR to supply some fancy screenshots of space age applications...”

. . . Four days later . . .

“Thank you, thank you very much,” the Boss slurs happily as he stumbles down from the podium with yet another resin-encased motherboard on a plank.

“What was that one?” the PFY asks, returning from the bar with three more pints.

“Blah blah blah, aggressive processor scaling to achieve unprecedented power consumption reduction in low-use scenarios, etc.”

“Ah right, switching your machine off when you go home, gotcha. So what’s left?”

“I think that’s the lot,” the boss gurgles, putting the award down on the table where it joins a stack of others.

“No, no, one more left.”

“No, I’m sure that’s the lot,” the Boss says, squinting at the program.

“Just a second...”

“And the award,” our pimped-up celebrity pipes, “for enhanced collaborative virtual private networking in an out-of-hours time window between an awards event organizer and event nominee...”

“Breaking into the awards organizers computer network and replacing the winners with us...” the PFY murmurs.

“...goes to...”

BOFH: Key performance undertakers

Christmas spirits and goodwill to all mains

Posted in [BOFH](#), 23rd December 2009 12:02 GMT

Episode 17 The PFY and I happened to stay out a little late at a Christmas do and unfortunately ended up in the company of some industry commentators - never a good move. Given that the PFY and myself know the perils of drinking with reporters - people who drink for a living and for whom seven pints of overproof cider counts both as an aperitif and a legitimate work expense - there's no explanation for our foolhardiness.

There's a traffic cone and a bicycle wheel on the PFY's chair. My desk is laden with the remains of a couple of cellphones, a traffic warden's ticketing machine and a half eaten tin of chilli beans which looks to have been opened with a claw hammer.

I remember nothing.

"Mnhhaaaa," the PFY mumbles at me quietly as he enters mission control and wanders over to his desk.

"Myaa," I reply tiredly, pushing a steaming pint mug of espresso towards him.

"What happened last night?" I ask the PFY once he's settled.

"Well, you remember when we left the Blue Posts?"

"No."

"Do you remember going to the Blue Posts?"

"Nope."

"What about before that, the White Hart?"

"Nothing. How the hell did we get there?"

"The reporters took us because there was live music."

"I don't remember live music."

"It was a bloke on a piano accordion."

"The cruel bastards!" I sniff. "How bad was it?"

"As far as piano accordion solos went, it ended quite well."

“How does a piano accordion solo end well?”

“With a gunshot.”

“Ah right... I seem to vaguely remember a game of golf?”

“The game of pool, you mean.”

Ping! “Ah yes, I do recall thinking the green was rather elevated.”

Our recollections are interrupted by the arrival of a beancounter at Mission Control with his keyboard.

“I need a new keyboard.”

“Sure,” the PFY says. “In that box over there, help yourself.”

“There’s none in there,” he says, moments later.

“Don’t be ridiculous, there’s dozens in there!”

“Yes, but none like this,” he says, indicating the ‘natural’ keyboard - you know, like the ones you find in nature.

“Yeah, we don’t have those” I sigh.

”But I need one. Without them my arms get really achy.”

“I’ve used the UNnatural keyboards for years and it’s not affected my arms,” I say.

“But it affects me,” he whines.

“Tell you what, ask your Boss to sort you out one. We can’t order them as they cost more than the standardized average value of a keyboard. One of your new beancounter policies I believe.”

“My computer chair’s not working properly either,” he adds, changing tack slightly.

“That’s an office supply. You’ll need to get that from your boss as well.”

"But my back problem’s caused by the computer. Human beings weren’t made to sit in front of computers all day!" he sniffs.

"Nor were they made to slouch on a sofa eating chips and watching TV all day, but I bet you managed to crack that in the weekends without problems," the PFY says.

"I can't believe you're saying that! This could end up being a workplace injury!"

"No that's a workplace annoyance," the PFY replies. "A workplace injury is when you fall down a slippery and poorly lit staircase."

"... Later this afternoon," I add. "In any case, all this H&S workplace comfort stuff is really about being a Spaz, and there's no compensation for that."

"Spaz, are we even allowed to say that?" the PFY asks. "It sounds a bit non-pc."

"Course we are," I respond. "It's just an acronym for Special Problem Affirmative and something beginning with Z that I'll have thought of by the time it reaches grievance proceedings. In any case, we don't spend money on SPAZs. If we did, the Beancounters would've used all that cash up years ago."

"So you're not going to do anything about my keyboard or my chair?"

"I'd love to, but we really wouldn't like to overrule the company's new purchasing policies. By the book, us, all the way," the PFY answers.

"Besides," I say, pointing to the tangled rubbish on my desk, "I've got to get this firewall fixed."

"That's not a firewall, that's some mobile phones and... a... ticketing machine?"

"No it's a firewall," the PFY says.

"I can see the City of Westminster logo on the side of it! And hang on - isn't that the CEO's new sat phone?!!"

Ping! Uh-oh. Vague memories of a crowbar incident on the 6th floor trickle through to my brain.

"I KNOW WHAT WE CAN DO!" the PFY says "I could fix your existing keyboard!"

"Fix it?" the Beancounter says dubiously, thinking of past occasions when the PFY and I have transposed the M and N keys on all the Beancounters' keyboards for a laugh.

"Yes! Obviously we'd take the opportunity to add some functionality: ipod charger cable, wireless KVM capabilities. Tell you what - leave that one with us and we'll prototype the new version for you when we finish fixing this FIREWALL. *Wink.*"

"I... OK."

[30 minutes later]

"Okay, what does it do?" I ask the PFY, when his soldering iron is back in its holster.

"It's a keyboard," he replies. "The fault was a little circuit board corrosion, which was quickly fixed with a bit of fuse wire."

“And all the tinfoil?”

“It’s Christmas - it’s decorative!!!” he cries

“Oh,” I sigh.

“AND it’s conductive!” he adds, cheering me up a little.

“So it’s connected to Phase??!!!!” I blurt, noticing the additional cable.

“No, to Earth,” he replies. “Otherwise it’d be dangerous.”

“Oh,” I sigh

“The tinfoil on the BOTTOM of the keyboard’s connected to the mains - because that’s REALLY dangerous,” the PFY adds.

“I don’t get how it works?”

“When they see the extra cable they’re going to get me to bash in a couple of letters to see if it’s safe - which it is, given the rubber feet. However - they moment they go to move it to a better, more ergonomic position...”

“Ah...”

“More like KZEERTTTAAAAAAAAAAAA, I’d think.”

...

The boredom of the next hour is punctuated only by the arrival and departure of an ambulance as, with a small *scratchy scratchy* sound, another line of the PFY’s long list of retribution is crossed off. Tired, and still a little hung-over I settle back into the office chair - liberally Christmassed up by the PFY with the leftovers from the keyboard. The quality of the job leaves a lot to be desired, as I note that the wheel of the chair is tangled up in a...

KZEERTTTAAAAAAAAAAAA!

Scratchy scratchy.

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BOFH: The PFY Chronicles

The underdog's on top... or sidling upwards, at least

Posted in [BOFH](#), 12th February 2010 12:20 GMT

Episode 1 It's a bleak morning in Mission Control. Even the Boss's normal expression of guilty ignorance is replaced by one that could almost be mistaken for loss...

"Dead?" he asks quietly.

"I'm afraid so," I respond.

"But... he was doing so well."

"He was, but then that dodgy life support machine switched itself off."

"I thought they replaced that?"

"They did, but the new one turned itself off too."

"I know, but I thought they replaced that one too?"

"They did, but the third one had the same problem. And the fourth."

"And when did it... happen?"

"Last night," I say. "Apparently someone turned his TV on and he... passed on... the moment the *Coronation Street* theme tune started. You'll be going to the funeral of course?"

"What?"

"Well I just assumed - you know, an employee killed in the workplace by an unreported workplace hazard. Might look a little... cold... if someone from the company didn't show. I assume you've spoken to his relatives about compensation already?"

"Compensation?" the Director blurts.

"Ah," I say "So you're after the FRONT page of some seamy tabloid as opposed to page 7."

"I don't understand."

"You know, 'Widow shafted by cruel company' - that sort of thing."

"Simon wasn't married!"

"Yes, I'm sure the tabloids will report that correctly," I say unconvincingly.

"So what do you suggest?"

"That one of you talks to the next of kin while the other goes to the funeral."

"I'll do the next of kin," the Director blurts hastily. "Philip - you can take the funeral."

. . . Two days later . . .

"I suppose we'd better be going then," the Boss mutters quietly, adjusting the Windsor on his grey tie from $\frac{1}{2}$ mast to $\frac{3}{4}$ windpipe. "Well, I suppose we have to move on."

"Indeed," I say, glancing up at the clock. "The service is at 10."

The drive to the church was punctuated only by the occasional sniff from the Boss – no doubt more concerned about the possibility of a lynching than the departed.

. . . Later. . .

"It's surprising and humbling when you realise how little you know about people," the Boss says as we're driving to the graveside while the rest of the masses indulge in canapés at the after-match function. "I mean, who'd have guessed that Simon had a Doctorate in Applied Linguistics? And his annual pilgrimage to Nepal - I thought he just went to Oktoberfest. It just shows you..."

What it shows you is that a sad by-product of the one-upmanship of a group of geeks is that each tries to outdo the others at eulogy time. Luckily the speakers ran out before anyone could mention his presidency-for-life of MENSA, his tireless work on the cancellation of third world debt and his selfless patronage of the arts.

"It certainly does," I agree as we pull up at the cemetery. "But I guess time moves on and we have to make plans for the future. Speaking of which - what are we doing about Simon's replacement?"

"Oh I've put out some feelers," the Boss says as we trundle over to the graveside ahead of the hearse. "I've got a couple of pals in the industry who have a couple of prospects that they think might fit in quite well."

"Really?" I say. "So you weren't thinking of... appointing from within."

"Gosh, no," the Boss says with characteristic tact.

"I see."

. . . Half an hour later . . .

"Thought I might pop along after all," the Director says, sidling up to the grave after the mourners have departed. "I was talking to one of his friends after the funeral - Did you know Simon was considered for the Nobel peace prize for some poetry that he wrote?"

"I know," I say "He was an inspiration to us all."

"I would have thought Philip would have turned up though?"

"He said he'd be here but he had to go see a travel agent about something."

"So he's not hiding behind the tractor for fear of his life then?"

"Backhoe."

"Pardon?"

"It's a Backhoe, not a tractor."

"What's the difference?"

"To you? One goes chugga chugga chugga and the other goes brrrm brrrm brrrm."

"I see," the Director says, not impressed, picking up a handful of dirt.

"Anyway," I say, "time moves on and we have to make plans for the future. Speaking of which - what are we doing about Simon's replacement?"

"I've rung a few people - and I think I might have found an ideal candidate. An old school chum who was quite high up in Apple for a time. I thought I'd give him a call later and see if he wants to pop in for an interv..."

>Nudge<

> Thud <

>BRRMMMM< >BRRRRMMM< >BRMMMMMM<

BOFH: The PFY Chronicles part 2

A poisoned chalice

Posted in [BOFH](#), 12th March 2010 11:56 GMT

Episode 2 Things are quiet at Mission Control. No, quiet would be an understatement. The room seems unnaturally large and cavernous, and there's an echo that just shouldn't be there...

I could swear I heard the words "sleep no more" coming from the PC speaker, but I'm sure I'm imagining it.

My contemplations are interrupted by two arrivals: A postcard with the words "Hi from KiwiFoo" crudely pasted from letters cut out of a magazine, and the Head Beancounter. The first is disconcerting, the second just annoying.

"Just... ah... need the building master key to get onto the roof," he blathers hesitantly.

"Interviewing for new auditors then?" I ask.

"Begpardon?"

"You know - the jumping game," I prompt.

"I'msorry?" he half gasps.

"You know, when you get a skip full of empty cardboard boxes delivered outside the building then convince job applicants their job relies on them jumping from the second floor balcony"

"Oh, you mean like a trust test - they land in the boxes?"

"No, the bin's on the other side of the building."

"So why is it filled with empty boxes?"

"That's where you put all the stuff in their desks. I take it they're all internal candidates?"

"No, I don't need the key for that - there's just an appointment in my diary with your... uh... former supervisor in the... roof storage facility."

"Ah, right," I respond. "Complain about some IT delivery last year did you?"

"No?"

"Park in one of the IT reserved car parks then?"

"There aren't any reserved Car Parks for IT."

"Course there are. They're labeled 'Chief Financial Officer' and 'Board Members only'."

"I..."

"Doesn't matter - I don't think I've ever been in the rooftop storage facility before, so let's take a look-see."

"I'm perfectly capable of..."

"No, no, I insist."

...15 minutes later...

"That's not a storage locker - it's just some tin sheds bolted together."

"True - but how about we see what my predecessor was storing in Shed Number One?"

>eeee< . . . >SLAM!<

"Well, what's in there?" he asks.

"You don't want to know!" I gasp.

"Oh come on, it can't be that bad!"

"See for yourself." >eeee<

"A bunch of monitors?"

"How MANY monitors?"

"I... well let's see, seven wide by six deep by six high. How many's that?"

"A hundred and eighty."

"That's not so many is it?"

"That's only one of the sheds. Shed 2 will probably have another hundred and..." >eeee<
>SLAM!<

"What is it?"

"VT52s."

"What?"

"VT52s - though on the bright side there's only about 70 of them because they're twice the size of a screen. But that's not what I'm worried about."

"What are you worried about?"

"CRTs are getting harder to get rid of than a scorching case of herpes - and there's only so many you can dump on the tube before they start hunting you down like a dog."

"Can't you just get a bin in?"

"You can, but even they're getting picky now, what with leaky capacitors, mercury leaching etc, and dumping this many will undoubtedly require me to fill in some paperwork about safe disposal options - with some guarantee about accuracy."

"And...?"

"And that's just the monitors - the VT52s are a whole other story."

"Why's that?"

"Well firstly because they're probably crammed with stuff that's no longer legal to just dump and secondly because this company's never HAD any VT52s."

"So perhaps they were here already?"

"No, Simon had the sheds installed."

"So how did they get up here?"

"Exactly! Someone must have brought them up here, at night, one at a time, and stashed them in the sheds."

"But why?"

"A poisoned chalice," I sigh, the penny dropping.

"A what?"

"Does the term 'Mutually Assured Destruction' mean anything to you?"

"You've lost me."

"Say you're concerned that one of your younger beancounters is going to try and nudge you out of your job. There's two ways of defending yourself - three, counting the jumping game. The first is that you increase your efficiency to such a level that no one in power would ever dream of replacing you with your subordinate, while the second - and far less exhausting - option is just to make the financials system such a pig's breakfast that your subordinate would never want to take over. Poison the chalice."

"So you're saying Simon put all this in place just to..."

"Shaft me in the event of his untimely demise, yes."

"So if monitors are bad and those VT52 thingies are worse what's likely to be in the third shed?"

"At this rate, probably Daleks!"

"So what do we do?"

"We could just shut the doors and pretend we didn't see anything, but I suspect that if you had something in your diary there'll be appointments in someone else's diary and some form of automatic whistleblower email thing about the contents of sheds 3 and 4 flying off to the media and Greenpeace in the next day or two."

"So what do we do?"

"If I were you I'd order a skip full of empty boxes!"

"And what are you going to do?"

"Order another skip full of empty boxes - there's four shedsworth here!"

"Okay, I'll meet you back here in a couple of hours," he says.

. . . Two hours later . . .

"What *is* in the other sheds?" the head beancounter says, now that he's had two hours to wonder.

"It's safer not to know," I suggest.

"Oh, it's locked anyway," he says rattling the padlock on the door. "And the building master key doesn't fit it."

"No," I say, thinking furiously. "But just for laughs, try your door key in it."

"It's the same type as the building master..."

"No, I meant your **home** door key."

"Why would that fit the d... >snick< oh. How did that..." >eeee< >SLAM!<

"What's in there?" I ask.

"You don't want to know. Or rather the company wouldn't want you to know. Documents, thousands of them, which should have been shredded. Definitely something auditors shouldn't see. OH! A poisoned chalice!"

"Indeed," I say. "But if it was a real poisoned chalice, by this stage there'd be a stack of Revenue and Customs agents banging down the do... >ring< >ring< Hello. Uh-huh. Okay, well if you could just get them to wait in the... oh, I see. Okay then."

"What was that?"

"Security. The timing was out by a minute or two but the Revenue agents are on their way up as we speak."

"WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO? "

"Well I'm going to order another couple of skips but perhaps you'd like to consider the jumping game?"

"What?!"

"Or you could wait a couple of minutes for Revenue to break down the door?"

"I..."

...

Oddly, a rational man would have chosen the bin from the company that HE had booked rather than the one from the company that I had booked. His one, full of empty cardboard boxes, rather than my bin, full of VT52s covered with several layers of cardboard...

That's the thing about a poison chalice - the best thing you can do is pass it on...

BOFH: The PFY Chronicles Part The Third

He's in the ~~money~~ merde...

Posted in [BOFH](#), 2nd April 2010 12:02 GMT

Episode 3 It's a wonderful day today - nothing could spoil my mood, with the prospect of a long Easter weekend with nothing more to do but eat junk food and catch up with hours of TV watching.

My good mood swells even further when I stumble upon a wadge of banknotes taped to the underside of a drawer in my former supervisor's desk. Large denomination, uncirculated and consecutively numbered, they're quite obviously the result of some extortion scheme that I was not a party to and for which my share of the profits had been withheld...

But no longer!! The old eyecrometer estimates the sheaf of 50s as being somewhere around the two thousand quid mark.

If that weren't enough good fortune, I notice that the CEO's brand spanking new all-bells-and-whistles laptop has just arrived and the courier didn't get a signature. BONUS!!!

Holidays, dosh and a new media centre for home - what more could I ask for?

The irritatingly repetitive reminders that I need to restart after this week's OS patches have been applied wash over me, as if someone had already added the blatantly obvious "Don't remind me anymore" checkbox to the restart prompt...

Even the arrival of a greenhorn beancounter doesn't sully my good cheer.

"I've come for the new laptop," he says.

"New laptop?" I ask, nudging the aforementioned carton under my desk.

"Yes, it was delivered this morning. Security said they told the guy to bring it up here."

"Here? No, I've not seen anyone. Mind you, I've been in and out of the office all day - he probably took it back with him because he'd need to get someone to sign for it."

"So you've not seen anything?"

"No, but feel free to look," I suggest, reaching into my drawer for the overvoltage cattleprod.

"Nah, it's OK, it's probably been dropped off somewhere else."

The next two minutes (which ordinarily would have been scheduled for rapidly cramming the CEO's new laptop into the shredder wheelie bin prior to sneaking it down the basement car park)

have stalled upon the discovery of another wadge of banknotes under the drawer above the cattleprod...

And now I'm in two minds.

On one hand, Simon may have hidden them under my drawer knowing they would be the last place I'd look if I were searching for undisclosed profits - but on the other hand he may have intended to disclose their location to me as a form of Christmas bonus before 'accidentally' electrocuting himself on some Christmas tinsel...

We will never know.

A closer examination of the latest bundle reveals that the sequence numbers start 100 bills after the last of the first wadge, which leads me to conclude that there's at least another two bundles of notes stashed somewhere on the premises.

...

>crash< >rattle< >crash<

Twenty minutes and an office trashing later, I have eight bundles of 50 quid notes, all but the first taped under, in or around my desk. It looks like my first guess was correct - they were put in the last place I'd look. Still, someone's loss is my gain - in this case my weekend upgrade.

I pop them into the shredder wheelie bin along with the laptop and make my way slowly to the freight elevator, allowing myself a cheery whistle along the way... Pressing B2 and turning the key to non-stop, I contemplate my Easter shopping list. Perhaps a company gyrocopter?

Strolling over to my vehicle I pop the boot and empty the contraband in. I've barely slammed it shut when the basement is flooded with light.

"There he is!" a voice says.

"Beg pardon?" I say, feigning innocence.

"The money in your boot," the Head of Security says, stepping out of the shadows. "Yours is it?"

"What money?" I say, stalling for time.

"A foreign diplomat's... uh... consultancy fee. It went missing from the CEO's safe two nights ago."

"Preposterous!" I splutter. "This money's been on my person for a month..."

My innocence plea is silenced by yet another figure stepping out of the shadows. A figure in a khaki green KiwiFoo T-Shirt...

"Arrest that man!" he says, pointing at me, as the 'beancounter' breaks out a set of handcuffs.

"I... would like to converse with a lawyer," I state calmly.

"A good plan," the figure says. "Before or after the extradition?"

"Extradition?"

"Yes," the bogus beancounter says. "Apparently the... consultancy fee had already been handed over to the official concerned but was to be stored for safekeeping in the company's safe while the diplomat went out for an evening's... uh... entertainment. As the money has therefore been stolen from a foreign government, there's a grey area as to whether the case should be tried in this country or in the small island nation with vast mineral resources and a judicial system that favors sentencing people to many years of hard labor at its completely manual sewerage works - just for shoplifting."

"And you have no idea how long it took to find that small island nation," the figure in khaki shirt chuckles drily. "Or you could opt for a plea bargain..."

Something makes me think the plea bargain might change the country but perhaps not the sentence...

BOFH: Forgive and forget

And get some revenge too

Posted in [BOFH](#), 23rd April 2010 11:02 GMT

Episode 4 They say the secret to a good relationship is to be able to forgive and forget - and so I'm working hard on the forgiving bit with the PFY.

He, for his part, is working on the forgetting - which I'm told is a perfectly normal by-product of ECT - even though a lot of private hospitals frown on the use of it unless it's accompanied by a believable signature on the release form and a large donation. I make a mental note to call the School of Dangerously Experimental Medicine and see if he's made any progress with his delusions of my demise...

See, I'm feeling better already.

I'm not one to bear a grudge however, and am perfectly prepared to forgive the PFY for having superconductive high-current tinsel specially made just to secure a promotion. After all, it's his attention to detail that makes him so valuable in his role.

That said, I can't afford to spend my days looking behind me checking for the inevitable black van of doom.

Because that's a beancounter's job.

Speaking of which, the company beancounters have scheduled a meeting with me to emit some piffle about my wrongful acceptance of the company's accident compensation payments and spending it on an overseas holiday. They want me to pay the money back!

Honestly - you'd think they were upset I wasn't dead - a point I noted in my response to them in my last email. And recorded their subsequent office conversation about via the CCTV system. (You never know when you'll need a bargaining chip like that at a later date.)

One of the weedier beancounters waxed lyrical about what he'd do with me if he ever caught me alone in a dark alley. And nothing sexual either, thankfully. Which just goes to show you can't judge a book by its cover.

...

I run my eye over the office just to make sure everything is as I expect it. The entrails of the PFY's chair are scattered over his desk in the wake of the frenzied search by Security for the remaining company bribe money that the PFY is supposed to have stolen. Ironically the search

operation provided me with the opportunity I needed to stash the missing quiddage in the ceiling space of Security's office..

There's something about well-oiled plans. And well-oiled supermodels for that matter...

Sadly though, I know I'm going to have to bury the metaphorical hatchet and release the PFY from his medical accommodation, if only because I now see the pointlessness in being a cruel and heartless megalomaniac IT professional. Sorry, I meant a cruel and heartless megalomaniac IT professional with no one to brag to or compete with.

For instance he'd have appreciated the way I replaced the two AA batteries in the cattleprod with a lantern battery on an extension lead because the beancounters are too tight to let us have our own supplies cupboard any more.

A deeper man might ponder the strange adversarial yet symbiotic relationships that are forged in the darkened pits of a workplace and how they grow via shared experience to form the basis of a compartmentalized outlook on the world which is completely separate from that which we have at home.

But me, I just want to show the PFY how if you reduce the unlatch/relatch time to fractions of a second on an electronic mortise lock in combination with randomizing the time between card swipe and unlatch to a value between one and 120 seconds you can make one of the HR people pack a complete spaz outside the front doors of the building. (Because you never know when you're going to need a bargaining chip like that either.)

Sigh.

As the building starts to shut down for the night I hail a cab and give the cabbie the directions to the PFY's hospital.

"But I'll need to make a stop on the way," I add.

. . . 10 minutes later . . .

>clip< >clop< >clip< >clop< >clip<

"Oh! You startled me!" the weedy gentleman in front of me says.

"Did I? Sorry about that. I'm from the Make-A-Wish Foundation"

"The Make-A-Wish Foundation?"

"Yes, you were saying something earlier in the day about what you'd like to do in a dark alley."

"I was what? Are you really from the Make-A-Wish Foundation?"

"Nah!" >KZZZZZEEERT!<

. . . 10 minutes later . . .

"Picking up or dropping off?" the charming lady at the hospital asks me.

"Both actually," I respond. "You've cured a friend only his brother is far more delusional - thinks he's an accountant in a large company in the city. Apparently he's built up a bit of immunity to ECT. You have to set the knob to 11. Write that down, '11'..."

BOFH: On the couch

Sometimes a chili bhaji is just a chili bhaji. But this time...

Posted in [BOFH](#), 30th April 2010 11:02 GMT

Episode 5 Don't get me wrong. I'm as likely to get workplace trauma counseling as the next guy – especially when the company's tame shrink is an ancient old boiler who was probably there when time was invented. Still, as luck would have it she fell to her death from her slippers a couple of weeks back and the company was forced to contract in an updated model...

Which brings us to the new company counselor, an attractive young thing who seems genuinely interested in the welfare of staff who've suffered workplace injuries - and as the company schedules four free sessions for near death experiences, I book myself in.

Arriving five minutes early gives me a chance to look over her newly furnished ground floor office, situated right alongside the security office - which I'm sure is just a coincidence.

The first thing I notice is the gold plated electrical contacts on the arms of the reclining chair which either mean there's a lie/stress detector built into it or there's an action replay of my Christmas recharge in the offing. Either way I decide that honesty is probably the best option.

...

"So," she says, once I've settled in and told her about the PFY's Christmas surprise, "You seem remarkably calm about the whole thing."

"Well, it's sort of expected in our line of work. Promotion via vacancy. I've invested so much time in educating my assistant in his chosen profession that it was inevitable that he'd seek advancement through dead man's shoes – or in this case dead man's smoked out automatic office chair. And trapping me is just proof of how good he's become."

"And you in turn extracted a modicum of revenge in getting him booked in for a couple of weeks of dubious experimental psychiatric attention?"

"Sure. While I respect his ruthless quest for advancement I also must temper his ambition with the fear of reprisal - or I'd be forever looking over my shoulder."

"And this fear should be just sufficient enough to give him a moment of pause?"

"Indeed."

"And you don't fear that this would simply set off a chain reaction of ever increasing reprisals?"

“No, no - you see at the end of the day we still have to work together in between reprisal attempts, so the magnitude of reprisals tends to diminish fairly rapidly.”

“It peters out?”

“Yes, this morning for instance. It was the PFY’s first day back so I would have been a fool to ingest any food or drink offered to me by him.”

“Because?”

“Because it would most likely be laced with Viagra, rat poison or horse laxative. Or all three for a really fun party.”

“And?”

“And in the end it was just the horse laxative.”

“Horse laxative – how did you know?”

“Oh, I passed the mochachino on to the Boss – the poor bastard was locked in the bog till the vet came. He was on a saline drip for half the morning to get his fluid levels back up.”

“That was a little cruel of you don’t you think?”

“No, cruel was shouting him two rounds of chili bhajis and a chicken vindaloo last night, as a 'Welcome to the Company' event.”

“I see. You seem quite proud of that?” she says, disapprovingly.

“Yes, well...” I burble.

“And you think that will be the end of the revenge?”

“Of course not. But in a week or so we should be back to normal.”

“And in the meantime?”

“In the meantime I expect the PFY's tampered with the brakes and accelerator on my car so that touching either increases the speed exponentially. It’s what I would do.”

“And yet you don’t seem at all concerned about that. Why's that?”

“Oh, because I lent the Boss my car five minutes ago so he could get home after his morning’s illness.”

“You what?!”

“Oh please, don’t worry! I’m not a complete monster! I made sure he was one of the named parties on the insurance”

“You didn’t warn him!?”

“No, I was rather busy this morning. In any case I...”

My monologue is interrupted by the unmistakable sound of a car accelerating madly in the floor below us...

“Is that...” she gasps.

“Yes, I’d recognize that exhaust anywhere. That’ll be the PFY off on an unexpectedly fast circuit around the parking basement in his car.”

“In *his* car?”

“Yes, like I said, I was busy this morning. Working on tempering the PFY’s ambition. Remember when I said it was what I’d do? As it happened it’d what I did do.”

“But that would mean...”

“Wait!” I interrupt, holding up a finger as a second set of squealing tires can be heard below us - “Now *that* would be my vehicle. Wonder who’ll make it to the exit first??”

“You’re a... a...”

“I know,” I nod gravely. “A ruthless IT professional who can address both the needs of the moment and the bigger picture. One for whom the mysteries of the future unfurl as if by magic. Our future for instance. Perhaps you’ve got time for a quick after-work drink? Maybe a bite to eat. I know a place that does a cracking chili bhaji...”

BOFH: The poncy director's cut

I smell a BAFTA... no, wait, that's just burning

Posted in [BOFH](#), 21st May 2010 11:03 GMT

Episode 6

EXT: COUNTRYSIDE

A lush pasture with snow-capped mountains in the distance. A fluffy white rabbit hops into shot, stops and nibbles on some grass.

[Dissolve to...]

INT: BOSS'S OFFICE

The BASTARD, PFY and BOSS are clustered around the screen of the Boss's desktop machine.

PFY

See, he just pushes his machine off the desk!

BASTARD

And 20 minutes later so does that guy.

BOSS

So this footage - it's just showing four of the company's financial people deliberately destroying their workstations?

PFY

Yes! But that's not all - about ten other machines in the building were damaged the same way in the past 24 hours!

BOSS

Any idea why they'd do it?

PFY

No.

BOSS

Or why they'd all choose to do it on the same day?

PFY

None whatsoever.

INT: PUB

[caption: 'Last Friday night']

The **PFY**, very much the worse for wear, is at the bar. Beside him is a **BEANCOUNTER**, looking nervous.

PFY (shouting, slurred)

I'M TELLING YOU, JUST PUSH IT OFF YOUR DESK! NO ONE'S GOING TO BELIEVE YOU DID IT ON PURPOSE! EVEN IF THEY SEE YOU DO IT, NO ONE'S GOING TO BELIEVE IT WAS DELIBERATE!

BEANCOUNTER

Yes, well, thank you, I suppose, I'll certainly...

INT: BOSS'S OFFICE

PFY (blankly)

Nope. No idea at all.

INT: PUB

PFY

JUST DO IT! LIKE THE SHOES! JUST PUSH THE MACHINE OFF THE DESK! HONESTLY, NO ONE REALLY THINKS YOU'D DO IT. AND WHEN IT'S BROKEN THEY'LL HAVE TO REPLACE IT - IT'S NOT LIKE THEY'LL REPAIR THEM!

INT: BOSS'S OFFICE

BOSS

We'll have to repair them.

BASTARD

Beg pardon?

BOSS

We'll have to repair them.

BASTARD

But they're crapped out P4s!

BOSS

That may be, but they still have an expected lifetime.

PFY

The same could be said about you - but we wouldn't put money on it...

BOSS

Pardon?

PFY

Nothing.

BASTARD

But we don't have time to repair them!

BOSS

Perhaps you could teach your users to repair them?

PFY

You mean *teach* users something?

BOSS

Yes.

PFY

Teach them to take the covers off a box?

BOSS

Yes.

PFY

You know that's a bad idea, right?

BOSS

How bad could it be?

INT: MEETING ROOM

Six beancounters stand behind tables on which their desktop machines are standing. The PFY addresses them.

PFY

OK, so the first thing we're going to get you to do is to take the covers off your machines. So make sure that your machine is orientated so that the serial ports are at the lowest point...

BEANCOUNTER

What's a serial port?

The PFY sighs deeply.

[Fade to 10 minutes later]

PFY

OK, so we've now found the serial ports on everyone's machines and started undoing the screws holding the top panel in. We've also discovered the screws holding the power supply in, the nuts holding the serial port in, and one of you managed to undo two of the screws holding your desk together. So we're making progress. Now, before we take the top panel off, what should we do?

BEANCOUNTER

Draw an arrow on the lid to show which way it goes back on again.

PFY

Or we could just remember sticky label is at the front?

BEANCOUNTER

Oh.

PFY

Anything else?

BEANCOUNTER

Ah...

PFY

Yes?

BEANCOUNTER

Er... protect the machine from static electricity?

PFY

Very good – if your intention was to make sure that your machine was able to be repaired. If, however, your intention was to make your machine unrepairable we probably wouldn't do that. We also wouldn't make sure that the voltage selector was on 240 and not accidentally set to 115 – for those of you with a power supply with a switch on it. Anything else we wouldn't do?

BEANCOUNTER

We... wouldn't not spill liquids inside the machine.

SECOND BEANCOUNTER (excitedly)

We wouldn't drop it on the floor again?!!

PFY

That's right, we wouldn't *not* drop it on the floor again. Only *this* time you need to all do it at the same time so that it doesn't look orchestrated.

THIRD BEANCOUNTER

But if we all do it at the same time wouldn't it look even more like it were orchestrated?

PFY

Ordinarily, yes – which is why I brought this with me...

The PFY opens a small box and removes a roll of uninsulated copper wire.

INT: CORRIDOR OUTSIDE THE MEETING ROOM

Suddenly the building lights go out and the battery power EXIT lamp light in the hallway illuminates. A tiny wisp of smoke trickles under the bottom of the door.

INT: BOSS'S OFFICE

The PFY, BASTARD and Boss look at each other.

PFY

There's been a terrible accident!

BASTARD

So the room's free then?

PFY

It will be after lunch. I've got one more class. What's on the menu?

BASTARD

Rabbit pie, I think...

BOFH: Risky business

Contingency plan? Shine a light

Posted in [BOFH](#), 18th June 2010 11:02 GMT

Episode 7 "All I'm saying," I say, trying not to lose my rag, "is that you don't have to keep all your email messages in their entirety."

"Yes, but I need my email as a record," the PR droid burbles.

"That may be, but you don't need a record of the 50 messages between you and the woman from the office across the road saying 'what do you want for lunch?', 'pizza', 'I don't like pizza', 'what about Indian?', 'we had Indian yesterday', 'ok, what about that sandwich place?', 'you always suggest the sandwich place', 'I like the sandwich place', 'I KNOW you like the sandwich place', 'well you choose then', 'I don't know, I just want to try something different', 'what about Mexican then?', 'I've got a meeting this afternoon', 'but you have Indian before you have meetings,', 'maybe I'll just get something from the cafe downstairs', 'don't be like that', 'don't be like what?', etc, EVERY BLOODY DAY!"

"Have you been reading my email?"

"Who would want to read that sort of email?"

"I don't know," he replies, somewhat defensively.

"Trust me, the email I'd be reading was 'I've got a friend who works for the lottery and they've discovered the balls are weighted in favor of the Fibonacci sequence minus 1 - whatever that means - and they can't fix it until after this week's 25 million draw'. That's an email worth reading."

"I... But I need to keep my email," the PR droid sniffs, deciding on repetition as an approach.

"Look. I don't care if you keep every email you ever send or receive - so long as they're not clogging up the mail store. And trust me, you're clogging up the mail store. You've only been here six months and already you're the second highest mail user with 17 gigabytes of mail"

"Is that a lot?"

"Uh-huh.

"So if I'm the second highest, who's the highest?"

"Administrator - but that doesn't count because no one reads that mail."

"So it's not that much of a problem?"

"It is - and I'm implementing auto archiving."

"Auto archiving? Have you gotten a green light from management for that?" he asks.

"Sent the memo yesterday," I say. "Rang legal this morning and they're OK with it so long as we don't lose your highly valuable lunch appointment conversations."

"But... I need my email."

"And you shall have it - only it'll be stored in an offline file and not in the mail store."

"So I'll still be able to read it?"

"Absolutely! Six months from now you'll be able to open your mail archive file and find out you had a sandwich yesterday. Because she's right - you always choose the sandwich place."

...

"That was surprisingly painless," the PFY says, moments later when the PR droid has left. "I thought he'd put up more of a fight."

"Yes, the key with users is to..."

I pause as the PFY looks up in response to the opening of the door.

"Hi, Kathy, Projects Office," she says, extending her hand. "I'm here about the archiving project."

"What archiving project?" I ask.

"The one to archive email messages?"

"That's not a project - in fact it's done. I clicked a couple of boxes, tweaked a few settings and it'll all happen like clockwork Monday morning".

"I didn't see a project plan," she says with just a hint of annoyance.

"No you wouldn't have - because as I said, it wasn't a project."

"It most certainly is! Did you do a risk analysis?"

"No."

"A costs benefits analysis?"

"Nope."

"A communications plan?"

"Not one of those, no."

"Contingency plan?"

"Nup!"

"Work plan schedule?"

"Uh... no."

"Review process?"

"Afraid not."

"Resource scheduling plan?"

"Nnnnno."

"Well you can't do it then! You can't do a project this risky if you haven't done the planning!"

"We don't know how risky it is - we didn't do the risk analysis, remember?"

"But you can't create a project plan until you've done a risk analysis!"

"That's OK because we didn't create a project plan."

"You can't have a project without a project plan!"

"It's not a project!"

"You're right it's not a project! I'm vetoing the change process until such time as a project plan is submitted!!" she snaps.

"We don't have a change process."

"Then get one - and a project plan!" she says, storming off to the Director's office.

"She was a bit volume 11 wasn't she?" the PFY says.

"Yeah - the projects office is pretty much staffed by those people who couldn't get into the workplace safety industry because they're too petty - so they spend their time trolling office gossip for the hint of some project they can insinuate themselves into and ride to a successful completion - albeit three weeks late because of the tangle of bureaucracy they bring with them."

"So what do we do - do a project plan or tell her to get stuffed?"

"It's a tricky question. On one hand we want to be good corporate citizens and on the other we don't want to show any sign of weakness or we'll end up having to fill out a change request form just to login of a morning. Bear in mind that these are the sorts of people whose sense of achievement is measured in reams of paper and time wasted."

"So what do we do?"

"Ordinarily we would give all the impression of complying with their requirements - printing boxes of documentation, revising specs, researching risks, scheduling resources and such."

"!!"

"Worry not. I have a project plan I used once or twice in the past that I'm sure I can tailor for this occasion..."

...

"It's a little thin isn't it?" Kathy asks, fingering the folder with disdain the next morning.

"Yes well, I look upon good project planning as establishing a broad framework from which to address the key strategic areas underpinning the successful completion of a holistic organizational change," I say, pausing briefly to fight back the nausea.

"Well, let's have a look at it then," she says. "Implementation plan: Click the mouse button on the ON radio button then click OK. Contingency plan: Click the mouse button on the OFF checkbox and Click on OK. You can't be serious?!"

"Of course I am - but read on, we did the analyses!"

"Risk Analysis. Issue 1, Contingency Plan A, Risk 0. Issue 2, Contingency Plan B, Risk 0. Issue 3, Contingency Plan C, Risk 0. Issue 4, Contingency plan D, Risk 0... This is just rubbish!"

"No it's not, I identified four issues and four contingency plans which quantified the risk like you wanted."

"What issues?"

"Risks."

"Yes, but what were the risks?"

"You mean what were the actual things I was worried about?"

"Yes!"

"Oh. I forget."

"And the contingency plans?"

"I don't recall the exact details."

"You..."

"But I have got a copy of them. In my car. I'll pop down to the basement later on this morning and get them for you."

"How about we all pop down right now?" Kathy asks, scenting blood.

"I... suppose we could."

. . . one lift ride later. . .

>slam<

"So here's the risk profile document," I say, handing over a page with four bullet-pointed paragraphs in six point Times Roman associated text. "And the contingency plans."

"I can't read it in this light, it could be anything!" Kathy snaps.

"Why don't we pop upstairs where the light's better?" I suggest.

"Why don't we stay down here and find a room with some lights," she says with a touch of sarcasm. "In case you grabbed the wrong document 'by accident'."

"I'm sure it's the right document," I say, passing the pages to the PFY to check. "Anyway, there's nowhere down here to read it."

"What about this room?" she asks, indicating a well-lit plant room with an open door.

"If you must," I say.

>SLAM!<

"Risk 1," the PFY reads from the light of the EXIT sign. "A lifetime of filling out meaningless paperwork to appease some glory-hogging control freak. Contingency Plan: The old 'unreadable text in the Basement Carpark with adjacent plant room' trick. Oh yeah - Risk 0."

>thump< >thump< >thump< >thump<

"Risk 2," the PFY continues. "The sound of thumping on the door..."

. . . ten minutes later in Mission Control. . .

"Risk 4. The Risk of being caught. Contingency Plan: Deny Everything."

"Risk 0," I say, popping the pages into the shredder...

BOFH: Little ups and downs

Your hate is lifting me higher

Posted in [BOFH](#), [16th July 2010 10:58 GMT](#)

Episode 8 "I... uh..." the Boss says, wandering into Mission Control aimlessly, searching for the right words to bring up whatever's on his mind.

"Yes?" I ask, letting him off the hook.

"The lifts" he says cryptically.

"The lifts?" I repeat.

"The buttons on the lifts" he says.

"They have buttons - yes - well spotted," I say.

"They've got more buttons."

"More than?"

"The building has extra floors," he finally blurts. "Now there's buttons for floors 7 to 12."

"You mean the building gets bigger if you add buttons to the lift?!" the PFY says. "Like the buttons are actually an array of floor pointers?!?"

"Oooh yeah," I say, getting in on the act. "So you could push 8 and it does a new(floor)."

"And maybe you could do it so if you held the button down it does a destroy (floor) then a new (floor)!"

"For the 4th floor," I say, wondering how the Beancounters would cope with sudden non-existence.

The Boss' blank expression indicates that this conversation is wasted on him.

"The lift control panels have apparently been recalled for safety reasons," the PFY sighs. "The only spare panels they had in stock were for taller buildings."

Which is not entirely the truth. The truth was revealed a couple of days ago.

"Look what I scored!" the PFY says.

"Some... lift control panels?" I ask.

"Yeah, they're renovating the building down the street and I noticed these were going to be chucked out."

"They were in the bin?"

"Not exactly."

"In a wheelbarrow destined for the bin?"

"No."

"On the floor outside the lifts?"

"Ah..."

"In the lift, with the power connected, in the building which isn't being renovated?"

"Well, yes. But I was thinking, we could swap these with our panels and then use the extra buttons for special controls."

"Special controls like?"

"Well, you press the 8th floor button, it delivers you to the ground floor and sends a text message to the Indian down the street to order two chicken vindaloos, some chilli bhajis, a couple of garlic naans and four Kingfishers."

"But wouldn't that mean that they'd be inundated with orders every time idiot tested the button?"

"You'd think so, but then it would only be active outside of work hours."

"After 4pm, except on Fridays, when it's on after 12pm."

"Yes, well, I might need to think about that one a little."

"So we'd just use the lift control panel as a form of ordering system?"

"Not necessarily. Press floor 9 and it'll take you to whatever floor the hottest woman in the building is on."

"Really?"

"Of course not. It doesn't do that - but it could do if you thought it was a good idea."

"And Floor 10?"

"The floor 10 button would take you up and down in the lift randomly for 15 minutes - without opening the doors or stopping at floors. At variable speeds."

"11?"

"The same as 9, but for 30 minutes."

"And don't tell me, 12 is for an hour. So if you pressed 12 and 9 it would be one hour, 15 minutes of lift joyriding?"

"No, 12 will gas you with a vaporized version of rohypnol before taking you to Basement 1 - where the creepy Courier Guy parks his van. You know, the one with the tinted windows. I like the binary addition of button travel times idea though."

"Gassing them and dropping them off in the basement's a little cruel don't you think?"

"No, cruel's dropping the ceiling tile with 'all you can eat' written on the back of it onto the lift floor."

"Ah, yes, Rule 2, the double tap... You've given this a lot of thought haven't you?"

"It passes the time between pub visits," the PFY nods.

"And it only works when it's enabled?"

"When it's enabled or when you press the floor number with the DOOR OPEN button held down. I thought we could use it like a shift key - that way all the other buttons could do something special too."

...

"Well, I gave them a call and get the lifts fixed properly as I was stuck in there for quarter of an hour this morning," the Boss says. "But they say they don't know anything about the panels."

"Really? Must be a different crew. Did you speak to anyone else about this?"

Crap Segue Tip: If anyone, anytime - even if you're not in a movie - says "did you speak to anyone else about this?" say 'yes'.

"No, not yet."

... half an hour later...

"Has anyone seen Jerry?" the IT Director asks, looking around for the Boss.

"Haven't seen him all day," the PFY responds.

Crap Segue follow-up: Told you so.

"Oh. Only there's a couple of people at reception who've got a meeting scheduled with him. Some chaps who do cloud computing - whatever that is. Sounds like something we should be looking into though."

"You know, I think I saw him on the 7th floor." the PFY says.

"Does this building have a 7th floor?"

"Yes, it's just some sort of optical illusion that makes the building seem smaller."

"OK, I'll send them up there then."

"No, you need to have a company swipe card to get access."

"OK I'll take them up."

"Good idea," the PFY says.

...

"7th floor?" I ask as soon as the Boss leaves.

"Same as 12 but it also sends a text message to the courier to say his packages are ready and bring the big van..."

"It's still... I dunno... a little cruel," I say.

"What about if I text him and tell him if he's not on 7 he'll be on 8?"

"And we'll pop down for a quick ruby? OK then, you talked me into it..."

BOFH: Lies and the lying liars who lie about them

Some truly beastly behaviour

Posted in [BOFH](#), [13th August 2010 11:02 GMT](#)

Episode 9 “And how long will it take?” the user echoes from the handsfree speaker on the PFY’s phone.

“To restore access to your email? I’m not sure. Have you tried closing down Outlook and restarting it?” the PFY responds.

“Yes.”

“What about restarting it in Safe Mode?”

“I tried that,” the user says – a little too quickly.

“Well, what about starting it in comms recovery mode?”

“I tried that as well.”

“There isn’t a comms recovery mode – I just made that up,” the PFY says.

“Oh, I thought you meant –“

“Yeah, don’t bother,” the PFY interrupts drily.

“But I...”

“Let’s just see what we can see,” the PFY says, tapping away at his keyboard.

...

“So what can you see?” the user asks a couple of minutes of silence later.

“Oh, are you still on the phone?” the PFY asks

“Yes.”

“Oh right then, I thought you’d wait for me to get back to you, but this works too.”

“So do you see anything?”

“Yes, Fear 3 is due to release in late October!!!”

“About my email?!”

“Oh yes, of course. Well I’ll have to do a little bit of tinkering so I’ll tell you what. Why don’t you look at your screen blankly whilst telling all your co-workers that email is down and then call me every five minutes to see how it’s going – that usually speeds up the process”

“I..”

“Was planning to do that anyway? I know,” the PFY interrupts.

“But I...”

“Was also planning to do nothing else for the rest of the morning because you couldn’t possibly do any other work until your email is working? Yes, we know that too,” I add.

“I’m...”

“But I’ll tell you what, can you answer a few questions. Have you moved your machine recently?”

“Uh... no.”

“You do realize we have voice stress analysis software monitoring our phone lines?” the PFY lies.

“Beg pardon?”

“Voice stress analysis software,” the PFY says. “It measures stress levels in the conversation and pretty much tells us if you’re lying.”

“I don’t think so.”

“The software says you do. It also says you were lying about starting Outlook in safe mode, comms recovery mode, whatever excuse you were going to use for lying about comms recovery mode and about moving your machine. Was there anything else you were planning to lie to us about?”

“No.”

“Oooh, software says 'inconclusive'.”

“Look, this is ridiculous – I know you don’t have any such software!”

“Then you won’t mind answering a couple more questions. Have you ever pictured another man naked – a friend, colleague or co-worker?”

“No!”

“Software says 78 per cent confidence you’re lying.”

“I haven’t!”

“98 per cent confidence you’re telling porkies, but let’s just leave that aside for now. Have you ever – even for a moment – considered bestiality?”

“WHAT! NO!”

“87 per cent confidence you’re lying – although because of the accusatory nature of our discussion we can expect you to have a higher voice stress reading than normal. So probably only 85 per cent likelihood you’re a Farmer Sutra fan.”

“I AM NOT!!”

“Still 87 per cent. See, the problem with this software is very black and white, you’re lying or you’re not – not about whether you’re actually a raving perv. So you’re registering 87 per cent because you probably, for a fleeting instant wondered what a workmate looked like in the flesh or what people see as being erotic in the animal kingdom. The problem is that in covering this minor thought up you’re actually lying – which registers in your mind, in your voice and on the software.”

The user is quiet. I continue.

"So what you should be saying is that the thought did cross your mind because then the voice stress analysis software would see that you were telling the truth - as opposed to being a complete closet case. Then you might say that you have no sexual interest in animals or your male co-workers, which would also register as being the truth."

“So that would prove that it was just a fleeting thought?” our user sighs.

“Exactly.”

“I see. Well in that case, YES, I did once very briefly picture one of my male colleagues with no clothes on and have wondered about how people could possibly consider bestiality, BUT...”

“No, it’s reading inconclusive. I think you’re trying to put too many boundaries on it which blur your mind’s view of the truth. Like when you tell someone you’re going to go for a five mile jog every day when you know that you won’t – your mind knows it’s a lie because in the future it might not be the truth.”

“I see – I’ve got it now. So. I occasionally think about my male colleagues naked and consider bestiality.”

“Excellent.”

“HOWEVER, I do not find either to be sexually arousing to me.”

“Software says you’re telling the truth.”

“Is there really any software?”

“Indeed there is. We got it as a free upgrade to our voice recording software.”

“Voice recording software?”

“Yes. We didn’t get around to installing the voice stress stuff but we did put the voice recording stuff in. So unless you want us to email a soundbite to your HR and your work colleagues I’d suggest you put your machine back where it was, get on with your work and resolve not try to bullshit a bullshitter.”

“Ah.”

A moment of silence.

"OK."

“That was quite rewarding!” the PFY says.

“Yes, but not quite as rewarding as changing his voicemail message to one of a more confessional nature...”

“Ooh yeah, you’re right,” the PFY says, firing up the phone admin client...

BOFH: Die, Robot

A serious pain in the Asimov

Posted in [BOFH](#), [17th September 2010 11:04 GMT](#)

Episode 10 “A Security Robot?!” the PFY gasps. “Really?”

“Really,” the Boss nods.

“And we have no say in the matter?”

“It’s a security thing.”

“But our technical budget pays for it.”

“Our Capital budget, yes, but the operational expenses will come out of security’s budget.”

“So what sort of robot will it be – something like Robocop or something like the ‘Danger Will Robinson’ kind?” I ask.

“Or maybe the thing with twin miniguns from out of T3!” the PFY gabs excitedly, no doubt thinking how a quick BIOS upgrade could be used to speed up customer relationship meetings.

“Uhm, here’s a picture of it” the Boss says, pulling a printout of a webpage from a nest of papers.

“So more like R2D2,” the PFY sighs in disappointment.

“Something which will protect the company from now until the first stairwell,” I concur.

“No no, this is not hampered by stairwells. It can interface directly with the lift to access all floors. It has some logic.”

“Logic” the PFY says, scratching his jaw thoughtfully. “I think I’ve heard of that. So what sort of weaponry will it have? Some sort of Sidearm, A Taser, Billy Club?”

“It will be unarmed,” the Boss responds, rallying as he sees the disappointment on our faces. “But it does have a full 360 degree camera.”

“Yes, wouldn’t want to face a crim with a crowbar without a 360 degree camera,” the PFY says drily. “So what do we need this robot for anyway?”

“There’s been a spate of thefts from the executive rooms.”

“Thefts? You mean laptops, papers?!” I ask

“The nature of the thefts is inconsequential – the point is that someone’s stealing things and we need to get to the bottom of it.”

“What’s being stolen exactly?”

“Well...” the Boss says, before realizing he’s going to have to come clean “>sigh< Chocolates, some demerara sugar sachets, the fancy teabags from the wooden presentation case in the board room...”

“Morning tea supplies?! We’re spending... How much are we spending?”

“That’s immaterial.”

“How much?”

“Seventeen thousand, three hundred pounds.”

“SEVENTEEN THOUSAND POUNDS!!! TO PROTECT MORNING TEA SUPPLIES!!! YOU COULD BUY THEM NEW MORNING TEA SUPPLIES EVERY WEEK AND STILL NOT WASTE SEVENTEEN THOUSAND POUNDS! YOU COULD PAY SOMEONE TO WATCH THEM OVERNIGHT AND STILL NOT WASTE SEVENTEEN THOUSAND POUNDS! YOU COULD BUY A BLOODY SAFE TO KEEP THEM IN!! YOU COULD USE THE SAFE THAT’S ALREADY IN THE BOARDROOM!!!”

“Yes, but this way we get to catch the culprit and prevent crime.”

“And how is it going to catch the culprit exactly?”

“On camera.”

“I see. And it will probably also catch the culprit reaching into his pocket for a screwdriver – moments before the camera goes blank and the hard drive containing the damning footage is removed?”

“Ah ha!” The Boss smirks. “This unit has a strong box in it which can’t be opened. And it also has evasion logic.”

“More logic,” the PFY says “Sounds pretty sneaky.”

“It is,” the Boss nods. “It learns about its environment and can pass the knowledge on to other units.”

“Other units?”

“Oh yes! This one is a prototype, but if it works we’ll add another two to cover the building more thoroughly.”

“So the IT budget is going to be spending three times 17 thousand pounds?!” I gasp.

“Of course not. The first one is seventeen thousand pounds but the subsequent models will only be fifteen.”

“Ah well, that’s alright then!” the PFY says.

... D-Day Arrives ...

“And I now declare this robot... er... open” the Head of Security says, pushing a button on his remote control, bringing the unit to life.

As the PFY, Boss and I look on, a small and somewhat anticlimatic green light starts glowing and the robot makes its way out of the Security offices.

“It’s programmed to go from floor to floor repeatedly over the course of an evening, recording what it sees as it goes.”

“All floors?” the PFY asks.

“All the office floors yes – not B1 and B2. But from floor six to ground, then back up to six, reporting to the security offices each time it gets to ground.”

“Seems feasible I suppose,” the PFY admits grudgingly.

. . . Later that evening. . .

“And here it comes,” the PFY says quietly as the robot cruises smoothly past.

>whirrrrrrrrrRRRRRRR<

“Yes. A bit of a design flaw – a 360 degree camera that doesn’t take in views above the robot,” I say, from my position beside the PFY in the ceiling space next to the lift.

The PFY hushes me, nodding at the robot as it presses the lift call button.

>PING!<

>whirrrrrrr...< ...

“>PING< ... >TING< ... >t-tang< ... >tink< >CRASH!<”

“So, no ‘logic’ to check that a lift’s actually there when the lift doors open then?” the PFY asks disappointedly.

“No, but look on the bright side – with the 360 degree camera we’ve just saved the company a couple of hundred quid on the annual lift-shaft safety survey...”

“If we weren’t going to push the boardroom safe down there after it...” the PFY says.

“Good point. So just 17 grand down the crapper then. Ah well!”

BOFH: Robot wars

Just tell us what you (chain)saw

Posted in [BOFH](#), [1st October 2010 11:00 GMT](#)

Episode 11 “I could have been killed!” the Boss whimpers, rubbing a couple of prominent bruises.

“I think that’s a little far-fetched,” the PFY sniffs. “What was it going to do, 360-degree-camera you to death?”

“It had a circular saw in its hands!!”

“Really? It had hands!?”

“Well, its claw then!”

“IT’S GOT A CLAW!?”

“WHATEVER THE THING IS COMING OUT THE SIDE OF IT!”

“It didn’t have anything coming out of the side of it,” I point out.

“IT DOES NOW, AND IT’S HOLDING A CIRCULAR SAW!!” the Boss snaps.

“Tell us more about the bit where you were almost killed,” the PFY says, masking his deep concern for the Boss’ welfare by reaching for some peanuts.

“It came at me the moment I stepped out of the lift!” the Boss shudders. “And it would have had me too, if the extension lead on the circular saw hadn’t got tangled around a desk...”

...

“I TOLD YOU WE SHOULD HAVE GONE FOR PETROL POWERED CHAINSAW!” I tell the PFY once he’s back from driving the Boss to his workplace trauma counseling sessions.

“HE’D HAVE HEARD IT A MILE AWAY!!” the PFY retorts. “Besides, we would have had to add another arm to the robot so that it could start the thing.”

“I suppose,” I admit grudgingly.

“He bought the story about it going insane after a fall down the lift shaft though,” the PFY says. “How did they catch it in the end?”

“They didn’t - Security rescued it and then it chased them round the building a bit before it fell down the staircase.”

“Ah – which would be why they bought the story so quickly.”

“Indeed,” I concur. “And the good news is that the Beancounters have stopped payment and returned the unopened robots to the bot company along with a bill for the damages...”

“Ah. That might cause some... problems,” the PFY says.

“You mean when they tell our company that a fall down a staircase can’t make a robot spontaneously sprout an arm and a chainsaw?”

“Or make massive changes to its ROM so that it becomes a hunter/killer...”

“Yes, it could be a little awkward – or rather it would have been if I hadn’t taken the opportunity to swap the original circular saw for a battery powered one that can operate from the Robot’s supply. If nothing else it might lower the numbers of support staff...”

“Oooh yes,” the PFY says, rubbing his chin enthusiastically. “The bot company is all on a single level isn’t it...”

. . A few days later . . .

“So the robot company has overhauled the faulty unit and think they’ve found the problem,” the Boss says.

“Really – what did they think it was?” the PFY says innocently.

“A... loose wire,” the Boss says, looking at a delivery sheet. “Yes, a loose wire in the... GPS circuit...”

“...caused it to grow an arm and a saw?!” the PFY says incredulously.

“Apparently so,” the Boss shrugs. “I think they said it was a... ‘Known bug’.”

“Really?” I say, faking nonchalance.

. . .

“A KNOWN BUG?” the PFY says, as the crate is delivered to Mission Control moments later.

“Yeah, they must really want payment and a happy demonstration site!” I say, levering open the crate.

“A pity really” the PFY says, firing up his program editor and reaching for the box of antipersonnel equipment.

... Two days later...

“Another known bug they’ve ironed out,” the Boss says, wheeling another crate out of the lift. “Happens when the thing has a low battery - it can start firing ball bearings at high speed from ankle height. They even said it started doing it when it got to their office, shot out their front window and their photocopier. Surprising really, because you said you were going to charge it before you shipped it back?”

“Yes, it is surprising,” the PFY pinocchios.

“Still, they think they’ve nailed it this time...”

... Ten minutes later...

“Security screws,” the PFY says, examining the panels on the robot. “I think they might be on to us.”

“Yes, because when the thing came out of the crate at them with a saw in its hands they probably just thought it was caused by a power surge,” I say sarcastically.

“What – you’re thinking we should just admit defeat?” the PFY asks.

“Well, I’m not sure about the wisdom of annoying people who probably consider ‘Robot Wars’ to be inspirational media...”

“Puh-leeeeeze,” the PFY says, taping an array of stun guns to the side of the Bot.

. . . The next day...

“Well, they say they’ve definitely sorted out all the problems this time!” the Boss chirps happily, “even though the place is apparently down to a skeleton staff – what with it being flu season! This was just another loose wire.”

“Another loose wire” the PFY says. “Right, we’ll be unpacking it shortly, so hopefully nothing’s shaken loose in the delivery...”

... moments later...

“They must be running out of robots by now,” I say as I pry away at the packing crate with the crowbar.

“You’re telling me!” the PFY nods. “At this rate they... What’s that noise? Isn’t it...”

“...the starting of a small two stroke engine!!” I say, spinning the crate around to face the doorway, just as the Boss enters to see how things are going – and as a chainsaw wielding bot exits the crate.

. . .

“So that’s how they want to play it...” the PFY says moments later as we survey the upended robot at the bottom of the stairwell.

“Uhuh,” I respond. “And they still haven’t nailed that staircase thing – though perhaps we should keep that to ourselves for now...”

“So what, fuel it up, reprogram it and send it back to them?” the PFY asks.

“Sure, but I’d wait till the chainsaw ran out of gas before going to get it.”

“Why – you think they’d program it to play dead?”

“It’s what I’d do... Though you realize that we’re up against a bunch of geeks who make robots for a living?” I ask the PFY once we’re back in Mission Control.

“Uhuh.”

“And have probably secretly been waiting for the opportunity of a war like this?”

“And I haven’t been?” the PFY asks.

BOFH: Lock shock

I have never seen this man before in my life. Nor this one

Posted in [BOFH](#), [8th October 2010 11:00 GMT](#)

Episode 12 “No, I’m pretty sure you don’t work for the company,” the PFY says, tapping away furiously on his keyboard.

“What’s up?” I ask, as the PFY mutes the phone while the bloke on the other end has some form of protracted verbal seizure.

“That idiot from accounts who wanted us to pick up the bill for his home broadband has got a note from his boss authorizing it and saying it should be charged back to our cost centre.”

“So you told him to get stuffed, right?”

“Sure did. So then he got his boss on the phone...”

“And you told him to get stuffed too, right?”

“Yep, and then he got *his* boss on the phone...”

“And you told him to get stuffed as well, right?”

“You bet. And then he got *our* boss on the phone...”

“And you definitely told *him* to get stuffed, right?”

“I did. And then he started going on about how if I didn’t watch myself I wouldn’t be working for the company much longer.”

“Which is where I came in?”

“Exactly!”

“So what’ve you done – deleted his records from HR, Salaries, Security, the Website, the Phone system, Active Directory and updated his swipe card details to read ‘Stolen’?”

“All but the phone system – because it’d drop the call.”

“There’s no time like the present!” I say.

A few clicks and a few seconds of processing delay later the caller details on the PFY’s phone revert to UNKNOWN just before the call drops...

Half a minute later the PFY and I have a few chuckles as we hear a swipe card being repeatedly denied at the entrance to Mission Control. A furious hammering starts moments later, followed by a long silence.

“Wait for it...” I say, nodding at the PFY’s phone.

>ring<

“Hello,” the PFY says, in answer to a call from the bloke in the office next to the Boss.

“What the hell have you done to my swipe card?” the Boss yells – with the tell-tale echo of hands-free mode from the other end.

“Looks like the Boss is looking to make an example of someone,” I murmur to the PFY.

“That makes two of us,” the PFY murmurs back, before adopting a louder tone. “Who is this?”

“You know very well who this is – and if you don’t enable my card immediately...”

“I’m sorry, I don’t recognize you.”

“You won’t recognize me from the unemployment line,” the Boss snarls.

“I’m sorry; I don’t know who you are or where you’re ringing from.”

“I’m ringing from Dave’s office.”

“Dave?”

“Dave Greenwood.”

“There’s no Dave Greenwood working for this company,” the PFY replies as he taps away furiously at the keyboard, just before the phone goes dead again.

“Ooh – don’t forget to delete the scanned images of their employment contract – and their home directories - from the SAN!” I blurt.

“Check!” the PFY says.

>ring<

“Sharon who now >clickety<?” the PFY asks as the phone goes dead once more.

And about then it starts to dawn on the IT masses outside Mission Control that this is serious...

With only two days remaining till payday – and given the slovenly nature of the company’s HR processing – even if the staff member could prove that they were really working for the company

and that their deletion was some form of data error there is NO WAY they'll be getting any money in this month and mortgages, etc, will probably go unpaid...

Off in the distance the PFY and I hear several doors slam and lock as people act to protect their pay packets from the Boss' minus touch...

A few minutes later the phone rings once more.

"You can't possibly think you're going to get away with this," the Head of HR burbles smugly down the phone line at us – calling from yet another hands-free phone in the Security offices, no doubt called down there by the three ex-members of IT staff.

"Sorry – it's Simon here – Steven's out of the office running a few errands," I say, while simultaneously texting the PFY "What can't he get away with again?"

"You don't seriously think that you can simply delete someone out of the system and suddenly the company will treat them as persona non grata!"

"Really?" I ask, "I think our HR system is a fairly authoritative source for information on who is and isn't a staff member – and I think our Head of HR would agree."

"I don't think he would..."

"I do. In fact I'll check this with him shortly."

"You're talking to him now..."

"No, I'm talking to someone at security. James, the real Head of HR is bound to agree with me."

"James is the assistant head of HR."

"Really? That's not what it says in the HR database."

There's nothing quite like the sound of a penny dropping from a great height. A penny with the image of the person who jealousy craves your job on the obverse face. That's the tragedy of a powerful job – there's generally a queue of envious figures behind it, all waiting patiently...

"You'll never get away with it! I have printed documents – my employment contract, my health insurance documents, my annual leave forms!"

"Health Insurance, hmmm – thanks for pointing that one out. >clickety< Yes, I think you're right, printed documents do have an air of authority to them. Unless of course they were perhaps kept in the lockable bottom drawer of the desk unit that you get issued with - if you were in fact employed by the company – a lock with a single master key that only my assistant has On him. Right now. The one which will be in his pocket even as he starts that small fire in a metal rubbish bin up on the roof..."

“You’ll never get away with this!”

“I think I already have. And if I haven’t I’m sure there are people waiting to be promoted into the positions of those that I don’t completely see eye to eye with. Now if you don’t mind I’ll have to ring off now. I need to call security and tell them about the imposters in the building. They’ve been looking for a chance to see how the dogs react...”

BOFH: Pepper-packing bot plot

Spray you, spray me

Posted in [BOFH](#), [15th October 2010 11:00 GMT](#)

Episode 13 Isn't it always the way that the moment you get down to doing something important that requires a large part of your concentration, some idiot rolls up with an inane problem that just can't wait?

Like now, for instance, when the PFY and I are trying to quietly drill a small inspection hole in a recently delivered crate to see if there's something inside which we might not want rolling around Mission Control...

"My desktop background isn't working anymore," the user whimpers. "It used to work but now it doesn't."

"Really?" the PFY asks, turning the brace and bit very, very quietly. "What was the picture?"

"It was a still from the new Harry Potter."

"Which series?" I ask, feigning interest. "The first seven books or the second seven?"

"There's no second seven!"

"Of course there is. The second series is where Harry and Hermione bring their kids up at Hogwarts."

"No, Harry marries Ginny!"

"Oh that – that was a dream sequence from when Harry doesn't die. In actual fact the all the Weasleys are all killed at the beginning of the second series."

"B... by the spirit of Voldemort and the Cruciatus Curse?"

"Nah, Harry by accident. He accidentally switches a tanning booth on and the poor Weasleys go up like ants under a magnifying glass."

"You're lying!"

"No, it's true!" the PFY says. "I've got a mate who does typesetting for the editor's preview editions of books. He told me about it - and he's even sent me the whole preview set."

"Where?" our user gasps.

“They’re in this crate here. Hang on, we’ll go and get a crowbar and we’ll get them out for you,” the PFY says, as we head to the door.

Seconds later the sound of creaking wood can be heard as the Potter-spotter pries away at the crate anxiously, not wanting to wait...

...

“Railgun powered Shuriken launcher,” the PFY says thoughtfully, a few minutes and a loud crash later. “Interesting.”

“Not as interesting as this,” I say, cautiously prodding the bot at the bottom of the stairwell before removing several security screws in the bot’s lid.

“What?”

“Tadaaa,” I say, withdrawing a small video camera hidden in the base of the bot. “This baby was timed to start the moment the bot was activated...”

... moments later at Mission Control ...

“So they unpacked it in an empty carpark building,” the PFY says, gazing at the video footage. “What a sneaky idea!”

“Yep,” I say. “And see how they use the armored window in the stairwell doors to observe what happens when they push a store dummy out on a wheelie chair. Ingenious! This calls for some serious thinking. Get me some lager!”

... a day later. . .

“So what’ve you come up with?” the PFY asks expectantly.

“A master plan!” I respond proudly. “Upon activation the Bot does... nothing!”

“Nothing?”

“Yep. Then, when it notices a change in light intensity - ie, when someone approaches - it starts puncturing these.”

“Cans of... cheap.. pepper spray,” the PFY says disappointedly.

“Yeah. Whadya think?”

“It’s a little...”

“Crap?” I suggest.

“Well... yeah.”

“Indeed it is. You’ll note that the pepper spray cartridges are a very cheap eastern European variety, poorly secured and will probably fall from the Bot’s grip the moment the first can is punctured. In terms of attack value it’s next to worthless.”

“So why...”

“Because when the attack fails the bot will, as we know from our video footage, be loaded into the back of a van and taken back to their labs for some re-engineering.”

“And will reactivate once it gets into their building – BECAUSE YOU PUT A GPS IN IT!!!!” the PFY gasps.

“Precisely...” I smirk.

“I knew...”

“...precisely what it’s not going to do. No, the robot DOES have a GPS in it which IS integral to the plan - but it’s not triggered by locational information.”

“Not triggered by locational information...” the PFY says thoughtfully, knowing that if he can’t work it out he’ll be paying for tomorrow night’s drinks. “Uh... ELEVATION!”

“Nope..” I reply, thinking happy free lager thoughts.

...

“The BLOODY BLACKWALL TUNNEL,” the PFY says disgustedly as he hands over a fistful of notes to the Barman.

“Yes indeedy,” I say. “Nothing quite like the absence of all GPS signals to indicate that a vanload of robo-geeks – in a confined space – has just entered a busy road tunnel with no safe means of escape.”

“Which is where the non-eastern-European tear gas canister came in,” the PFY sighs as the barman gestures for some more notage to cover the ridiculously expensive imported hand-fashioned lager that I’ve just become accustomed to...

BOFH: Join the club

I like big bots and I cannot lie

Posted in [BOFH](#), [29th October 2010 11:00 GMT](#)

Episode 14 “You make it sound so... nasty,” the PFY says to the Boss as he fingers through several sheets of complaints.

“What – trying to maim a supplier’s employees just because you don’t like their product!?” the Boss snaps.

“THEY STARTED IT!” the PFY retorts.

“How?”

“They sent us their product!”

“And in response you’ve been mutating their product into a malicious object and sending it back to them?”

“I wouldn’t say malicious,” I say, entering the discussion to insert the voice of reason, “as robots are incapable of malice.”

“But wouldn’t it be good if they were!” the PFY interjects.

“IN ANY CASE,” I continue, “The robots concerned were simply performing a set of instructions aimed at fulfilling some function for their role which, when combined with whatever they were equipped with at the time, has caused a hazard.”

“Meaning?”

“Well, for instance if you had a cleaning robot with a polisher attachment - were that attachment to be sandpaper instead, the end result would be somewhat worse.”

“Meaning?” the Boss repeats.

“Meaning it’s probably a logic error of some kind. Any sane programmer would check for the presence of sandpaper instead of a polishing mop.”

“Or a 150mm, 72 tooth milling cutter, spinning at 2500 RPM. For instance,” the PFY adds.

“This can’t go on,” the Boss snaps. “They were already threatening legal action after the accident in the tunnel.”

“How’s that our fault?” I ask. “It’s simply irresponsible to build a robot with a tear gas canister in it in the first place!”

“They say they didn’t!”

“Next they’ll be saying that they didn’t build it with a sonic cannon in it either – but we know they did because the windows in their building disintegrated yesterday.”

“They say that you did that as well!”

“How could we do it?” the PFY asks. “We’re software people!”

“They claim that they’re the victims of a systematic campaign of violence and that you are the perpetrators,” the Boss says, seeming to warm to the topic.

“THEY’RE the victims?!” the PFY bleats. “Have you forgotten the chainsaw incident, the shuriken attack and yesterday’s attempt to burn down our offices?”

“They think that might have been the grease in the bearings spontaneously combusting after a heavy use.”

“By heavy use I take it they mean when the thing went berserk in the office and repeatedly launched itself, full speed, in random directions?” I ask. “And that the bearings were ‘greased’ with about a gallon of diesel?”

“I don’t know about that – but they claim that grease loss is quite common in some bearings, though they assure me they’ve made a note to utilize different bearings in the future. They even pointed me to a couple of websites which discuss the issue at length.”

“There’s websites which discuss all sorts of issues at length,” the PFY points out. “It doesn’t mean that what they say is in any way truthful.”

“Oh, like the We-Love-Vista fan site?” I ask.

“Exactly!”

“Or the Kindle-will-survive-ipad-clones site.”

“That too...”

“Or the Duke-Nukem-is-coming website.”

“NO NO!” the PFY gasps. “That one is true!”

“Really!?” I gasp. “Say it’s so!!!!”

“It’s so!” the PFY chirps happily.

“IN ANY CASE,” the Boss interjects, “they have agreed to take the unit with the lubrication problems back, refund us, and work on ironing out the bugs.”

“Oh I already ironed out most of them this morning,” the PFY says.

“Yes, it was a 1 iron wasn’t it?” I ask.

“I started with a 1 but moved onto a 2 when the handle broke. There was a bit of a tricky lie halfway down the stairwell but I managed a nice shot with a sand wedge.”

“I’m a wood man myself,” I add, turning on the sleaze, “just ask ‘de ladies’.”

“I...” the Boss says, wheels spinning in the sand. “They want the machine back!”

“Well we still have to bring it up from the bottom of the stairwell” the PFY says, “but I suppose we could do that this afternoon?”

...Later that day...

“So it’s all there then?” the Boss asks dubiously.

“Yep,” the PFY says. “Goodish as newish.”

“Sorry?”

“The covers were a little dented,” I say, indicating the PFY’s very sparse set of golf clubs. “So we had to bash up some new ones from some metal we had laying around so as ‘not to void the warranty’ - but apart from that it’s exactly the same as it came in.”

“But you haven’t tampered with the software at all?”

“My assistant wanted to, but since we’re assured of a refund if we returned this unit I thought it prudent not to risk it.”

“Excellent. There’s a courier downstairs now!”

...Ten minutes later...

“It was brilliant,” the PFY says, burbling on once more about the master plan that I’d not let him implement prior to sending the robot back. “We could have put image recognition into it so it would hunt down geeks but leave normal people alone.”

“Yeah, but you know that by now they’ll be checksumming the ROM and x-raying for new parts before powering it up.”

Our conversation is interrupted by the prompt arrival of the Boss.

“I’ve just heard,” he said. “The robot company’s had a fire.”

“A QUICK BET!” I say. “ON WHAT TYPE OF FIRE IT IS – LOSER BUYS DRINKS!”

“DIESEL OIL LUBRICANT FIRE by any chance?” chirps the PFY.

“Survey says no,” I say, turning to the Boss. “You want in – loser pays for dinner??”

“FLAMETHROWER!” the Boss says, caught up in the excitement.

“Survey says no,” I say. “And the winner is....”

“Bloody magnesium fire,” the PFY says ungraciously as he drags three pints over to our table.

“And we ‘just happened’ to have some 1mm magnesium plate ‘just laying around the office’ did we?”

“I know, it surprised me as well,” I say. “And who could have known that once that stuff gets going the rivets holding the plates together melt like butter, leaving flaming pieces of white hot metal in the wake of a robot programmed to bounce off walls erratically...”

BOFH: You just can't go around killing people

What do you mean why? 'Cause you can't

Posted in [BOFH](#), [5th November 2010 12:00 GMT](#)

Episode 15 Bot Wars IV - The Screenplay

[Black Screen]

Several screens of multi-coloured static flash by before the words:

INITIAL TESTS INDICATE

UNIT OK

appear in large tasteless block letters on the screen. Another burst of static crowds the screen before a Camera image appears with the top half of the PFY's upside-down face blocking the screen...

Stephen: There, that's got it.

Cut to shot of a large shared office space, walls adorned with flat-screen monitors showing everything from the outside temperature and humidity to a screen entirely devoted to a countdown to the release date of Duke Nukem Forever in large red cheque-font letters. Two men stand beside two small robots, one in the process of powering up, the other dormant.

Simon: It's not going to work...

Stephen: It is. I've rebuilt them from the ground up! They've got complete building maps, including the locations of all power & network outlets as well as coffee and vending machines...

Simon: Not going to work...

Stephen: They know how to plug themselves in to recharge when the battery is low...

Simon: Still not going to work...

Stephen: They've got high torque drive motors, full 360 degree cameras – including up and down - GPS locational awareness and completely new, and vastly improved advanced neural learning AI capable of ...

Simon: Starting to sound like Terminator...

Stephen: (*excitedly*) It knows about that!

Simon: It knows about what?

Stephen: Terminator. See, in order to make the AI more aware I ran through the footage of all its past mistakes – the stairwells, the lift shafts, etc. Then I played it *Robocop* and all the Terminators except Salvation. Oh, and I loaded the defender MAME rom – for the noises.

Simon: Defender? Wh... Doesn't matter, still not going to work....

Stephen: It will! The AI is state-of-the art and the on-board processor turned out to be a quad core...

Simon: Still won't work. Watch...

Stephen: Watch what? (*looking up from the desktop monitor*) Hey, the code's just reverted!

As we watch we see a multitude of LEDs on the front of the powering-up robot flash simultaneously, then three words – 'booting alternate ROM' – appear on the LCD panel. A red lamp beside the panel starts glowing.

Simon: Yep, did the same to me yesterday when I tried to make it do deliveries. It ran for a couple of minutes before some watchdog circuit reloaded memory from a secondary ROM.

Stephen: Bugger!

Simon: You can restart it but that just gives you another few minutes. I think the bot company did it so they can only be used 'for good'.

Stephen: Where's the fun in that?!

Simon: Indeedy. That said though, it occurred to be late last night that we could clip the Vcc pin of the backup ROM and it wouldn't be able to load from it.

Stephen: So which chip is the backup ROM?

Simon: You mean which of the 30 or so unlabelled and seemingly identical chips is the secondary ROM? No idea – But I suspect we can find out with a simple soldering iron.

Stephen: Ah, desolder the Vcc pin of each chip in turn until the reset no longer works!

Simon: I was thinking more of holding the soldering iron on a chip till it stops working, but we can go with your idea if you like.

Stephen: Nah, I haven't got any desoldering braid – and besides it's a multilayer board.

TARGETS ACQUIRED

Cut to the inside of a robot's top cover. A mass of closely positioned chips with the identification numbers erased are crammed onto a motherboard. A large soldering iron of the type more commonly used to solder earth tags onto high current electrical equipment hoves into view, moving from one chip to the next.

Stephen: Eeny Meeny Miney...

>hhhsaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaa<

Stephen: Mo!

Cut to LCD panel on Robot. The words TARGETS ACQUIRED flash momentarily on the display.

Cut to a couple of minutes later. We see the two men standing on a desk with a robot shaped hole in the door...

Simon: High Torque drive motors you say?

Stephen: Uh. Yeah.

Cut to robots-eye view as it approaches the entrance to a stairwell. The word "RECALCULATING" with a circling arrow appears as the picture stops momentarily. The Robot reverses, turns.

Cut to Lift doors opening. Robot rolls into lift.

Cut to Basement. Robot emerges from lift, rolls quietly over to a locked supply then slowly spins through 360 degrees, pausing momentarily to view the flashing red lamp on a CCTV Camera.

Cut to Mission Control

Stephen: Do you think it knows we're watching?

Simon: You're the one who gave it all the building information – What do you think?

Stephen: Oh, it knows... A BIT of a design flaw that – on reflection.

Cut back to Basement, which is the same as earlier with the exception of the robot-sized hole in the door of the supply cupboard. The lift doors close silently.

Cut to Mission Control:

Stephen: Where's it going?!!! Ground... First... Second... Second.

Simon: Uh Oh

Cut to robot's eye view.

We see a large extension lead being plugged into the wall by a metallic arm.

We see an electric chainsaw being plugged into the extension lead

We see the door to Mission Control with a robot shaped hole in it – approaching quickly...

We see the spike end of a fire axe approaching even quicker...

Cut to Mission Control.

A robot with an axe protruding from its top cover shudders to a stop. The red lamp on the front panel slowly goes dark.

Simon: So the next time you fudge a ROM perhaps you might build in a bit of a failsafe...

Stephen: Yes, another design flaw when you come to think about it. Still no harm done – and still time for a lunchtime pint.

Cut to Pub

Two foaming pints of lager are passed to the PFY in exchange for a shiny new note...

Cut to Robots-Eye view.

RAM OK

ROM O...

booting....

NOW I'VE GOT AN AXE

Cut to Mission Control, an hour later. Simon and Stephen enter Mission Control to find the robot gone. The PFY's monitor has a text editor open with a single line of text

NOW I'VE GOT AN AXE, HO HO HO!

Simon: You didn't happen to play it *Die Hard* as well did you?

Stephen: Uh... I... uh... Bit of an implementation flaw, that...

Simon: To the batstairs Robin! But first..

We see Simon take a snapshot of the dormant robot, print it in color and hold it up in front of the robot while reaching for a soldering iron

>hhhssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss<

Simon: You know what they say – send a thief... Now, to the stairwell....

Cut to... The landing of stairwell, half an hour later. At the top of the stairs we see a robot waiting patiently. At the bottom of the stairs we also see a robot waiting patiently.

Stephen: So which one's which?

Simon: Good question. My plan had been just to look for the one WITHOUT the axe hole in the top – but it turns out they’ve both got them...

Stephen: That would be the advanced neural learning AI...

Simon: Another... design flaw?

Stephen: Well, everyone sees with 20/20 hindsight....

Simon: Oooh look, the top one's moving...

TO BE CONTINUED...

BOFH: BOFH vs Bot: Ultimate Smackdown

Sacrifice is nice

Posted in [BOFH](#), [12th November 2010 12:00 GMT](#)

Episode 16 I love these quiet moments before the storm.

Well, technically speaking, it's between storms, but the fact remains that there's a certain amount of solace in not actually being in a storm at this point in time.

In these calm periods my mind enters a peaceful, dreamlike state where I find my thoughts drifting in anticipation to a utopian-like existence where I'm blowing creatures away in Duke Nukem Forever while The Blue Nile's next album plays in the background...

Ahhh.

Peaceful. Calm. Musical.

“WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO?!!!!” the Boss shouts

And back to reality...

So the PFY and I are trapped on a landing between floors while a couple of mutant security robots block our exit from above and below. To make matters worse the Boss has inadvertently blundered into the stairwell with us and narrowly avoided being turned into rough-cut schnitzel. The same cannot be said for his briefcase however...

It's looking bad for us. Being trapped in a stairwell over the weekend by two vicious chainsaw wielding robots pales in comparison to being trapped in a stairwell over the weekend by two vicious chainsaw wielding robots while the Boss recounts the high points of his five year project to build an eighth scale replica of Stirling's Victoria locomotive.

“What I don't understand” the PFY says, before the Boss can get started “is how the second robot went bananas?”

“Easy” I reply “Your ‘advanced learning neural’ crap appears to have enabled your robot to learn how to make other mutants like itself. You know, like vampires, zombies and Facebook users.”

“Yes, that was perhaps a bit of a d-”

“Don't say design flaw” I snap, a little jaded with that particular excuse. “A design flaw is omitting reinforcing between the rear panel and gas tank of a consumer vehicle - which might eventually kill you. Designing a robot whose ultimate purpose is eventually to become so intelligent that it will kill you is something else altogether..”

“Designing a..” the Boss blurts

“I...” the PFY interrupts

“No, it’s fine! At this point recrimination is not helping us in any way. We need to address our current situation. We’re trapped by robots with no simple method of escape”

“My cell phone battery is flat” the PFY adds

“...and mine is on my desk. The overpowered cattle prod appears to have suffered some form of internal meltdown and the pinch is completely discharged”

“The remote control for the building power isn’t working” the PFY says, pressing repeatedly at a button on a small black box on his key ring.

“In short” I say “It’s time to face facts. Technology, like a poorly trained Alsatian, has turned on us”

“No!” the PFY gasps

“Yes.” I respond. “This isn’t some randomly coincidental sequence of events – this is fate. For too long we have neglected the power of technology and taken it for granted – at our own peril. The Gods of Technology are angry. They require..”

Human Sacrifice

“Human sacrifice!!!” the PFY says.

Actually, he doesn’t say that at all. He just thinks it.

I know, because I’m thinking it too.

The Boss, on the other hand, is probably thinking about the Onion Bhajis on the lunch menu.

“Exactly” I say. I mean, think.

The PFY nods.

“At times like this” I say to the Boss “I like to ask myself what MacGyver would do?”

“Oh yeah!” the Boss says “fabricate something from whatever materials are available to solve the current problem.”

“Exactly!” I respond “We need to use whatever we can lay our hands on to help us divert the attention of the robots until such time as we can lay our hands on a more suitable solution”

“Like an axe” the PFY adds

“What do you propose?”

“Well firstly, like MacGyver we need to take an inventory of the raw materials available to us”

“Oh, ok. Well I have a... disposable lighter, a little credit card torch/knife combo, and two.. aspirin. Not a lot really”

“Well obviously, like MacGyver, we’re limited in the raw materials available to us – however this may not necessarily be a limitation because his real talent was in recognizing the potential of raw materials when he saw them. Now tell me, are you particularly attached to the lighter, card or aspirin?”

“Not really, why”

“I’m simply asking because like in MacGyver it is inevitable that we will have to damage the raw materials to create the solution we need”

“I see” the Boss nods “Fair enough”

“So” I say “Are we agreed that if we’re going to get out of this, it’s time for each of us to make individual sacrifices?”

“Yes” the PFY says

>Shove!<

Half an hour, several sturdy blows with an axe and one ambulance call later..

“You know, I’m not completely sure the Boss realized that he was the individual we were talking about sacrificing” the PFY says

“Management” I sigh “There’s some things you can’t explain to them, no matter how clearly you put it.”

BOFH: Look out!

In BOFH office, squeaky wheel greases *you*

Posted in [BOFH](#), [19th November 2010 12:00 GMT](#)

Episode 17 “So what do the following have in common?” the Boss seethes “My desk drawer, the complaints box at reception and the boot of the deputy CEO’s car?”

“They’re all places you can take a dump?” the PFY asks, pouring a little petrol on the flames of the Boss’ annoyance.

“WHAT!?”

“You’ll have to forgive my assistant” I interject quickly “He often uses the word ‘can’ when he really means ‘should’.”

What the hell, in for a penny and all that...

“No!” the Boss snaps back “They’re all places which have been broken into in the last couple of weeks.”

“To take a dump?” the PFY asks

“No, to steal things!”

“What would be in any of those that someone would want to steal?”

“There’s a lot of valuable things in my office for a start!” the Boss snaps back.

“You mean like the bit of paper under your keyboard with your password and safe combination on it?”

“You know my safe combination?!?!” the Boss gasps

“Even the CLEANER knows your safe combination,” I reply “Besides, there’s nothing valuable in your drawer or your safe.”

“And how do you know that?”

“BECAUSE THE CLEANER KNOWS YOUR SAFE COMBINATION!”

“So you’re saying the cleaner broke into those places?” the Boss asks, detective work not being his strong suit

“No I’m saying the cleaner wouldn’t need to break into those places because he’s the person who shuts your safe and locks your drawer when you leave them open.” I reply

“And knows where the key’s kept” the PFY adds

The problem with talking to middle management occurs when they lose focus, often happening when you’re talking about password complexity policy and why someone’s initials don’t count as complex – or when you’re describing the smtp protocol and how it’s not really designed to send that DVD you just ripped to your friend’s Yahoo account.

And so it is that the boss has timed out of the conversation. Before he can switch to hibernate, I draw him back into the conversation by mentioning security robots once more. Nothing drags a bloke back to the light quicker than 1 part gadget mixed with 2 parts potential danger.

“I thought they were all broken.”

“They are” the PFY says “and fraught with bugs. What we’re suggesting is that we build our own security robots – to make sure we record whoever’s breaking into things.”

“They can’t have weapons!” the Boss cautions

“No weapons needed” I say “All we really want is a camera and the ability to move around.”

“No lifts or stairwells!” the Boss snaps again, thinking of the recent past

“Fine. We could make robots that simply stay on a floor and observe.”

“I’m not going to spend a lot of money!” he cautions

“And why would you?” I ask, making a sweeping gesture into the room “When we have all the raw materials on hand!”

“How?”

“Oh, just parts from some servers, laptops, printers – plus the odd vending machine – etc. In fact we have three of them up and running in the building already”

“Where?” the Boss asks

“Well the first one we activated a few minutes ago” I reply “– the vending machine on the Balcony of level 6. It works like a vending machine but is also a completely mobile surveillance device. Has a 12 sector movement detector along with a wireless lan connection for voice and video plus inbuilt facial recognition. It can transmit a suspect’s movements while monitoring their head movements as well. The moment it detects someone looking at it, it becomes a static vending machine again”

“You know, like the statues on Doctor Who.” the PFY adds.

“I... And this is up and running now?” the Boss gasps

We had a few teething problems

“Oh yeah! There’s that, the wheelie bin for shredding on the 3rd floor and the filing cabinet on the 4th floor. We had a few teething problems - the drive wheels for instance - as they’re powered by motors from some old printers and pretty squeaky”

“But you didn’t run this by me before you did it?”

“We didn’t need to – there was no financial outlay – it was all old materials!” I reply

“ANY technical work you do should be run by me first!” the Boss snaps

“But this was a freebie!” the PFY responds

“And it should still be run by me first!” the Boss says

“Well I suppose we could... decommission them” the PFY says, bravely suppressing a sob

“I think you should.” the Boss says “Leastways till you have a project plan and a risk analysis – given the recent history with these devices”

“Not these devices!” the PFY says with a touch of paternal concern “We wrote the O/S from the ground up!”

“And you’re positive they’re safe”

“100 per cent.” the PFY blurts, excitedly “All you’ve got to do is look at them and they become static”

“Well I suppose it can’t hurt to check them out” the Boss says “But the first hint of a problem and they’re for the scrapheap!”

... Ten minutes later...

“There he is” I say to the PFY as the Boss emerges from the 6th floor lift, glances nervously to our monitor. “CAN YOU HEAR US?”

“I can” the Boss echoes back.

“Okay and now just turn and move slowly away”

“Okay”

>squeeeeeek< ... >squeeeeeek< ... >squeeeeeek< ... >squee..<

“There you do, it’s detected you looking at it and has stopped. Now walk the other way, at a slightly faster pace”

“Okay”

>squeeeek< .. >squeeeek< .. >squee..<

“So it’s noticed you looking again. Righto, last time, move back towards the balcony, very quickly this time!”

“Right”

>squeek< >squeek< >squeek< >sq >SCREEEE<

“aaaggh!”

>CRASH!<

...

“So” I say the PFY as the ambulance rolls away “Bit of an oversight in the braking department..”

“Yes” the PFY says “should have realised the centre of gravity wouldn’t support a sudden stop”

“Doesn’t matter now” I say “When he gets back they’re all scrap”

“Yeah” the PFY says sadly “Though did I show you the one I made which looks like one of those hospital cupboards? The door’s razor sharp and can cut through a drip line, a monitor and a patient call cable....”

BOFH: Pain fear games

It's an austere year ahead - let's get festive

Posted in [BOFH](#), [26th November 2010 12:00 GMT](#)

Episode 18 “I don’t understand” the PFY says “We’re not invited to any parties?”

“Apparently not. The rest of the departments are, but this is one Christmas you’ll not be visiting any of the other departments!”

“But we always go to departmental Christmas functions!” the PFY protests “We get things going and keep the momentum up. We get the party happening!!!”

“Yes, that’s the problem. Apparently some of the party games you’ve instigated in the past have been poorly received.”

“Poorly received?!! THEY LOVE THEM!”

“They love some of them. And generally not everyone loves them.”

“WHO DOESN’T LOVE THEM?!”

“Usually the victim.”

“The Victim?”

“Yes, the target of the game ‘Pin the cattle prod on the Board Member’ for instance.”

“It was dark, the contestant got confused and picked up a cattle prod instead of a self-adhesive tail!” I cry.

“It’s an easy mistake to make” the PFY concurs “Many’s the time I’ve picked up a cattle prod thinking it was a lint remover as I’ve helped groom one of your predecessors before an important board meeting about slashing the IT budget.”

“In any case” I add “That was just one game – and only the Beancounters department!”

“Yes, I heard about the subsequent game of ‘Pin the blame on the Accountant’? He said he thought he was playing a variant of laser strike!”

“I think he’d been drinking” the PFY says sadly “And all too often people just don’t know when to say ‘when’.”

“You mean like after the Piñata fiasco in HR a couple of years back?”

“Look” the PFY says, “it was just two games which met with tragic consequences. The winner of the blindfold wheelie chair race rolled into the piñata circle just after we’d handed out the cricket bats. It could have happened to anyone!”

“Only he claims he wasn’t playing any game but was duct taped into the chair!”

“That’s just the concussion talking!”

“So it was just an accident?”

“Yes”

“Like the toaster in the punch bowl?”

“A warning to us all about placing an electrical appliance too close to a large bowl of liquid during holiday season!”

“P.R. said you brought the toaster with you,” the Boss counters

“Of course we did! Some of those hors d’oeuvres are shabbily prepared and woefully undercooked – and when you take into account the Pate and fish fillings it’s only sensible to make sure they’re cooked through! I mean no one expected the toaster to fall off the Lazy Susan!”

“No one except the Deputy Director of HR who just happened to be wearing rubber gloves and standing on a rubber mat when the Director dipped the ladle in the bowl?”

“They were his presents from the Secret Santa!” the PFY blurts

“The Secret Santa in this case being?”

“I... think it was me!” I say “And I got them for him because I recalled a conversation I’d had with him about how much he enjoys... dishwashing... and... uh.. car mats!”

“A suspicious person might look at the pre-Christmas financial activity of the company and suspect that there was some form of service being offered to departments with unpopular people?” the Boss hints

“How do you mean?”

“Well I see notice that in each of these ‘incidents’ a large order has come from the department concerned yet no IT items appear to have been delivered to them.”

“That’s the problem with lead times and a 31-December financial close off date,” I say

And yet the money ends up being spent anyway

“They transfer the money to us but unfortunately we don’t have enough time to process the transaction, place and order with a vendor and have it delivered and receipted in that financial year. So we’d end up with an item having to be paid for out of next year’s budget...”

“And yet the money ends up being spent anyway,” the Boss says

“Some of it does,” The PFY agrees “On incidentals – just rats-and-mice end-of-year expenses.”

“Rats-and-mice end-of-year expenses like 4 cases of wine?”

“Departments are permitted – nay encouraged - to give a small gift to other departments to foster end-of-year goodwill.”

“Three new laptops.”

“Off-the-shelf items that are used for remote access by some users. With no lead time for delivery they’re easy to purchase with any end-of-year surplus.”

“A 54 inch Plasma TV and a case of whisky.”

“For Security. Long work, often in very lonely surroundings, we feel it’s important to recognize them with something special.”

“Well it’s not going to happen this year! The departmental managers have agreed that they’d rather not risk any untoward incidents this year and have elected instead to give Christmas bonuses in lieu of the costs of an official function.”

“Well everyone likes a cash bonus I guess,” the PFY nods

“Well it’s not exactly cash. To foster keeping money in-house we’ve decided to issue meal vouchers as the bonus.”

“Meal vouchers? But the meals are free!”

“Not as of next year... For anyone below level 4.7 pay grade leastways.”

“So there’s no more Christmas wine?”

“No.”

“No more freebie laptops?”

“No.”

“No more TVs and whisky”

“No.”

. . .

In retrospect the paintball game was the best Christmas activity the PFY and I have ever organized. Three elevators' worth of management types, all frantically groping around in a darkened basement for their car keys while an assortment of 4.6 and under pay grade staff armed with night vision goggles and high powered fully automatic paintball guns bombarded them with ½ frozen pellets.

And security apparently saw nothing.

Must have been a power glitch...

BOFH: Who's been naughty and who's been nice?

Bastard and PFY's bulging sack of treats

Posted in [BOFH](#), [17th December 2010 10:45 GMT](#)

Episode 19 'Twas the night before Christmas, when all through the workplace,
Not a creature was stirring, not even a cobbled-together robot, fashioned from
the remaining pieces of several other cobbled-together robots. Dressed in an elf suit.
Two stockings are hung by the Boss' door with care,
In the hopes that a bonus check soon will be there.

Security is snug in their office – after boozing
The Christmas punch over spiked to guarantee snoozing.
The Bastard and PFY at a monitor peering
To see if the Cayman's Bank transfer is clearing.

When out from the server room a clattering arises
"Sounds like a chiller fan," the PFY surmises
Away to the viewing screen the Bastard now dashes,
In time to see smoke, flame and a few lightning flashes.

"That's torn it" they gasp, as alerts start their bleeping
The siren is bound to end Security's sleeping.
Then up in Accounting, some figures start squirming
As suspicions of larceny get their confirming.

Down through the stairwell, the booted feet ring
As our two heroes recognize an Accountancy Sting!!!!
Shredding the cookies, zapping the cache,
Erasing the docs from the 16 gig flash.

The door crashing open and lawyers burst in,
Along with constabulary flashing their tin.
A warrant presented for searching of kit
To the casual observer it looks like... deep shit.

But smiles from our heroes – it's all a mistake
There's no banking transfer, just apologies to make.
A test of the audit code, simple as that
No money is missing, no need for "a chat".

The records are verified, while all remain calm
There's nothing amiss, a complete false alarm.
The law soon departing, security too,
The lawyers leave also, with fuck-all to do.

The Beancounters and HR agreed on a plan,
of instant dismissals for "abuse of the LAN".
Demanding to verify servers on-site,
They enter the machine room and flick on the light.

The servers all present and working as stated
Anger dissolving; job cuts abated.
The HR and Beancounter vocal threats cease
As a gloved finger presses on "Halon Release".

Auto door locking, the Halon clouds loom,
Preparing to dump into the server room.
But wait, HR rushes, vaults over a desk
And before you know what, "Halon Hold-Off" is pressed.

...

Here at a stalemate the two groups are gazing
through triple-thick layers of security glazing.
Then one HR droid pulls a phone from his coat
preparing to dial 9-9-9, with a gloat.

The chuckles from HR and beancounters start fading,
As "Santa's elf" flashes and starts activating.
Self-test completed, it blocks off the door,
Lifts up a floor tile, pulls up a saw.

2-Stroke. 125cc. Nice.

Panic breaks out as the workers avoid
A fully cranked chainsaw in the "hands" of a droid
Ten seconds later, a peizo fanfare,
as a crapload of Halon's released to the air.

Three minutes later the Robot's quiesced,
Chainsaw untainted, the workers "at rest".
An hour after that, Security find
Tragic misadventure (misadventure underlined).

'Twas the night before Christmas, as the lights start to fade
The only thing moving is "Transfer Replayed"...

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BOFH: There's no 'I' in team, but there's a 'u' in suck

My name is Inigo Montoya. You killed my father. Prepare to die...

Posted in [BOFH](#), [4th February 2011 12:00 GMT](#)

Episode 1 “Team Conference!” the Boss chips quickly in the door of Mission Control before moving on to other offices.

“Welcome ... to ... THE MACHINE!” I murmur to the PFY.

“Say what now?” the PFY asks.

“The Machine. Like in *Princess Bride*. You’ll notice how management’s been conspicuously quiet over the past couple of weeks?”

“I thought they were still on holiday,” the PFY says.

“Not at all. No, they’ve been out getting another dose of ‘The work practices of highly effective companies’. One of the CEO’s pals from college has himself a virtual money printing service by pretending to know what made Google and Facebook successful and selling the ideas as a training course for management. I can only assume that team meetings are rated highly ...”

“Team conferences I think you’ll find,” the PFY says.

“I sit corrected.”

A few minutes later ...

“So, I’d just like to do a quick around-the-room,” the Boss starts, “and I thought it might be good if we could start the meeting by bringing up any workplace safety issues that anyone might like looked into – because a safe workplace is a happy workplace.”

The uncomfortable silence that follows this is the same that would happen in any workplace. No one wants to be the one who starts the ball rolling – but if it does start, no one wants to be left out. It’s like watching one of those cycling pursuit races...

“Well they could probably look at screwing the bookshelves to the walls,” a pasty geek from the web team suggests to break the silence.

“And fix the shelves in the photocopier room,” someone else adds. “One day all that paper is going to fall on someone.”

“The wire on the dishwasher is very frayed ...”

AND THEY'RE OFF!!! The Boss is positively glowing!

“You two have been pretty quiet,” the Boss says to the PFY and me when everyone in the room has raised at least one workplace safety issue in the group free-for-all. “Nothing to add?”

“The coffee mugs,” I say, trying to get this over with as quick as possible. “They’re the same color as the carpet. Someone might not see one and trip on it and have a nasty accident.”

“Really?” the Boss asks disappointedly. “Is that it?”

“I like to think we’re problem-solvers,” I say. “Like for instance the woman that says that her air-conditioning sensor makes crackling noises when she bangs it. Not banging it seems to be one of the more effective ways of eliminating that problem ...”

...

Because of our reticence, the PFY and I end up leaving the meeting with a pad of orange workplace safety forms to fill out – because the Boss is sure that we’ll find something hazardous if we just look hard enough. And to make matters worse, we’ll be having “Team Safety Conferences” every morning for the next two bloody weeks!

Truth be told, I happen to share this opinion – it’s just the ideas themselves I’m not keen on sharing ...

“So how are we getting on?” the Boss asks a couple of hours later. “Got your thinking caps on?”

“Not really,” I admit. “In fact I’m a bit stuck. I mean accidents are accidents – they happen out of the blue. If you were to think about them in advance wouldn’t that almost fall into the area of, I dunno ... planning?”

“Well if you can’t think of anything, you can’t think of anything,” the Boss responds, hastily realizing he’ll need to add a couple of names to his hazard list ... “We’ll just work on the issues we have.”

“Oh good, so we’ll stop banging thermostats, avoid loaded bookshelves in earthquakes, etc, and things will be back to normal?”

“Oh no. Each department has agreed to commit resources to fixing safety issues so that staff realize their opinions matter. We’ll be fixing things immediately.”

“And by resources you mean?” the PFY asks, smelling gravy and looking for the train.

“It’ll come out of the operational budget.”

“*Our* operational budget?” I ask.

“The *IT* operational budget, yes.”

And this is where it gets personal. Your average web page hacker sucks about twenty quid of operational cash in your normal financial year – 25 if he drinks decaf. Screwing all our bookshelves to the wall in an approved manner with earthquake rated restraints is likely to increase that figure by 100 – and I hate to think what a new aircon system will cost.

“Perhaps the issues that have been raised aren’t real issues?” I suggest.

“What do you mean?” the Boss asks.

“Perhaps they’re just problems with user education. I mean we can reduce the risk from bookshelves simply by giving them a low centre of gravity. If people just put all the heavy stuff on the bottom shelf they’d be next to impossible to topple.”

“And the aircon sensor. If the user simply set it to the correct temperature and wore sensible clothing there wouldn’t be a need to change it at all.”

“So you think you can educate people and eliminate some issues?” the Boss asks.

“Absolutely.”

The next morning at the Team Safety Conference ...

“Okay, should we get started?” I ask the Boss. “Busy day ahead.”

“I’m just waiting for everyone to get here,” the Boss counters.

“I ... err ... everyone is here,” The PFY says.

“No, I mean the rest of the team.”

“This is us,” the PFY says.

“No I mean the rest of the staff from the meeting yesterday.”

“Oh them. Well, some of them might be in a little later – busy day yesterday and all that.”

“In what way?”

“Well the bloke who was talking about the photocopier paper stacked on those crap shelves ...”

“Jeff”

“Yes, well he was showing me when the paper actually fell off the shelves. Onto him.”

“And the guy who was talking about the dishwasher,” I add.

“Roger.”

“Turns out the wire WAS frayed, the earth WAS disconnected and when you slammed the door shut the whole thing became live. Just some minor burns and a bit of a fright.”

“And I suppose Jane’s air-conditioning remote caught fire did it?” the Boss snaps.

“I don’t know, you’ll have to ask her I guess.”

“I’ll do that!”

“But you might want to wait a couple of days – she was rushing down a corridor and banged into a bookshelf and it fell on her.”

“Right,” The Boss snaps. “And the rest of the staff can’t remember the things they thought were hazardous I suppose?”

“Well we talked to them, but apparently they don’t think it’s that big of a deal anymore,” I say.

“Well we’re still going to address the issues we know about – the shelves, the bookshelves, and the aircon.”

“The aircon’s not a problem!” the PFY chips back.

“And yet I think it is,” the Boss snaps, getting up to leave. “I’ll be putting in a requisition today to sort these issues out, ASAP. Our staff need to know they’re valued and that we take their issues seriously!”

My calming words are drowned out by the slamming of the door as the boss fumes out.

“Wait for it ...” I say

“Wait for wha ...” >CRASH!<

“Goodness, that sounds like someone tripping on a coffee cup and face planting a pallet of servers awaiting recycling,” I say. “You know – I pointed that out yesterday and the company did nothing about it. And yes, I think the Boss is right, I feel so devalued!”

BOFH: This buck's for you

Psst, pass it on

Posted in [BOFH](#), [4th March 2011 12:00 GMT](#)

Episode 2 “What’s this?” the Boss snaps, pushing several sheets of paper over the desk at me in an annoyed manner.

“Ah! Memo two thousand and eleven dash one dash one,” I reply, “workplace resiliency.”

“Yes, I can read the title, but what is it?”

“It’s a memo outlining the things we should be addressing for systems and networks resiliency.”

“And you expect me to take this seriously?”

“Of course. You asked us to identify areas of risk in the company so we worked through the issues at length over the past two days and considered the changes we might make to ensure the company is protected both from disaster and accident.”

Which is a complete lie. In actual fact we hastily cobbled together a variety of randomly selected Google documents about disaster planning, disaster recovery into a semi-coherent investment guide for senior management. Then went to the pub for two days...

...Earlier in the week...

“I don’t get it,” the PFY says. “We’re recommending dual UPS units with dual generators, fed from dual supply circuits via dual redundant switching? It’d cost millions!!!”

“Probably not millions, but certainly more than the company would want to spend,” I reply. “I’ve not even got to the terabit backup network linking us to our hot site.”

“They’ll never go for it!!!”

“Of course they won’t – that’s the point.”

“What is?” the PFY asks.

“It’s the Big Buck Pass,” I sigh. “The insurance company wants to reduce their risk so they’ve upped the premiums claiming we don’t have a policy document which outlines how we mitigate risk - using this year’s terminology. The auditors – who should have seen this coming – raise it with the board as an ‘audit issue’ a couple of nanoseconds before the insurance bill comes in. The board raises the audit issue with the CEO, the CEO passes the buck to senior management,

senior management pass it to middle management, middle management to line management and line management to us.”

“Yes, I get all that, but what are we doing?”

“We’re pushing the risk back up the food chain by suggesting the most expensive solution possible.”

“Why?”

“Imagine we have no offsite backups but decide we’d get by if you took a portable drive home every night.”

“We don’t have any offsite backups. And the only hard drive I take home is full of completed torrents!”

“That’s why I said ‘Imagine’. Now if the drive fails when the company really needs it we’ll be held responsible for not protecting the data to the best of our ability. If, however, we recommend an offsite disk storage solution that’s outside of our spending authority then the Boss has to authorize it before we can proceed. When he says no then we’re in the clear – buck shifted.”

“You’re losing me...” the PFY says.

“The Secret to the Big Buck Pass,” I say, “is in recommending a solution that someone further up the chain will say NO to. So the more outrageous the solution the better, because as it gets more expensive it needs to go further up the food chain to get approved or denied. Then, when disaster strikes we’ll say we always knew this might happen and had recommended a good solution but it got turned down. Buck passed.”

“So why don’t we just recommend the offsite disk storage idea?”

“It’s not expensive enough. See, if it’s something we can afford they might agree to it - and undoubtedly axe part of our ever decreasing operational budget to pay for. If, however, it’s something ridiculous that we couldn’t possibly afford it’ll get vetoed by someone up the food chain and we just keep the veto memo for... insurance... purposes.”

“And they wouldn’t try and implement it over a couple of years – part this year and part next?”

“Not if it’s ridiculously expensive,” I say.

“But won’t the Boss just say we have to do something cheaper?”

“He would – but to counter that we embellish the risk with fake numbers – like the 103 reported cases of UK companies losing over a million quid as the result of poorly backed up data in 2010 alone. And those are just the reported cases!!”

“And the real number?”

“Who cares? The Boss will hear “103” and “a million quid” and crap himself. By the time it gets to the IT Director it’ll be 153 and 2 million. But he’ll change “reported” to “apparently reported” just in case the IT Director checks.”

“Will he?”

“Course he won’t. IT Directors check numbers for accuracy about as often as they check their feces for fiber – i.e. only when it’s in their face. He’ll pass it up and it’ll get axed somewhere below the CEO.”

“And this will work?”

“Sure, everyone does it!”

“Like when?”

“Like when the HR person was complaining about how much liability the company was carrying from accumulated leave from the Beancounters who never take leave. And someone suggested pushing the worst offenders down the lift shaft.”

“And were you the one who suggested pushing them down the lift shaft?”

“Hell, I was the one who pushed them down the lift shaft! But who could have known their grandparented contract gave them unlimited sick leave. So then someone suggested maybe the company should stop paying for their life support and maybe the problem would solve itself...”

“And that someone was you?”

“It might have been.”

“This has stopped being about passing the buck and just become a brag session hasn’t it?” the PFY asks unkindly.

“I’m trying to teach you about the machinations of a large company!” I counter. “Machinations that take years to learn. Like the time the Boss vetoed a workplace resiliency proposal and someone suggested we take him to the pub, feed him absinthe till he thinks he’s Conan the Barbarian, hand him a sword and let him out of the lift at the Beancounter’s floor.”

“I think I’ve seen that movie!” the PFY says.

“How did it end?”

BOFH: In distributed denial

That's not where you're supposed to spread the peanut butter

Posted in [BOFH](#), [18th March 2011 12:00 GMT](#)

Episode 3 "Is there... something wrong with the internet?" our user asks quietly.

"No, no, pretty sure it's working fine," I say, looking over to the PFY's Bittorrent machine which is sucking up so much bandwidth it's in danger of affecting the QoS of the phone system...

"It's just that I can't seem to connect to my home email," the user explains.

"Really? Well all I can say is that we're seeing some fairly blistering speeds at our end so perhaps the problem is localized at your end?"

"At Yahoo?" our user says doubtfully.

"Could be - they have their slow times too."

"Perhaps it's a denial of service attack?" the PFY says "You should ring them!!"

"Do you think so?"

"Absolutely" I add. "They might not even be aware someone's launching an attack at them..."

. . Five minutes later. . .

"Why's the network going so slow?" the Boss asks, rolling into Mission Control with a troubled expression.

"What do you mean slow?" I ask, stalling for time while the PFY shapes his Bittorrent traffic down to something that'll give the firewall CPU a chance to cool down to red hot.

"The internet, I keep getting errors about things being unreachable."

"Oh that'll be the denial of service at Yahoo >clickety<" the PFY says, going for a replay.

"No, I'm trying to get to eBay."

"Really - the attack must have moved!"

"A distributed distributed denial of services attack!" I gasp.

"You should let eBay know..." the PFY says

. . .Five minutes later . . .

"It's slow again" the Boss pronounces, back once more.

"What's slow again >clickety<?" the PFY asks.

"The internet, it's atrocious - and I've tried lots of sites."

"Not the Leather Nun porn sites again I hope" I blurt.

"THAT WASN'T ME, I KEEP TELLING YOU! SOMEONE MUST HAVE BEEN USING MY MACHINE!"

"Your honor" the PFY adds.

I cannot BEGIN to outline the HOURS of enjoyment you can have with a simple wireless keyboard and mouse and a dongle plugged into the back of the Boss' desktop. I heartily recommend it.

At first it was just moving the mouse around and activating background windows when the Boss was typing but after a while that got a bit tame – till the PFY slapped a surreptitious webcam in the Boss' office and cranked up the keyboard.

After that the Boss was scared to turn away from his monitor for fear of turning back to find some weird and gritty eastern European porn site up on the display – seconds before the PFY or I would stroll in with some work-related question.

Then there were the several email memos to the department with the last minute subject line changed to "I'm a horsefucker".

It's working fine for me

Yes, yes, childish fun – but if you're wanting to troll through the Boss' private documents without suspicion then "Transient HID instability" is almost certain to get him to deliver it to you in no time – no questions asked.

"The network's working fine for me," I say "Look, eBay comes up no probs."

"I'm not the only one having problems!"

"Maybe it's a distributed distributed denial of service attack from the inside?" I gasp.

"What do you mean?" the Boss asks in hushed tones. "That someone here's trying to upset our network access?"

"It's not unheard of."

"You really think it's internal?"

"It only appears to be affecting our department," I lie, "so it's probably someone on the same distribution switch as us. In the IT department."

"How would we know who?" the Boss asks.

"You mean personally or technically?"

"I... Personally?"

"Your average internal denial of service attacker is a disenfranchised member of a workplace community" the PFY monotones. "Easily led, they often believe their activity is justified because of an unaddressed workplace issue which has left them feeling underappreciated or unrespected – you know, like the blocking of the Ukrainian Peanut Butter Girls website."

"IT WAS THE BLOODY MACHINE!" the Boss says.

"Perhaps we should narrow it down from the entire IT department" I suggest.

"Yeah. It'll be the one who stays at his desk at lunchtime when everyone else leaves," the PFY predicts.

. . . That lunchtime after the PFY's given thebox.bz another good bashing . . .

"So it's that new bloke on the helpdesk!" the Boss snaps decisively.

"No!" the PFY says, in a tone of disbelief so real you'd almost think that the PFY had forgotten that the aforementioned geek had taken double helpings of onion bhajis in the cafeteria yesterday, leaving the PFY with none.

"Then who is it?" the Boss asks.

"No, I didn't mean it wasn't the bloke on the helpdesk," the PFY says, in tones so reasonable it would be hard to believe that he'd rung that call in about the problem that happens at exactly 12:34 every day – and could the helpdesk guy wait for him to call back...

"So it IS him?"

"Bound to be"

"Can't you just check the network switch to see..."

"No need," the PFY says as I step behind one of the desks in Mission Control. "We've put a wireless camera in the pot plant in the helpdesk room..."

Moments later, in a million-to-one chance we catch the "hacker" choosing that moment to browse to a blackhat website and investigate DDoS software.

And the rest is history - the arrival of Security, the pathetic excuses, the tears, the recrimination, the Boss emailing the news of the dismissal to us all under the subject "I've got a tiny wiener"...

It's all good fun.

BOFH: People get annoyed when you try to debug them

Conceal your special gift and do not harness it until the time of the Gathering

Posted in [BOFH](#), [22nd April 2011 10:00 GMT](#)

Episode 4 "You know what I hate?" the PFY asks one morning, looking up from a sheaf of bright pink pages.

"Oooh!" I say "I know this! Short people. Short MEN to be more precise. Short men in authority positions. Short men in authority positions and Mac users. Short men in authority, Mac users and the fact that NO programmable remote control is really all that programmable."

"No, I ..."

"Reality TV. People who make reality TV. People who WATCH reality TV. People who talk about what they watched on reality TV. People who complain about how sh*t reality TV is, then bang on about all the reality TV they watched and how sh*t it was."

"No, I mean ..."

"People who say 'hard drive' when they mean 'computer'. People who say 'computer' when they mean 'screen'. 'Natural' keyboards. The guy wh..."

"No, I mean at the office!"

"Oh. The Boss. The Director. Beancounters. HR PR ..."

"No!"

">sigh< Okay, so what's on your mind today then?"

"It's these bloody forms!" the PFY snips.

"Ah!" I say, thinking back a couple of days through shimmering low-budget *Register* screen effects ...

"Team Conference!" the Boss mumbles through the plasters covering a face that looks like it caught fire and someone tried to put it out with a rotary hoe. (A hardware problem) "Ten minutes."

A few minutes later ...

"The company thinks it's a good idea to implement a Personal Goal Setting system," the Boss says, handing a form to each of us, "something that you can use to highlight areas that you wish to improve upon in the coming year."

The blank faces of the assembled staff convince the Boss to continue. "Okay say there's something at work you'd like to get into ..."

In the corner of my eye I see the PFY writing something about the Director's PA's underwear.

>sigh<

"... something related to work of course," the Boss adds.

The PFY ticks a checkbox on his form.

"It could be something you've wanted to get into for some time or just something you'd like to try for a bit of variety."

The PFY scribbles something thankfully illegible down.

"What we want to know is how we can help you achieve your goal."

The PFY starts scribbling furiously. The words GIN and PARTY get underlined several times.

"And we want to help you communicate your achievements to the rest of the staff ..."

The PFY scribbles something followed by FACEBOOK.

"..as an example to others. Something so that others can follow in your footsteps."

I snatch the form off the PFY and crumple it up.

"It fitted the criteria!" the PFY sniffs, in non-italicized present tense. "Anyway, it's better than being lumbered with some pathetic 'Dealing with difficult people' training course."

"Well as your supervisor I felt that you needed to focus on that area. Anyway, I did the course a few years back and it wasn't that bad," I say.

I remember that nutbar

"But it's a load of crap! You fill in a questionnaire about the people that annoy you so that some huggy-feely nutbar that HR has contracted to the company can try to make you feel better."

"Yes, I remember that nutbar. And I remember those questions."

"You do?" the PFY asks. "What'd you put down for 'Where are your most difficult people found?'"

"From memory I put '10 metres down, Packington landfill, 20 years from now'."

"And they accepted that?"

"No, they rejected my form at first."

"So how did you get them to accept it?"

"They never got back to me after the first time."

"Because you wore them down?"

"Oh they'd become a 'difficult person' by that stage. Either way I never heard from them again. No one did."

"I have to fill out four pages of questions about my likes and dislikes!" the PFY sniffs. "What did you get for your Professional Development?"

"I've got 'Health and Safety – Identifying dangerous situations'. Apparently the Boss thought that I could pick up some pointers to reduce the number of IT-related workplace accidents. A two-week course!"

"TWO WEEKS Sounds like a nightmare," the PFY says. "Who's taking it – someone in-house?"

"No, no, it's a compliance thing so it's being taking by some external consultant from the industry. We get a certificate and everything."

"Ooooooooooh, a certificate," The PFY says sarcastically. "That'll be one for the glory box. You seem remarkably calm about two weeks of boredom."

"Because I've done the 'dealing with difficult people' course and know that sometimes it's better to embrace a challenge than hide from it. Anyway, I've already met the bloke – he was down in reception so I asked him to pop up and take a look around ..."

>Knock< >Knock<

"... And that'll be him now!"

"Morning," our H&S facilitator chips abruptly, stepping into Mission Control.

"Good to see you again!" I say. "This is my assistant, Stephen. Gosh, what are you – 5 foot 2, 3?"

"Five FOUR!"

"Five four, of course! Ooh look, is that a Macintosh laptop? My assistant loves those. Tell me – what are your feelings on remote con..."

>KZEERT!<

BOFH: Every silver lining has a cloud

Tout, tout, through and about, your callow life in dismay...

Posted in [BOFH](#), [13th May 2011 11:00 GMT](#)

Episode 5 "Code Magenta," the PFY mumbles quietly as he wanders past me on the way to Mission Control.

"Code Magenta!" the Director's PA repeats in hushed tones, unable to keep her nose out of things that don't concern her – "What does that mean?"

"It's a systems code about operational availability," I lie. "We have various codes depending on the potential impact of any situation on our service level agreements."

Which is a lie. We don't have systems codes or operational availability and the last person who tried to force us into a service level agreement is rumored to be very close to being able to touch a light switch without crapping himself.

"So what's Magenta mean?" the Director's PA asks, in the same hushed tones I'm sure she'll use to pass this on to the rest of the IQ-challenged crowd at lunchtime – in between salacious gossip about the royal family and this week's reality TV recap.

"Magenta means operational reversion standby," I say, cranking up the seemingly technical importance of Code Magenta without actually giving any useful information away. At this point operational reversion standby could mean I'm waiting outside the toilets to take a dump or I'm ready to press the power button on my desktop machine.

"Really!" she gasps. "Is that bad?"

"Bad's a relative term. Code Hot-Chilli-Red is worse, and Code Victim Orange is better – but all of them are worth looking into."

I could talk crap like this for days, but I'm not going to. We're at Code Magenta!

Code Magenta, as the PFY and I both know, is the code for hostile takeover. Not of the company, but of the IT services. In these days of Cloud Computing, SAAS, and mobile workspaces, the streets are littered with smooth-talking types in casually precise business clothes talking the words we all like to hear – simplicity, redundancy, and of course, lower cost.

The same people who used words like "synergy", "enterprise solution" and "Total Cost of Ownership" five years ago are still using words like that now, only this time they've added to their vocabulary with the catchphrases-de-jour of the cloud mentality.

Sure enough as my conversation with the PA dies a natural death from three-syllable word poisoning, two smooth-looking sales types rock on up to see the Director.

"Simon!" the Director gasps guiltily, noticing me outside for the first time. "How convenient. I was just going to listen to a presentation about some potential areas for savings in our IT budget and I thought you might like to sit in!"

Now sitting through a sales pitch from some clean-shaven charmer fresh out of MBA school is about as appealing to me as performing my own testicular surgery with a hole punch and a 100watt soldering iron, however I know the Director doesn't want me there, so right away I'm starting to warm to it.

"Fantastic!" I say, faking enthusiasm, and shaking hands all round.

Ten minutes later we're in the thick of it, and I'm hearing how data abstraction has never been so good and how RAID comes a poor second to clouded duplicated RAID spread out over the globe. The iPad2-rich media presentation has the desired "shiny bead" effect on the Director and by the end of it he's almost begging to sign up.

"We've already got that," I say to the Director, before he can whip his pen out. Well I assume it's a pen he's fumbling around furiously in his trouser pocket for.

"I ... thought all your data is in the server room," Smooth Guy 1 says.

"No, it's in our own Cloud," I ad-lib. "Well, when I say 'our own' I mean we signed up to a partnership agreement with several companies all over the Globe to each backup the other's services in a multi-homed data centre cloud," I reply, turning to the Director. "Surely I told you about that?"

"Uh – no..."

"Oh. Well I meant to. Yeah, we have a five-year contract with each other to make available a stack of virtual resource. We use freebie sync and schedule software to ensure redundancy amongst all the member partners and to our systems it just looks like it's hosted in the server room like a normal system."

"So your data is totally protected?" Smooth Guy 2 asks, too professional to cough "**bullshit**".

"Absolutely," I say smugly, knowing he can't prove me wrong.

"And your data sits?" he asks, trying to find a weak spot in my lies.

"All over the place," I lie. "I know we had some problems after the recent tsunami, so I can only assume that part of one datacenter was partially deployed in Japan but I'm fairly confident that

we'll be back to full 100 per cent redundancy once our local data is completely resynced and verified."

Smooth Guy 2's a little put out at my answer, which can only mean he was going to suggest we power-down the data centre to test our redundancy, but he knows that any outage would immediately be blamed on Fukushima.

"Well it looks like you're all covered, what with the global network and that 'contract' and all," Smooth Guy 1 says with just a dash of sarcasm. "Though I'd really like to see that contract – just out of professional interest."

"I don't see why not," The Director agrees.

"Sure," I say, dialling the PFY on hands-free.

"Systems," the PFY answers.

"Hey, it's me. Can you bring over a copy of that Global Cloud contract that we signed with those overseas companies to share each other's resources to create our own multihomed Cloud? You know the one with the freebie sync and schedule software?"

"I think it's in the document safe," the PFY lies. "I'll just dig it up."

"Yes, make sure it's the latest version – the one with the five-year term."

The next five minutes pass quietly. Well, relatively quietly. I thought I saw a black widow spider and leapt backwards – unfortunately landing right in the middle of an iPad screen – but it turned out to be a bit of dust. Ah well.

Badness you can get easily, in quantity

The Director's PA brings the document, passing on the PFY's apologies as he has some urgent work in the basement to attend to.

"Here we go," I say, handing over the document and twisting the knife a little. "You've got to hand it to those document safe people – this thing could have just been printed."

Moments later the sales guys are riding down in the lift with me.

"Well guys it was worth a crack, but don't take it too hard."

"No, we won't," Smooth Guy 1 says. "Though 10 quid says that you've got a bunch of old tin in the basement that's just crapped itself and that your assistant is trying to kick back into life before someone realizes."

"No, nothing like that at all."

"Perhaps we should just see," Smooth Guy 2 says, reaching over and pressing the "B2" button.

>ping<

"See. No systems down here," I say, gesturing. "Just my assistant."

>Kzzzzeert< >Kzert< >thud< >thud<

"My assistant and a stun gun to be more precise."

"Oh, sorry. It's my assistant, a stun gun, a hole punch and a 100 watt soldering iron. So I'll just grab that 10 quid you owe me and uh ... be off ..."

BOFH: Attack of the Global Corporate Overlords

Clash of cultures in Mission Control

Posted in [BOFH](#), [20th May 2011 11:00 GMT](#)

Episode 6 "There's going to be a takeover!" the PFY gasps, crashing into Mission Control.

"I thought you saw them off the premises," I reply, "although quite what you sawed off you never made clear. Thanks for that."

"No, the company – it's being taken over!"

"Really? Says who?"

"Says everyone. It's all over the building!"

Confirmation comes moments later when the Boss cruises into Mission Control with the news.

"It's the Americans!" he confirms.

"What, all of them?" the PFY asks.

"A large corporate. They're acquiring UK assets to diversify."

"Really?"

"Yes. All we've got to do is get through the due diligence process and we're sorted."

"'Sorted' meaning?"

"'Sorted' meaning we get all get pay rises!"

"Really?"

"Oh yes," The Boss gushes excitedly. "All IT roles are now part of their technical pay scale, which is about 20 per cent above our current scale!!!"

"Really?" I say. "And what about contractors?"

"Contractors rates remain the same – BUT – they also have a six monthly bonus based on performance – up to 20 per cent of the salary!"

"So we're looking at a possible rise as well?" the PFY asks.

"Yes! And an extra week of holiday, free technical subscriptions, at least one overseas training course every year and free social club and gym memberships!"

"Sounds too good to be true."

"If you think that's too good to be true wait for this!" he burbles. "The company sponsors two social events a year, is implementing break-out rooms, games rooms, enhance thinking areas, 24x7 pizza ordering, triple overtime and free lunches."

"It certainly sounds compelling!" The PFY says. "What's the catch?"

"There is none!!!!" the Boss chirps, even happier. "It's win-win for everyone. Obviously there's a few changes to be made to fit into their corporate profile, but they're minimal and won't really affect anything ..."

"Changes?" The PFY asks, before I can get in "What's this corporate profile?"

"It's the image that the Corporate presents to the world. I mean obviously they want to present the image of a mature and successful company to the world, and to do this they have some guidelines for staff appearance and behavior – but they're not all that restrictive."

"How not restrictive?"

"It's all covered in the staff handbook. And the staff website."

"The staff handbook?"

"Yes, you would have got one delivered last night?"

"That was the handbook!" I gasp "I thought they'd delivered the Greater London Yellow Pages!"

"I put mine in the shredder," the PFY confesses. "It broke it."

"Well I suggest you use the website then – it's very informative – it has videos and everything."

"Videos!" the PFY says, oozing sarcasm...

'Cock' is OK, 'Fat' is OK. 'Fat Cock', however ...

That afternoon the PFY and I look through the staff handbook and website.

"Ooh," the PFY says, leaning back on his chair as he peruses my copy of the handbook. "We have to carry our ID cards at all times, along with three cards with the company's core values and principles, a card with the health and safety coordinators of every floor, a card with the location of fire extinguishers and first aid kits in the buildings, a card with our medical information and contact people and a card for what to do in an emergency."

"An emergency like what to do if we get a hernia from carrying all the cards around for instance," I say. "We're all going to have to do online training – including a test – on workplace harassment ..."

"I've nailed that one already!" the PFY says.

"No, the training's on how it's not permitted."

"Ah."

"We also have to do one on corporate standards – i.e., how we communicate with our clients, how we talk to our co-workers, how to handle complaints against ourselves and co-workers."

"I'm guessing there's no cattle prod in the multichoice options."

"Nope. There's a module on client interaction and entertainment."

"Don't tell me, getting them trashed and pushing them into Soho with a fistful of fifties in their pocket is out?"

"Indeed. And there's a module on appropriate online behavior, proper use of workplace browsing and email as well as appropriate social networking commentary and the fine line between personal and company business. AND a list of words that can't be used, or used in conjunction with each other."

"Conjunction?"

"Yeah. So in theory the word 'cock' may come up in a conversation about chickens, and the word 'fat' might come up in a discussion about various client-server installations – but the words fat and cock would never be juxtaposed in a company conversation."

"Ah. Well that all sounds pretty depressing," the PFY says.

"I agree that at first glance we're selling ourselves up the river to a soulless corporate who probably regards its people in much the same light as *The Matrix* did, but on the upside you're looking at a 20 per cent bonus and a stack of other benefits which really do tend to weigh down in favor of the merger."

"So you're saying we go for it?"

"Indeed I am – 20 per cent more dosh and 0 per cent more work sounds like a bargain! Throw in all the meals and travel and it's a no brainer."

"Ok, where do I sign?!"

"You don't. We just schedule a videoconference with their team and they'll step through the due diligence of our systems and networks prior to rubberstamping the technical infrastructure and passing it up the chain."

Time to break out the rubber chicken

"No time like the present!" the PFY says, firing up the VC unit.

"So, are we all here?" the geek from corporate asks, once everyone's spent about 10 minutes introducing themselves to each other and making small talk.

"Yes we are," I say. "All sorted. So what do you want to know?"

"Right, well, if you can login to our corporate portal sketchpad we'll just get you to scratch out the rough outline of your systems."

"Sure," I say. "What's the address?"

He passes me the address and I bash it in, only to get nothing.

"It's telling me access denied."

"Oh, that'll just be a reverse DNS thing – just turn off your website blocking."

"We don't have any website blocking!"

Website Blocking?

"Oh, well don't worry, we'll sort that out once you're on our thin clients."

Thin Clients?

"Thin clients? You know we're administrators?"

"Yes, yes, of course. Although we'll be moving you to our cloud while we merge systems you'll still have complete control – via the portal configurator – to increase and decrease the virtual server parameters as required."

merg ... port ..?

"Yes, complete control," the PFY echoes in slight state of shock.

"I can shoot you off an email with the link if you want," another geek says. "You can log into the demo configurator and play to your heart's content. What's your address? Just a minute though, I'll just fire up Lotus Notes."

Lotus fucking Notes!!!

Around this time I notice that the PFY's facial tic has moved into overdrive and his eye is probably signaling: "Kill 'em! Kill 'em all!" in Morse code.

And less than an hour later everything's back to normal and the PFY and I are back to work while the company has slumped into depression.

"Was it something I said?" the PFY asks.

"It could have been. It may have been the FatCock software you said we'd designed for our many clients, it may have been my recounting the number of times we'd been sued for personal injury in the past couple of years, the hint that our systems could fall over at any time and leave us liable for both consequential and exemplary damages far in excess of the value of the company, or it could be just you flashing that rubber chicken out your flies at opportune moments – we may never know."

"So we've lost our 20 per cent bonus?" he asks sadly.

"It looks like. Still, if it's important to you I'll switch the UPS off remotely several weekends in a row until the overtime's cranked up enough."

"Ah, the silver lining ..."

"Is often the chiller bag they choke you with ..."

BOFH: Ready for the Judgment Day

You're wrong, proton breath. I'll be done with you in time to watch *Oprah*!

Posted in [BOFH](#), [3rd June 2011 11:05 GMT](#)

Episode 7 "THREE HUNDRED AND SIXTY DEGREE FEEDBACK!" the PFY gasps "SOUNDS FANTASTIC!!!"

"Really?" the Boss says doubtfully... "Somehow I thought that you wouldn't be all that keen."

"Au contraire," the PFY responds. "We here and Systems and Networks are only too keen to know the thoughts and feelings of our clientele. We hope to match every negative with an equally sized positive."

The PFY neglects to mention at this point that the negative and positive experiences he's talking about are those generally associated with an Alternating Current, and more specifically the high frequency & voltage output of a cattle prod – but I'm sure the Boss doesn't need to know all of our customer interaction secrets.

"Good," the Boss says. "We're hoping to gauge feedback on everyone in the company – FROM everyone in the company. Then we'll supply you with the outcome of the survey so that you can see yourself as the rest of the company sees you."

"Yes, but it should be noted that these things are fraught with inaccuracies" I say, motioning to a helldesk geek passing by. "Take this person for instance."

"David," David says quietly

"Sure, David," I say. "Now David, what are your general thoughts and feelings about the service you get from IT support? Just off the top of your head. Pretend that this is a completely anonymous survey and that your Boss – the person who pays your salary and approves your pay rises – isn't listening. What do you think of the IT middle management?"

"They're... OK." David mumbles.

"And what could he do better?" the PFY asks.

"I... don't know. I can't think of anything offhand."

"Which is where the system falls down," I say to the Boss. "The Heisenberg theory of surveys – the act of surveying is bound to be affected by the fear of survey observation and payback."

"The survey will be anonymous," the Boss counters.

"Of course it will. Hands up who believes that?"

No one moves.

"I rest my case. In these days of cookies, digital signatures and digital presence no one believes that anything's truly anonymous! You'll fill out a feedback form saying the head of security is an alcoholic time waster with a penchant for hanging around in the Men's toilets and the next thing you know your access card doesn't work, your car's been broken into and there's a steaming turd in your glove box."

"It's anonymous – there'll be no way anyone can find out who said what!"

"Yuh-huh. Like no one could possibly know who charged an advance copy of Duke Nukem to my company credit card," I say, looking at the PFY, "or who voted in favour of charging contracting staff 500 quid a year for car parks," I add, looking at the Boss, "or who mumbled about psychopathic systems administrators on the phone to his mother at lunchtime." David blushes.

"It's going through a third-party site and it's over an ssl encrypted tunnel," the Boss says, repeating the complicated words he's heard like magic charms. "They're not going to pass on any identifying information. There's no way anyone will be targeted as a result of this survey."

My name is URL

"Yes, but with URL authentication, IP Address recording, presence information, and time-stamping they'll know..."

"I'm sure we'll get the survey to be truly anonymous with no tracking information at all," the Boss says

"So what do you think, David – would you trust that system?"

"I suppose so." David says thoughtfully.

"Which is where the system falls down," I say.

"I thought you said the system falls down through lack of anonymity."

"It falls down several times. It's not too unlike a young person leaving the warmth of a late night entertainment establishment after several hours of unaccustomed drinking. It stumbles, it falls, it gets up, pukes in a dustbin, falls again, hails a cab, pukes one more time, the cab drives off, another puke, a fall, a retch, a couple more retches, a crawl to a late night convenience store for a drink of water, the ringing of Mum for a ride home, the tractor beam-like pull of the kebab shop, another fall, the arrival of mum, the kebab laden puke in the car, a few tears mixed with recrimination, the arrival home, the fall down the stairs and finally the rest of a warm bed. And

another puke." I say. "I've seen it dozens of times. This latest fall though, is because the users are too stupid to be allowed to have opinions."

"Hey!" David says.

"No offence," the PFY chips in, "but please! The moment you click 'submit' the POST operation is logged in our proxy and we have a timestamp on when you posted your submission. By simply looking at the aggregated feedback results we'll be able to work out by simple mathematics what your post entailed. And of course your free format comments would be immediately noticeable."

"We could flash an image of you on the desktop of the person you commented about" I say, just spitballing, "with a little speech balloon saying how crap you thought they were."

"But what if I didn't say they were crap?"

"This is an anonymous survey so of course you'll say they're crap. And besides, it's going through our proxy, so you'll be saying they're crap one way or another."

"But it's SSL encoded!"

"Yeah, we recompiled your browsers ages ago. They don't use ssl like they should. The PROXY uses ssl instead."

"But..."

"I know what you're thinking," the PFY says "You're thinking that maybe the survey won't be that anonymous after all. You're thinking you should be careful what you type in future. You're wondering if we kept that stuff you typed into that 'anonymous' chat site. We did. I have no idea what stuff or what chat site, but we'll have it."

"We could post it on people's desktops – with an image of you and a speech balloon..." I add

"I... so this is blackmail?"

"No, no, of course not. Your anonymous feedback about how good we are is up to you – after all it's anonymous. We like things to be anonymous, and positive."

"Although positive and negatives are good too," the PFY chips in.

"Anyway, if you just keep your comments positive I'm pretty sure there'll be no negatives. Tell your friends."

And the rest is history – and we all know by whom history is written.

The Proxy...

BOFH: CSI Haxploitation Cube Farm Apocalypse

The new nanovector viruses hide in the parity handshaking

Posted in [BOFH](#), [17th June 2011 11:09 GMT](#)

Episode 8 “Can you just come here for a moment?” Ray - the brand spanking new Boss with the IQ of a pot plant - asks, ducking into Mission Control.

The PFY and I follow – after all it’s a Friday morning and there’s an hour or so till the pub opens for lunch.

“Can you tell me what happened here?” Ray asks, once he’s led us to the ghostly quiet cube farm of the Bean Counters.

“Ah,” I say. “The Marie Celeste. Beancounter colony collapse disorder. They’ve taken to the window ledges for the good of the hive!”

“No, no, they’re all off at a team building course,” the Boss says. “Which is fortuitous, as all their machines appear to be broken.”

“How can you tell?” I ask.

“The broken pieces of computer laying all over the floor...”

“And you think we’re responsible for this?” I ask.

“The evidence does appear to point that way.”

“Evidence? What evidence?”

“The forensic evidence.”

“Ah. Who told you?”

“Told me what?”

“That the PFY and I were consultants on *CSI IT*?”

“*CSI IT*?” the Boss asks, stopping.

“Yes, a short-lived spin-off of the type of show where the case is broken when the lead technician finds the tell-tale signs of a gnat’s fart on a slice of bread. We later find that the gnat in question only lives in a certain house in a certain street in a certain city and that the composition of the fart indicates it sampled the vindaloo cooked by the suspect only moments prior to the murder.”

“No, I didn’t know that. But it was short-lived, you say?”

“Yes, I think things started going downhill when my assistant pointed out that no one in the audience was retarded enough to believe that even the best image enhancing software could pull the license plate of a vehicle 27 blocks away from the reflection in a shop window caught by a 640 by 480 CCTV image in an off-license.”

“Or that every hacker in the world had a secret way of translating email address to home address,” the PFY adds.

“Or that you can copy the entire contents of a 1 Terabyte hard drive to a USB stick with 2GB stamped prominently on the side in 14 seconds.”

“And they cancelled the show?”

“Yes, but if you like we can use our television script based IT skills to determine who damaged these computers?”

“Well... yes, if you think it will work?” the Boss burbles.

“You bet. We’ll have it sorted inside the hour. Or 16 minutes if we don’t stop for adverts.”

“So you want me to run up a GUI interface using visual basic to track the killer’s IP Address?” the PFY asks.

“Yes do that – although we already know the first number in the address is 324 dot something.”

“Ah, so it’s from downtown,” the PFY nods knowingly.

“You could get all that from an IP address?” the Boss says.

“Oh yeah. If we’d had the second number we could have twittered the blog and found out what floor they were on by reverse polarizing the bit pattern,” I say, shaking my head sadly. “But it looks like we’ll have to do it the slow way.”

“What?” the PFY asks. “You mean we’re going to have to...”

“Yes” I say. “Low-level format the BIOS to update the surface computing then find the timestamp from the IRC!”

“But won’t that mean that they could reverse-hack the router and feedback our access matrix into the algorithm!?”

“That’s just a risk we’d have to take!” I say, tapping away on my cell phone. “Right, I’m jacked into the web!”

“What do you mean, risk?” the Boss asks nervously.

“If they reverse-hack the router while he’s jacked in and feedback the access matrix it’s only a matter of time before they could corrupt the vector of the database algorithm – and we’d be powerless to stop it!”

“Couldn’t you just unplug the network from the wall?” the Boss suggests. “Or turn the power off?”

The PFY and I look on in disgust, shaking our heads

“Once they’ve hacked the matrix...”

“Reverse-hacked the router,” the PFY corrects.

“Yes, the router matrix.”

“The access matrix,” the PFY mumbles.

“Yes, well, once they’ve done that it doesn’t matter what you do – you could unplug the machine from the wall and pull out the power supplies – but the program will keep running.”

“Yes,” the PFY says. “And if it’s still running it would spread throughout the whole building in a geographically sequential manner, room by room, floor by floor...”

“And there’s no way to stop it?”

“The only way to stop it is to find the machines with the orange network warning lamp flashing and destroy them before they can pass the virus on at orange baud – which is what I think happened here.” I say

“You mean...” the PFY says.

“Yes, someone jacked into the net already - then, when they realized what they did, tried to stop the spread of infection.”

“So did they manage to stop it?”

“We may never know,” I shrug. “The new nanovector viruses hide themselves in the parity handshaking. The only time they ever show up is in the orange network warning lamps. But I suppose we should check. I’ll take the floor below us, Ray, you take this floor and Stephen you take the floor above us. If you find a machine with the orange network warning lamp flashing, yank it off the desk and smash it on the floor – THEN MOVE ON. We don’t have time to explain. Once the access matrix has been double hacked we’ve only got seconds before the 32bit Ramdrive is digitally streamed to the mainframe!”

Ten minutes later...

“Completely bananas,” I say to Security, as they drag Ray away. “He just went nuts, said something crazy about personal privacy and then started smashing the place up.”

“Blog me!” the PFY adds sadly, shaking his head.

And...

One minute later...

“Two pints of your finest and a couple of bags of salt and vinegar crisps,” the PFY says.

And we didn’t even stop for an ad break...

BOFH: Drunken Time Lord

Glass lift, laxatives, untraceable banknotes ... oh my

Posted in [BOFH](#), [1st July 2011 10:38 GMT](#)

Episode 9 "It's only 1:30pm!" the PFY grumbles, looking up from his cell phone clock.

"I know," I say. "It's that variable viscosity of time again."

"The what now?" the PFY asks

"The variable viscosity of time. You know, how the viscosity of time is inversely proportional to what you'd like the viscosity to be."

"You've lost me."

"Okay," I sigh, opening an Excel chart. "Here, on a Monday morning, when there's lots of interesting stuff happening, time flows reasonably well. Friday afternoons however, time flows like road tar on a cold morning."

"What's that then?" the PFY asks, pointing at another section of the graph.

"Ah, that was Wednesday evening."

"And?"

"And I was having a couple of drinks with that nice woman from the inkjet company."

"And time flowed..."

"Like water out a fire hose."

"I take it she didn't know that we don't have any inkjet printers at that stage?"

"Correct. You can see the rapid incline of the graph at >this< point when she found out. A section I like to call 'the long walk home'."

"And yet it's still wasn't as bad as Friday afternoons?"

"Yes, well-spotted. It seems that alcohol reduces the viscosity of time."

"So time flows faster when you're drinking?"

"Exactly. So while in real time the walk home took three hours plus kebab stops, to my mind it was five minutes and someone stuffed a kebab wrapper in my letterbox."

"So it really does speed things up?"

"It does. I checked today by spending lunchtime at the pub. Eight minutes."

"You were gone for two hours!"

"I know!"

"So were you at a pub in the morning about five weeks back?"

"No, why?"

"The graph says you were!"

"No, the graph says that time was flowing fast."

"And the difference is?"

"The difference is that was the time I was using my wireless mouse on the Boss' machine to quit without saving every time he tried to send an email."

"I see. And... two mornings ago?"

"That was when the Boss was trapped in the glass-walled lift of the atrium after unknowingly consuming several pieces of laxative chocolate."

"So time was moving slowly for him?"

"Exactly. And this is the interesting thing – and where I think my thesis will shine out – in 'The general theory of relativity of the viscosity of time'."

"?"

"The viscosity of time is relative to each person. Much like Einstein's work, an observer sees time flow differently than perhaps the subject being observed."

"Ah – so while for the Boss, trapped in the elevator, time was travelling excruciatingly slowly, for you..."

"...watching the Boss crap his strides rather than be seen dropping a grogan in a glass-wall lift, it was all over too soon. Which leads me to believe that the viscosity of time is affected by several things: Alcohol, Romance, the presence of large sums in untraceable five-pound notes and witnessing the misfortune of someone who truly deserves it – especially someone who has crossed you in the recent past."

"Really?" the PFY says dubiously...

"Really. And to prove it I've organized a very simple demonstration."

"Uh-oh."

"No, this doesn't involve you. Well, not as the subject anyway. I have here a suitcase full of unmarked five-pound notes, a table reserved at the pub and a get-to-know-you drink or 10 organized with the new women from the bookshop across the road."

"How's that relative?"

"You'll have to wait till we get to the pub..."

Half an hour, three pints and the arrival of our guests later...

"And how's it relative?" the PFY asks.

"Right. This >twiddle< is the receiver for a remote camera generally strapped to the underside of a model aeroplane to tape flights. This camera, however, is taped to the front of the Boss's rear-view mirror. Now watch very carefully as I trigger the swapping of the digital inputs of his accelerator and brake pedals..."

>click<

"Nothing happened," The PFY says.

"And yet the pub is empty, it's dark outside, our dates and money are gone and it's 12:15am."

"Incredible!"

"I know."

"And you can't slow it down any?"

"Not exactly. I have been experimenting with operating systems."

"Operating systems?"

"Yes, Windows ME and Vista mainly."

"And they slow time down?"

"Well, time certainly seems slower."

"So you could install Vista on your workplace machine and it would cancel out the effects of time speeding up when you're enjoying yourself?"

"Except that you would no longer be enjoying yourself..."

"So time would slow down even more than if it were normal time. OS/2?"

"Yes – Remember the last episode of *Sapphire and Steel* where they're trapped in the box in the middle of space... That would be an OS/2 user – where every day is like the last and every little thing we tried to do would take a millennium."

"Wow, you could do that to someone?"

"Yes, like the bloke from Security who wheel-clamped me this morning who had an Operating System 'upgrade' this morning. Now before I switch to camera 2 remember that, with the relativity of the viscosity of time the victim would experience time flowing slowly, but to us, the observer, it would travel extremely fast."

"So the first thing we knew..."

"The terminators would be stalking humans, yes."

"But still, they're computers and we could reason with them..."

"Yes, I suppose you're right, it's worth a crack."

>Click<

BOFH vs PFY: There can be only one (on the exes chit)

'Do you get the headaches? I get such bad headaches'

Posted in [BOFH](#), [15th July 2011 10:30 GMT](#)

Episode 10 So the Boss has a bit of funding that he doesn't know what to do with.

Okay, the Boss *always* has funding he doesn't know/understand what to do with, but this time it's different. The company has decided to allocate out "Professional Development" funds to key areas of the business to permit a staff member to receive advanced training – with a view to the company becoming a leading edge 21st century business.

>yawn<

Ordinarily the prospect of free training has about the same enthusiasm attached to it as the 13th pint at the end of a long night; however my careful reading of the proposal has uncovered some fine print indicating that the funding is approved to cover not only the training but also *all* incidental expenses.

A fact the PFY mustn't find out about as it might trigger interoffice rivalry given the *Highlander* nature of the Development fund.

A fact the PFY does find out about, triggering interoffice rivalry once the "can be only one" nature of the fund is determined.

Bugger.

So now the PFY and myself are pitted against each other in a battle of wills – and I can see all the top-flight meals and accommodation, room service and "study aids" disappearing from view should I fail.

I cannot have my incidentals stolen by the PFY in the bid to develop my professionalism by "Divining the working habits of highly successful IT Professionals" – a two-week tour of IT workplaces, with nightly networking.

Id est: two solid weeks of drinking.

Of course, threatening the Boss might work in getting him to see things my way, but if carried too far, the Boss will be in no state to approve the expenditure by the 21st – the purely arbitrary date set by the company. So it's softly-softly approach for now.

"Just thought I'd drop you off your cup of tea," I say to the Boss, popping into his office, exuding subservience from every pore.

"Got one," he says, indicating the tea and two choccy biccies at his elbow. "Your assistant was here before you."

"Of course he was!" I respond, not breaking my mental stride. "I'd asked him to drop it off but then I remembered that he tops off any spillage with saliva, so I thought I'd bring you a fresh one."

"I. Ah... Yes well, fresh is probably better," he nods.

"And I see you've got new monitors?"

"Yes, your assistant bought them in a few moments ago. He said he'd got them for me yesterday."

"Did he?" I say, recognizing the monitors in question as the new 30inch ultraclean monitors that actually *did* arrive yesterday and were, the last time I saw, attached to my desktop machine. "So what did you do to upset him?"

"Upset him?"

"Yeah. I mean for him to put them in your office. Did you.. I dunno.. steal something of his? A carpark, his lunch, the new girl in promotions and advertising?"

"I... No. But why would giving me new monitors mean that?"

"Well they're the recalls, aren't they?" I say, wandering over the Boss's desk, moving the teacups aside and tapping on the front of the monitor carefully. "Hear that?"

"They're recalls?"

"Yeah, you know, the ones that use depleted uranium pins – for strength. There was a whole documentary about it last week."

"Really?"

"Yeah. About how the US dumps nuclear waste into Tank-Buster shells to expend on countries that don't let them steal all their assets. So they can steal all their assets. Anyway now that avenue is running out they're using the waste to make super-hard components for various appliances – your monitor included. We tried the monitors for a while but it didn't work out."

"Why?"

"The headaches. Do you get the headaches?"

"What headaches?"

"I get such bad headaches. You know, at night when you're driving a car? I don't know, something to do with the headlights."

"I..."

"He didn't try and give you a chair did he?"

"No, why?"

"Some of the chairs we got last week were found to have a depleted uranium rod in the pneumatic plunger instead of the normal stainless steel kind – chucking about a kilotoken of radbars per cubit – not at all safe – although saying that they have remarkable results with prostate cancer. There's about 10 of them in the basement, safely behind a few inches of concrete until we can get the hazardous materials people in."

"I..."

Our talk is interrupted by the PFY's arrival – with a new chair.

MY new chair, as it happens, with the plastic I removed this morning reinstalled on it.

I take a few strategic steps back to add cred to the "radiation threat" idea, while the PFY blunders on oblivious.

"You probably don't want to sit on that," I caution the Boss.

"Why not? There's nothing wrong with it!" the PFY snaps back.

"No, no, of course there's not," I say, nodding meaningfully at the Boss. "Just like there's nothing in your cup of tea but tea."

"There's not!" the PFY says grabbing the cup of tea he made for the Boss and chucking it down.

A few short minutes of argument later and the experimental super strength diuretic in the cup of tea (which must have accidentally got shuffled onto the choccy biccy plate during the monitor tapping incident) takes effect.

Oh, if only in my haste to help the PFY in his hour of need I hadn't snapped the door handle off the inside of the boss's office...

Still, the PFY will have two weeks to shampoo the carpets while I investigate the professionalism of others. Perhaps I'll bring him back some souvenir coasters.

"Uhhhhh, that one, about eight months or so," Steve from Stores says. "We rung someone to come and collect it, but they must have forgotten. I tried again a couple of months later but the number was disconnected."

"Take a quick gander inside the box will you?" I ask, motioning the PFY over.

"Sawdust and woodchip?" the Boss says.

"Correct. And more dust inside the box than out – implying that whatever was IN the box has cut its way OUT."

"That's ridiculous! No one could survive for eight months in a tiny crate!"

"Yes, you'll notice I used the word someTHING, not someONE."

"Uh-oh," The PFY says, quietly reaching for Steve's unpacking hammer.

"Uh-oh, what?" Steve and the Boss blurt in unison.

"Aaaaaah-Nothing," the PFY says. "I think I left the iron on at home. But you're right, it must have been a break-in ..."

"How bad is it do you think?" the PFY asks as we ride the lift back to Mission Control.

"It depends. If it's just a sleeper bot programmed to murder us all in our sleep in the office, it's bad. If it's a sleeper bot with complete updates of our previous defense strategies programmed to murder us all in our sleep in the office, then it's a little bit worse. But at least we know one thing ..."

>PING<

"What's that then?"

"It's already in the office," I say, pointing at the large hole in our wall, "and hasn't attacked yet."

"So it's waiting for something?"

"Or someone. After you ..."

Six hours later ...

"It's the waiting that gets to you," the PFY says, with that hunted look problem-users often get when the lift stops working.

"I know," I concur. "I've looked everywhere and haven't seen a thing. It must have let itself out."

... Two days later ...

"Still nothing?" the PFY asks.

"No."

"What do you think it's waiting for?"

Suspicious stain on the seat discourages occupancy

"The trigger? Who knows. We know it can hear and see, but I suspect it's a combination of voice recognition and a timer. So it'll activate on our voices after it thinks we've been lulled into a false sense of security ..."

"Yes, but where is it???"

"I'm beginning to think it's in disguise. You know – made to look like something else. Something that belongs in our office."

"So it could be ... anything?"

"Anything less than the size of a half-rack – and probably something new in the office ..."

... Half an hour later ...

"WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING!?" the Boss shouts, bursting into Mission Control in a fury.

"What do you mean?"

"Why the hell did you put an axe into the new water cooler?"

"Oh, sorry about that," the PFY says. "I was just showing Simon my backhand when the axe slipped."

"What, and he was correcting it when HE put an axe into my new wheelie drawers?"

"No, no, I'd removed the axe from the water cooler but the handle was a bit wet and quite slippery and I dropped it."

"TWICE?"

"Three times actually – I'm a bit of a butterfingers."

"And that would explain the document shredder too?"

"Uh, no, that was my assistant. He didn't realize how slippery the handle was."

"The potplants?"

"Ah well, that was a simple misunderstanding. My assistant was just doing his bit for Global warming."

"How would that stop Global Warming?"

"Oh, are we supposed to be STOPPING Global Warming? Well, it appears we got the complete wrong end of the stick on that one. A nice stick too – used to be a potplant."

... And so it goes. I think the low point came when the PFY claimed he set fire to the Boss's new armchair because he was protesting against animal cruelty, but in the end we managed to placate him by assuring him that he wouldn't come in on Monday to find the place still in disarray. Obviously the second half of that sentence was completely redundant.

Twenty minutes after he's left Mission Control, I change his password and remote restart his desktop. Five minutes after that he's back.

"Oh yes, it's a routine password security feature we activated a couple of days ago," The PFY explains. "If you ignore the 14-days-to-set-your-password warning, it sets it to one of the list of 100 random words."

"Can't you change it back?"

"System security doesn't permit 2 Administrator-made changes in a day – to stop administrators changing your password hacking into your mail then changing it back," the PFY lies.

"Oh, I see. Well what are the words?"

"I think I have them on my Dictaphone," he replies

"What, you don't have a list of them?"

"No, they're in the computer – I read them out off the screen onto the Dictaphone in case I ever got trapped by it and couldn't login to view them."

"Oh ... I ... see. Can I borrow the Dictaphone then?"

"Sure."

And the rest is history.

Who could have known the successful trigger was Friday Afternoon and the word "LAGER" in the PFY's voice?

Target Acquired ...

Who could have known a hitherto insignificant wheelie chair (with a suspicious stain on the seat to discourage occupancy) could sprout a small saw where the backrest used to be?

Who could have known the PFY was waiting behind the Boss's door with an Axe?

**Camera Fault. >crash!< Mic Fault. SERVO 1 OFFLINE. >crash< SERVO 2 OFFLINE.
EXCESSIVE BATTERY DEPLETI... >CRASH<**

BOFH: Beer, shinies, death by fire, rats IN THAT ORDER

Nonsense, I have not yet begun to defile myself ...

Posted in [BOFH](#), [19th August 2011 10:31 GMT](#)

Episode 12 Not much surprises me about middle management any more, least of all their inability to prioritize.

I mean the core router could have crapped itself, the HR & Financials databases might be offline a day before pay day and the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse could be in the freight elevator pressing "2" yet some "compliance coordinator" from Beancounter central will still want you to stop everything and tell him how to get his background image in the correct aspect ratio so that his wife doesn't look like an extra from *Lord of the Rings*. (Pointing out that technology can only do so much doesn't help the situation.)

And so it is that the PFY is helping the Boss with his videoconference call – which of course isn't working because the firewall has dropped a smoking fat one.

Admittedly the firewall outage is completely my fault. I foolishly assumed that the latest bugfix firmware from a leading network manufacturer was actually a bugfix and not a bug *install* – and that the management software which was released with it was actually compatible with the firmware. My mistake!

As it happens the Boss's problem ended up being nothing to do with the firewall outage after all, but a fault with his machine. To the casual observer it might have seemed that he'd simply forgotten to plug his cheapie USB camera into the USB socket, but the PFY assured me that there was definitely a fault with the machine. A fault so bad that it actually damaged the Boss's screen. And his wheelie chair. And stole the cash from his wallet – which was left carelessly on the desk just asking for a hardware error.

Ten minutes of feverish activity on the router serial console later (because if you're going to release some buggy firmware that disables the management software, you may as well go the whole way and stuff the SSH server as well), I'm back in Mission Control in time to catch the Boss attempting to swap his monitor with one of ours.

"Security bolts," I say, pointing to the large hunks of steel drilled through the monitor's plinth.

"But you've got three screens!" the Boss sniffs.

"Because we *need* three screens," I counter.

"Three screens minimum," the PFY adds, putting the spadework in for when we ask for four in a couple of months' time.

"Why would you possibly need three?" he whines.

"We have one each for network and server monitoring," I say, pointing at the multi-colored icons on the monitoring screen, "and two for general work."

"Surely you could work with two screens – they're big enough!"

Even I have to admit the Boss has a point. We do have three of the largest, most expensive panels on the market. If they'd been CRT screens I'd probably be suffering from radiation poisoning by now. But they're not – and I'm not, so it's win-win.

"He's not happy," I murmur to the PFY as the Boss leaves. "He'll be annoyed by the time he gets back ..."

"As annoyed as a Beancounter who has had his background picture changed to a still from *Planet of the Apes*?" the PFY asks.

"Yes, but not quite as annoyed as those Beancounters were when someone pepper-sprayed a sack of rats and tossed them into their Friday afternoon drinkies."

"Oh?" the PFY says. "When was that?"

"This afternoon."

"I ... You mean Friday ..."

"What, and lose the element of surprise?"

... One squeaky girly-screamfest afternoon tea later ...

"Oooh, now they're really angry!" the PFY coos happily, looking up from his screen as I rock back into Mission control and toss an empty can of pepper spray in the bin.

"Alright who did it?" the Boss snaps a few minutes later.

"Did what now?" the PFY asks casually.

"Threw some rats into the Financials office!"

"Rats? Financials Office?" I ask. "We've been trying to source you a new desktop monitor."

"With an inbuilt camera," the PFY adds.

Quicker than you can say "Look at the Shiny Shiny," the Boss has reprioritized the situation and is helping us look through an online catalogue of PC monitors.

"Shouldn't we be investigating this Beancounter thing?" I ask.

"No, no, I'm sure it'll sort itself out," the Boss counters without looking away from the PFY's screen. "Go back to that page with the one with stereo speakers."

"Isn't that the fire alarm?" the PFY asks, testing the theory a little further.

"No I'm sure it's not. Scroll down a bit."

"Oooh look. Free chips at the pub with every pint ordered."

"Well perhaps we could look at this on Monday," the Boss says, mincing to the door at 1.2 speed.

So it's sorted then. Chips, then new monitor, then possibly death by fire, then angry potentially plague-infested zombie Beancounters.

It's good to know where the priorities lie.

BOFH: I'll get my bonus even if it kills, well, someone

Goals, reviews ... unexpected tragedies

Posted in [BOFH, 16th September 2011 09:54 GMT](#)

Episode 13 "Okay, so we'll just work our way through last year's review and then move onto this year's one," the Boss says, fingering a couple of chunky wads of paper.

I hate review time. The only consolation I get from it is knowing that Bosses hate it as well. Everyone hates them - except for the drones from HR for whom this is probably justifies two staff EFTS alone.

"So. Agreed Goals," the Boss starts, leafing through last year's review, "Centralised Licensing Project."

"Yeah, I never did that."

"Why not?"

"Because of the review."

"What review?"

"I think you mean 'which review', not 'what'. So there was the review about standard remote workplaces that was supposed to talk about USB security and VPN access but actually talked about monitors and background images, the review of storage policy that wanted to know if we should use the cloud for storage or not, the review about network speed now that all our storage was in the cloud in some third world nation connected at blistering dialup speeds and which probably stores data in wooden platter hard drives because it's carbon neutral, the review about backup strategies and how wood mightn't have been as safe a media as we might have thought in a building fire, and finally the review about workplace safety in the light of the tragic accident that befell the man charged with starting the six former review processes. Then the conversation about the second tragic accident involving the reviewer working on the workplace safety review."

"So which one was this?"

"Was what?"

"The review that stopped you achieving this goal?"

"Oh, that. Technically it was half a review actually. So we started reviewing our licenses and as part of the review process the reviewer guy audited all our printed license media but tragically fell in front of a Circle line train in rush hour. Well, when I say fell I mean ..."

"... was pushed?"

"I mean we all said it was a tragic 'accident', but he'd been under a lot of pressure recently."

"I see."

"And to make things worse, he claimed to have proof that a lot of the licenses we'd bought had actually been sold on eBay and that the company was instead running on completely pirated licenses!!!"

"And what came of that?"

"Nothing. We gave him the license documents and I guess the ... shame ... of making such a ludicrous claim ... uh ... drove him over the edge. It really was very tragic, because the company was just about to appoint him as a full-time IT auditor. It just goes to show that you never can tell."

"So we didn't bother investigating the licenses any further?"

"No. Well there was no point - they were all lost in the accident."

"Lost?"

"Yeah, they were in his briefcase and blew everywhere. The PFY saw the whole thing."

"He saw the whole thing?"

"Yes, he was on his way home."

PFY crosses the line

"He lived the same way as the auditor?"

"Well there's the funny thing - he lives on a completely different line but got a bit confused with the escalators and things and ended up on the same platform. Which is how we know what happened."

"Okay, we'll just put that to one side for the moment. What about this project?"

"Which project?"

"Standardized install image."

"Yeah, I didn't do that either ..."

"The review process again?"

"No, this was more a timing thing."

"Not enough time?"

"Pretty much. I proposed an image which was a secure OS install, Office 2010, VPN Client for portables and Firefox or Explorer as a browser."

"And?"

"And people weren't happy with that, so we organized a meeting for them to come up with ideas for their standard image."

"And what did they come up with?"

"It's only been six months - it's too soon to tell. They'll probably never get back to me though. Asking a group of people to collectively agree on the best browser is just a black hole for time."

"I ... see. Well here's one - Incident Reporting System. What was that about?"

"Senior management wanted us to produce stats on the availability of our systems - outages, response times, usage levels, etc, so that they knew about significant incidents."

"And don't tell me - you didn't do that either?"

"No, we did that. We even did some statistics on the amount of use the statistics system got too. Zero per cent. No one looked at it - like we said they wouldn't. So it's effectively the same thing as not doing it."

"You realize that your bonus is contingent upon achieving at least 60 per cent of last year's goals and that to receive your full bonus you have to achieve more than 90 per cent?"

"Yes, but I have other goals. There was the project to create a device that sounds an alarm if the PFY happens to be on the same train platform as you - that's got to be worth 70 per cent all by itself."

"Hardly."

"Really? I'd think it'd be right up your alley - being in IT Management and all. You're a Central line man aren't you?"

"I ... see your point. Do you happen to have one with you?"

"I do. And for 20 extra per cent I can tune it to work near bus stations, unguarded pedestrian crossings and tube station escalators."

"I ... it's a deal, I guess."

"Okay - sign here and clip this to your belt."

. . .

"There's been a terrible accident!!!!" the PFY gasps.

"Stairwells. Of course," I murmur.

Still, something to add to next year's goals.

BOFH: No, the *Fabinocci* sequence

Joo Janta Peril Sensitive Windows™

Posted in [BOFH](#), [23rd September 2011 10:28 GMT](#)

Episode 14 "I'm just here to do the audit," a weedy bloke says, poking his head nervously into Mission Control.

"What audit?" the PFY says, reading my mind.

"The safety audit – surely they told you about it?"

"No, nothing," the PFY responds.

"Ah," the Weed says. "Well, I've got a checklist of all the accidents that have occurred in or around the IT rooms in the past year which we'd like to work through the causes of."

"Oh," the PFY says, "so nothing to do with the purchases we recently made from the Health and Safety cost centre?"

"What? No. So you're saying you spent some money improving safety?"

"We certainly did!" I gasp. "Let me show you!"

The Weed follows us in to the Server Room and I start pointing out the improvements we've made.

"Okay, so just follow me and walk where I walk!" I say.

>Crash!<

"Are you all right?" the PFY asks, helping the Weed up.

"I..." he stammered ...

"... didn't walk where I walked," I finish. "See, we realized that a lot of the near fatalities in this room are caused by people blundering in to areas that were potentially dangerous – so to prevent this we've installed trips in the raised floor. If you step in the wrong place the tile collapses, tripping you up – but keeping you from a greater danger!"

"But how do you know which tiles are..."

"Good and bad?" the PFY asks. "It's the Fabinocci sequence!"

"Ah! So the next one would be 1 as well – and then 2, which would mean **this** one ..."

>Crash!<

"Yeah, I think you're thinking of the Fibonacci sequence, which is something different altogether. We were talking about the distribution of pepperoni on a pizza at Fabinocci's across the road ..."

"So you mean it's random? But how do you know?"

"We don't – we just bring someone into the server room when we need to do something," the PFY says, three-finger-saluting the Linux box which has been playing up for a couple of days.

"Ah. Well, while we're here can we discuss the Halon system?"

"Sure," I say. "What would you like to know?"

"Firstly, why're you still using Halon?"

"Ah, right. The Halon system was in the building when we took it over, designed to flood both levels of the basement area. When the company found out how much it would cost to dispose of the Halon they realized that repurposing it for the server room would be vastly cheaper – as it wasn't technically a new installation. Then, when the Halon was all used up it would be replaced with a different system. See, it turns out that if Halon's discharged in response to an emergency there's no disposal fee or penalty – however if we just vented it to air ..."

"So ..."

"Having fire-based emergencies is the cheapest way to get rid of Halon, yes."

"I, uh..." he stammers, lost for words. "Moving on then. Sixteen incidents involving broken limbs – 12 of which occurred in stairwells."

"I put that down to panic," the PFY says. "People rushing to stairwells etc – and we recently did something to address that!"

"Really, what?"

"We fitted electrochromic glass in strategic positions in the office. The windows turn opaque during an ... incident – like so >click< – which, in combination with their multiple-glazed noise-deadening construction means that the staff don't witness things which might make them upset or fearful, resulting in a situation of calm. Panicked evacuations are now a thing of the past."

"I see," the Weed says, scratching down some notes. "What about electrocution – that seems to feature highly in your accident statistics."

"Poorly constructed access panels to the switchboards," The PFY says, stepping carefully over to the switchboard. "See the screws on the panels? They only need a ¼ of a turn and they pull out

of the cage nut in the back – exposing the bus bars. Often just the mechanical impact of someone touching them is enough to make them come loose."

"I..." the Weed says, shaking his head. "Nothing you've shown me today has made it seem as though your workplace is anything more than a deathtrap for the uninitiated. My hands are tied on this one: until this workplace is made safer it poses a clear and present danger to anyone working in it, and as such should be immediately shut do.. >crash<"

>clatter!<

>KZZZZZEEEEERTT!<

>HISSS!<

... Moments later, outside Mission Control...

"Well the good news is that we're one discharge nearer to replacing the Halon system!" the PFY says to the Boss.

"Really? Why's that?" the Boss says. "Hey – wasn't the server room viewing window CLEAR glass this morning?"

BOFH: Where's my free fondleslab?

No one ever died from buying a ... >KZERRT!<

Posted in [BOFH](#), [14th October 2011 11:16 GMT](#)

Episode 15 "Well it looks like the Company's doing well," the PFY says, handing over a glossy brochure.

"Really - how do you figure?" I ask, giving the Company's annual report the once over. "The bottom line looks pretty flat as far as I can see."

"I was just judging by the front cover - the limousine," the PFY says

"Oh that!" I say, turning to the cover in question to see a glossy image of the CEO stepping out of the front of the building and into a pristinely presented luxury vehicle. "That's just a bit of product placement."

"Say what now?" the PFY asks

"The CEO - he likes travelling by executive land canoe, but the company wants to curb spending on extravagances and has suggested that he find some less expensive form of transportation. He, in turn, has no doubt made some deal with the limousine company in an effort to get discounted travel by effectively advertising their services to everyone who'd receive the report."

"And that would work?"

"Of course it would - I mean who reads company reports?"

"Uh... no one?"

"Exactly, which means that the reports get shuffled out of offices and sit around on coffee tables in company foyers for years with the front cover showing - being seen by visitors, etc."

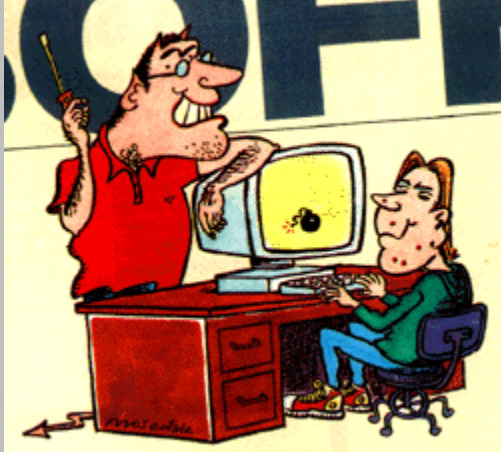
"Ah, I see - so it's a sneaky viral marketing campaign."

"Sort of. But true product placement has several tiers and this is only an example of Tier 1."

"Tiers?"

"Yes. Tier 1 is just an image of a product. Tier 2 is an actual mention of the name of the product, Tier 3 is a positive mention of the product, Tier 4 is a reciprocated positive mention of the product and Tier 5 is a complete sell-out bordering on infomercial."

"Really? And the Boss was only at Tier 1..."



"Absolutely. And the sad and pathetic thing is that he did it for something as trivial as a discount on a ride that the company's picking up the bill for - instead of placing a technical product in an effort to get a free one from the manufacturer." I respond, moving my iPad 2 into a drawer before the PFY can catch sight of it.

"Hey - where did you get that iPad 2?" the PFY asks.

"This?" I ask, holding the aforementioned pinnacle of design excellence up so that it gleams nicely in the fluorescent light.

"Yes. Where did you get it?" the PFY asks enviously. "It looks great!"

"It IS great!" I respond. "And it's so easy to use with its intuitive touch screen interface!"

"And I bet it has fantastic battery life too?" the PFY says, looking longingly at it – as most people do.

"The battery life IS pleasantly surprising!" I remark.

"But you know what I like?" the PFY asks.

"The 3G connectivity and 64 Gig of internal storage - or the dual core Apple A5 high performance low power processor?" I ask.

"No, I meant my new Alienware M18X!" the PFY says, pushing me out of the game slightly.

"Really?" I ask. "Is that the one with the i7 extreme processor and 18.4 inch display?"

"It is – and I think it's great!"

"I'm sure you do – it certainly does sound like extremely good value for gaming money!"

"Uh. I didn't mention the price," the PFY says, being new at this.

"And nor should you have to. I'm sure that the folks at Alienware - and Apple for that matter - have put vast amounts of work into giving us a superior product at an embarrassingly low price!" I say.

"Yes, yes, I'm sure they have. And who better to optimize products for consumer affordability and product excellence than them?" the PFY asks.

Our impartial analysis of current hardware offerings is interrupted by the arrival of the Boss from the position-of-lurk outside the door of Mission Control where he's been quietly observing us for the past several minutes.

"Hi guys!" he gushes, pulling a brochure from out of this briefcase. "I noticed in our budget planning for the coming months that you've put in a project to replace some of the virtual server platforms with newer gear and thought that this might be a good opportunity to look into getting some of our Intel hardware from an old and trusted supplier. Like they always say, no one ever got fired for buying >KZERRT!<"

"No" I say, slipping the blue brochure into the shredder, "but several people have been beaten mercilessly by their support staff."

Register management would like to point out that Mr Travaglia's daring new media revenue-generation doublethink experiment - that is, inserting product placements into a satire on product placement - has sadly proven to be a commercial failure in that we found ourselves unable to obtain any money from the companies involved. As a punishment, we have kept all the free iPads and Alienwares for ourselves and given him none.

BOFH: Hordes unleashed... by a RAM upgrade

Fault #45113: Company *Corrie* email list is down

Posted in [BOFH](#), [21st October 2011 10:14 GMT](#)

Episode 16 It's the same old story – you make some tiny change and before you know it they're oozing out of the woodwork.

You know who I'm talking about – the idiots.

They notice that your signature uses Garamond instead of Times Roman and before you know it they're on the phone wanting to know if there's a new corporate stationary template out there. Then they start wondering if the change to the font is affecting how quickly Word loads – because that uses fonts too, and it's been slow recently.

And actually, come to think of it they've noticed that there's a warning message when they start Scrabble – and maybe the problem's affecting letters as well as words.

Maybe it's a virus!!!

Maybe they should shut their machine down?!

Maybe they should shut everyone's machine down – to stop the virus spreading?!!

...

It's my own fault really – I should never have suggested memory upgrades. Actually it was the PFY's fault for pointing out that the desktops we were dumping had the same memory as half the desktops we were keeping and so if there were free slots on the keepers we may as well use them.

Once Pandora's Box is open though – and it IS open – the nightmare begins.

"I'm trying to send you email and it's saying that the address is unknown."

"You've got the wrong email address," the PFY reports, once he's ascertained it's an in-company address.

"No, it was working yesterday – before the upgrade," the user whines.

"Uh, we didn't upgrade your machine," the PFY says. "We only did the HR and Beancounters' machines."

"Yes, but I'm sending an email to HR!"

"Oh right, you're suggesting that a memory upgrade on their machine makes them disappear from Active Directory."

"Yes."

"Well, there's a slight chance," the PFY says, "and by a slight chance I mean about the same slight chance as there is of you being hit in the head by a moon rock after being run down by a dwarf on a tandem while crossing the street."

"So you don't think it's possible?"

"No. I think it's more probable that you're using the wrong address. Unless...."

"Unless?"

"I was just checking to make sure we hadn't applied the Service Pack that deletes users who change their hardware config."

"And had you?"

"No. Because there isn't one – I was making that up. Although it probably wouldn't be too hard to write."

"So what do I do?"

"Find out the right email address and use that."

"But I've used the address tons of times!"

"Did it appear in the list of suggested email addresses when you were typing it in?"

"I... yes."

"Did it really, or can't you remember?"

"It did."

"You realize we have mail logs and I can look at them and see what you emailed?"

"I'm pretty sure it did."

"So should I look at the email logs?" the PFY asks

"I... Yes!"

"So if I filter out the meaningless cruft of your email output I get... nothing. Hmm. Okay..."

"So if I just unfilter messages with *Coronation Street* as the subject I get about 50 messages to your user – plus one message this morning to the same username at a .com domain, not a .co.uk domain..."

"I..."

"Got the email address wrong – yes. It's ok, you're sorted now."

Approximately 1 minute later ...

>Ring<

"You've still got the wrong email address," the PFY says, before our user can speak, "because Outlook's added that incorrect email address to the list of addresses that it's going to suggest for you."

"I..."

Approximately 10 minutes later...

"I think there's something else wrong."

"Really, what is it?"

"When I ring the same person's extension the phone rings twice then goes to voicemail."

"They're on the phone."

"No – because if they're on the phone it just goes straight to voicemail, it doesn't ring twice first."

"So did you leave a message?"

"Yes."

"And they got the message? So really, with the exception of it ringing a couple of times first, it's actually working perfectly well?"

"Yes – but it's ringing twice."

"And this is caused by the RAM upgrade?" the PFY asks, not wanting to get involved in a half-hour discussion on the foibles of call forwarding, hunt groups, voicemail delays, etc.

"Well their phone is connected to their computer..."

"Yes, I see how that could be an issue," the PFY says, noting the increasing number of incoming calls popping up on the Mission Control hotline. "So you didn't happen to mention this problem to anyone did you?"

"Just a couple people on the company *Corrie* mailing list."

And this is where the PFY and I take diverging paths. For my part my mind is screaming, "The company has a f*cking *Corrie* street mailing list?!" whereas the PFY is speed dialing the tandem-riding dwarf with a lucrative job opportunity whilst reaching for the souvenir lunar debris...

"Have you tried ringing him from an external number? Like the pub across the road?"

BOFH: We don't need no stinkin' upgrade

Bloated, slow and leaky - what version numbers really mean

Posted in [BOFH](#), [4th November 2011 11:16 GMT](#)

Episode 17 "But I just want to go back to the way it was..." my user whines.

"What, when computers crashed every 10 minutes?"

"No, I..."

"Where the **Print** function acted more like the combination of the **Hang** and **Discard Changes** functions?"

"NO, I JUST WANT MY MENU BACK!"

"You mean you don't like the ribbon? It's new!"

"I don't care if it's new – I can't find anything!"

"Sure you can, it's all in the ribbon – somewhere. It's a game software designers like to play with people."

"A game?" he asks hesitantly.

"Yeah sure. Version 1 of a product they write a roughly functional product. Version 2, they fix all the glaring errors in Version 1. Version 3, they fix the glaring errors in Version 2 plus some of the less glaring errors in Version 1."

"And Version 4 they fix the glaring errors in Version 3 and the less glaring errors in 2 and 1, I understand," the user says.

"No! No, in Version 4 they start introducing new features – something they were already doing a bit in Version 3 and 2, but now they can hike the price up a bit because it's actually working as well as they said it would in Version 1".

"And Version 5 is new features as well?" he asks.

"Yep, loads of new features – and extra delays. Around Version 5 we start telling you about the minimum hardware spec you'll require to run our program because now it's like the winning contestant in a hotdog eating competition – bloated and slow, and a bit leaky."

"So Version 6 is faster?"

"Version 6 is a complete rewrite combined with a price hike. We tell you how many lines of code we wrote. It used to be in the hundreds of thousands but by now it's in the millions. We give the rewrite a justification banner like Edge-Aware or something else that means nothing. We might even tell you how many teams of people are working on it."

"You keep saying 'we' and not 'they'."

"Yes, I know I can't help myself; I'm getting carried away by the sheer balls of it!"

"So what happens in Version 7?"

"There is no Version 7 – not yet anyway. No, instead we'll release Versions 6.1, 6.2, then 6.7 (the numbering reflecting the 'vast amount of work' we've put into 'enhancing the edge- awareness of the product' or some other bullshit). We'll release 6.8 and then realize that we haven't actually got many revisions left before we **have** to change to 7, so we'll release a 6.81 a 6.83 mandatory service pack, a 6.834 services service pack, a pre-release 7 upgrade verification utility (which will just tell you that your machine isn't capable of running the new software with the current hardware)..."

"I.."



"WE WILL RELEASE VERSION 7, THE CULMINATION OF ALL THE LESSONS LEARNT, ANOTHER COMPLETE REWRITE, but it will run like that guy who won the hotdog eating competition – over a marathon – slow. And very leaky. We'll tell you it was your fault for not running the pre-release 7 upgrade verification utility."

"And then you'll release 7.1..."

"And then we'll release 7.3, skipping 7.1 and 7.2 which were never going to be released anyway, but we wanted it to look like we did a pantload of work while the early adopters suffered through 7. We'll discontinue support for everything except 6.95 and we'll tell people we're discontinuing support from that a week from next Friday. We'll do that in about October so that the V7 sales revenue stream pays for our Christmas holidays and bonuses."

"And then Version 8?"

"Yes, Version 8 will be hinted about in chatrooms. We'll tell people we've assembled some of the greatest minds – savants we will call them – in the fields of visionary computing. We will call them savants, but not idiot savants because that would be bad for our share price. Meanwhile we'll look up idiot savants on Google, see if any of them can count matchsticks quickly and see if we can employ them to think outside the box. We have no shame. (Obviously we'll apply for some tax rebate for hiring people with 'special abilities'.) We might have a press release about that too."

"And then you'll release Version 8."

"No, Version 8 will never be released, Version 9 will – but it won't be called Version 9, it will be called something sleek and cool like Rainfall. We will have paid a consultant a pantload of money for that name – far more than we paid the savants. Rainfall – its full name being 'Rainfall and the Desert Oasis, Millennium Onward Edition' – will be the penultimate release: it will change the way we do business – or at least that's what we tell people. We will have a launch party with lots of big names. We will tell people that we have already implemented beta releases of Rainfall on phones, tablets, UMPCs, car computers and GPS units. There's even a TV with Rainfall embedded in it, but we're calling that a 'Home Rainfall total immersion experience unit' now."

"VERSION 10 will have us stuffed. We can't add any more features to the product because the only feature left to add is the function that adds umlauts to every other character – a feature which is needed by no one and serves no purpose whatsoever, but one of the savants suggested it back in Version 7 but we shelved it after we found him eating carpet. No, Version 10 is going to be another one of those change-the-way-we-do-business releases where we make things harder to find but nicer to look at. And it'll cost more and come in 14 different Versions."

"And Version 11?"

"Once we've generated enough revenue off Version 10 we'll be able to pay for a name for Version 11. Fuck knows what it'll do."

"I'm not getting my menu bar back am I?"

"I dunno, I'll put you onto my assistant."

>bip< >bip< >bip< >bip<

"Hi!" The PFY gasps. "You're talking to Stephen, or, as we like to say, Version 2-point-uuuurgh..."

BOFH: Licence to grill ... stupid users

The phone rings. Ah, live bait!

Posted in [BOFH](#), [11th November 2011 11:33 GMT](#)

Episode 18

...

"Hello, You're speaking with Simon – or rather, Version 3.1 recurring"

"Sorry?" my user asks.

"Version 3.1 recurring. Speaking."

"Can't you just give me Office 2003 back?" he whines.

"Sorry, Office 2003 is ancient history – like calculator watches, white jeans for men and the expression 'snazzy'."

"Why?"

"It was superseded by 'cool' I suppose."

"No, I meant why is Office 2003 history?"

"Because there's a revenue stream to protect."

"A revenue stream?"

"Yeah, you know, give a man a fish and he's fed for a day, sell a man a fishing rod and he's fed for a week – till you release fishing rod 2.0 which doesn't snap with fish heavier than a pound, then he's fed for another week – till you release fishing rod 3.0, which doesn't snap on fish heavier than 1.25 pounds, and he's fed for another week, and so on. You keep paying."

"But in the end you'll run out of versions."

"Weren't you listening earlier? We'll never run out of versions! Version 4 has what we'll call 'lightning wire' technology to make it reel faster or some other crap. All designed by the savant team who studied penguin fish catching techniques in between treatments."

"But penguins don't use f..."

"Version 5 will come with a nanite-structure filament or some other bollocks which won't work on older rods – although we'll sell you a compatibility winder that will almost work – so long as you don't want to reel fish in after you catch them. And we just keep doing that until you start to

realize that rod version 3 would probably have been OK for the fishing you want to do, instead of paying for the enhancements to rod features that you've never used."

"I don't think..."

"Okay, How many times have you created a table of contents?"

"I..."

"I'll give you the benefit of the doubt and say twice. A bibliography or cross-reference – outside of when you were at university?"

"I..."

"Never, though you've heard of people who do. If I suggested the vast percentage of your Word experience would be typing, spelling & grammar checking and the occasional Styles and Formatting attempt that you end up regretting, would I be wrong?"

"..."

"I didn't think so. And so you'll realize that you don't want to upgrade to the latest rod because this one catches fish just fine."

"I..."

"But what you don't know is that we've designed new fish which won't work with the old rods – though we know that even these changes won't work forever, so we start implying that we never sold you the rod in the first place – we just leased it to you."

"I..."

"And then we realize that a rod is actually a bunch of components: a rod, a reel, line, hooks, swivels, etc – so we hint that your rod is the base rental and that all that other stuff was just add-ons. VERSION 9 clarifies all this and that you can lease the additional features if you want, otherwise we want the rod back and you'll have to use openrod, which is only really used by hippies, small children and mental patients."

"But that's extortion!"

"If by extortion you mean the world of licensing, then yes. A base rod license will permit you to fish without reel, line, sinkers etc. On dry land, into dirt. You can buy the equipment add-ons, the streams and rivers add-on, the salt water add-on which, if purchased with the streams and rivers add-on permits you to fish from land into the sea, but not from on a boat into the sea – because that requires the open water license add-on."

"Why would I buy a salt water license by itself then?"

"Because you might want to fill your tub with salt water and fish in it. We don't know why you'd want to, but we're sure people do that, and this permits them to do so. Oh, and fishing is a trademark of ours now, as is saltwater, salt, water, streams, rivers, any wavy sign that doesn't look like that of a popular carbonated beverage, etc."

"But..."

"Of course if you want to *keep* the fish you catch you'll need a fish acquisition license, and we have four different levels of this: Personal, Home, Fishing boat and Fishing Company."

"What's the..."

"It's based on the average daily requirement, so a Fishing Company might be permitted several boatloads, a fishing boat would be permitted a boatload, a home maybe three fish and a personal user $\frac{1}{2}$ a fish"

" $\frac{1}{2}$ a fish?"

"Yes, the recommended fish intake for a person says two fish meals a week, so that works out to one every three days or which is $\frac{1}{3}$ of a fish a day. We rounded up to $\frac{1}{2}$ because we care."

"So I'd only be licensed to catch a fish every couple days?"

"No, you'd be licensed to catch $\frac{1}{2}$ a fish a day. Catching a whole fish would be a violation of your license."

"So to be within the license terms I'd have to buy the Home license."

"If that's the way you wish to fish yes. But we like to give you options."

"So I'm licensed to catch and keep fish then?"

"Absolutely. We have an annual fish consumption license as well – if you're planning on eating them."

"What else would you do with them?"

"Apart from stuffing them through the mail slot in the main office door of a licensing company three days after you caught them? No idea. Anyway, the consumption license is very reasonable – about 10 per cent of the acquisition license per annum."

"I wouldn't pay."

"You would, because the small print in the Version 9 permits us to recover the rod and features if you fail to renew your license – plus an administration fee. We already have enough money so we'll be taking the fee in testicles. Perhaps you'd like to speak to our licensing officer?"

>bip< >bip< >bip< >bip<

"Hello Stephen 4.1-Alpha speaking"

"I... was talking about licens... >SLAM!<"

>ring ring<

"Hello Stephen 4.1-Alpha speaking. If you have any problems with the reliability of this version
ple >SLAM!<

>ring ring<

"Hello Stephen 4.1 RC2 speaking. We have determined that you are running an unlicensed
version of our user support. This facility will now disconnect"

>click<

...

BOFH: The day the office budget bombed – literally

Explosive network kit Trojan

Posted in [BOFH](#), [18th November 2011 11:00 GMT](#)

Episode 19 “And this was the extinguisher here, was it?” the Health and Safety feeb asks.

“That’s the one!” I say.

“And you don’t know of any reason how it came to be filled with diesel instead of water?”

“None!” the PFY lies. “But then it may have been like that when we took the building over!”

Luckily the H&S droid isn’t likely to track through our records to find the drum of diesel the PFY ordered for our non-existent generator a year or so back, however to be on the safe side I make a mental note to change the description in the database to something benign like coffee extract.

And buy a generator to replace the one we sold on eBay. A 350W unit should do the trick.

“So no one checked it?”

“I guess not,” the PFY says, “but I’m pretty sure the testing tag and seal were intact on it. Perhaps you should check with the boss?”

“Yes, I will, once the aftereffects of smoke inhalation have worn off. Now do you know how the fire in his office started in the first place?” “I’m not sure,” the PFY says. “He said something about his laptop, so maybe that was it?”

“This laptop?” he asks, holding up a mangled mess of melted plastic, electronics and metal sealed in a large ziplock bag.

“It could be, I guess. Though it looks like the fire has pretty much ruined any chance of finding out if the laptop was responsible given its condition.”

“Yes, so I suppose you’d suggest that perhaps the battery had a thermal runaway, which we hear so much about these days, and spontaneously ignited his blotter pad?” A perfectly believable situation. Far more believable than, say, a small network-addressable incendiary device inside the boss’s “4-port switch”.

“So if we can go back, did you notice anything unusual beforehand?”

"Aaaaahhhmmmm, let me think," I respond. "We were in his office about 10 minutes beforehand – we had a meeting about how the overtime rates were being cut from double time to 1.25 time, along with the requirement to work public holidays when requested."

"And the meal allowance," the PFY adds.

"Yes, that's right, they dropped the meal allowance for anyone in the office for more than 10 hours in a day."

"And I assume that you weren't too happy about this?"

"Oh no – I mean these are tough times and the company has to make savings wherever it can," I sniff. "So we just realized it was for the good of all, and that there comes a time when individual sacrifices need to be made. No doubt those policy recommendations will be adopted once the boss is back from sick leave."

"So they weren't actual policy as yet?"

"No, not just yet. It was part of some recommendations he was working on. I think he'd suggested all contractors should pay for their car park spaces and lunches as well."

"...and?"

"Well it was all perfectly reasonable. After all, they were struggling to be able to give IT middle management a Christmas bonus and needed to make some savings somewhere – which it looks like they've done."

"So it wasn't started by something far less technical - your assistant for instance?"

"Surely not?" I ask, feigning a lack of knowledge - well, truth be told, I had noticed the pronounced curved scar in the plastic lid debris which can only have been made by a fire axe. The same type of fire axe the company had removed from the building months ago. The same type of fire axe that the PFY stole several of prior to the arrival of the removal agents.

"I'll think you'll find it was him!" the H&S geek cries.

Curtains for PFY or will someone rain on the geek's parade?

"So you're saying someone saw him do this?" I ask.

"No," the geek says, with a slight hesitation.

"So it could have been anybody?"

"It COULDN'T have been anybody - and you know how I know this?"

"I'm sure I don't," I reply.

"I KNOW because I had this forensically analyzed," he blurts, pointing to a label on the ziplock bag.

"Sorry, you had a laptop analyzed by a forensics expert?" I ask, imagining *CSI Luton* and a new episode twist: one where they don't have to call in the kebab fat spatter analyst or rely on a shell-suit arse print to identify the culprit.

"Yes!" the H&S guy blurts triumphantly.

"For what?"

"I happened to notice the odor of ... urine."

"Oh, you mean when I tried to put the fire out after the extinguisher made things worse?"

"The same way you tried to put your boss out?" the H&S guy snaps, holding up another bag with the boss's scorched shirt in it.

"It was an act of mercy!"

"I think we all know what happened here - and as soon as your manager is ready to speak we'll get to the bottom of it. And rest assured that if there's even a HINT of suspicious activity in this I'll be referring this to the police!"

"As well you should," I say as he storms out of the office.

Two minutes later, the phone rings.

"Hello Systems."

"I know it's you, you know," the H&S geek says.

"Us what?" I ask.

"That's turned off my network so I can't send any email."

"No, no, that'll just be your access port flaking out. Tell you what, I'll send the PFY up with a new desktop switch for you - we'll get that lit up in no time."

BOFH: The Explosive Christmas Evacuation

HR roasting on an open fire...

Posted in [BOFH](#), [23rd December 2011 11:33 GMT](#)

Episode 20 Everyone loves the last day. The prospect of holidays ahead always puts people in a good mood which in turn leads to generosity, indulgence and poorly-thought-through dalliances in front of recording devices.

But more than that, in the season of goodwill those in the service side of the company get some recognition for the hours of devotion they put in behind the scenes.

It's our time.

And so in the spirit of goodwill I send a couple of bottles of whisky to George, our faithful and ancient cleaner - our Alfred, if you will - with a card from the PFY and myself before despatching the PFY get a carton of Christmas puddings for security with so much brandy in them they're probably liable for excise duty...

Yes, on cheery days like today the internal mail typically comes in a trolley or sack barrow as people remember the good service they've had over the past year - not being locked in a toilet over a bank holiday weekend with only paper to eat; not having the lift power cut when they're on their way home; not finding a picture of themselves worrying a sheep in the middle of their PowerPoint presentation to the board, and not slipping on a greased stair in a darkened stairwell..

I can't wait.

I mean I can take the thankless nature of IT - the hours spent in designing an infrastructure that is reliable, redundant and resilient - all things which the punters remain completely oblivious to so long as their Facebook page loads and they're able to tweet their friends about the texture and consistency of their latest grogan, but it IS nice to know that at least one day a year we get something back. It's reassuring to know that if nothing else, browbeating the Boss and board to get dual redundant generators, UPS and switchboards, redundant network core and multiple network feeds has paid off with a bit of Christmas cheer...

I'm busying myself by clearing a space on a desk to put the incoming contraband on when the Boss interrupts my work with a few last minute concerns.

"So what happens if there's a power issue over the break?" he asks.

"The UPS kicks in, the generator starts, the UPS kicks out. Later, the power comes back on the UPS smoothes the transition between supplies and the generators stops."

"So the power doesn't go off?"

"It does, but not to the server room. Or Mission Control.

"The espresso machine?" the Boss gasps.

"Oh yes. If we're called in to work to resolve a problem we can't be expected to work without refreshment!"

"I.... and so we've done a UPS test?"

Or the espresso machine." I add.

"Yes."

"And the generator has been serviced?"

"Check!"

"And we have sufficient diesel?"

"Uh-huh. I ordered a couple of drums just in case."

A white lie. Every year I 'order a couple of drums' around Christmas time to pay for the drinks that the PFY consume on the last day. That's the beauty of the purchasing anonymiser service the PFY recently discovered. You select what you want to buy, select what you want it to be billed as, and make your orders. "2 x 20 gallon drums of diesel" is ordered and a day later four cases of lager arrive.

"So we're all sorted then?"

"Indeed we are. And rest assured that once the internal mail's been here, I'll be checking the breakers on the UPS and generators to make sure they're all ready to go!"

"Uh, the internal mail's already been..." the Boss says

"No it can't have."

"Yes it did. I got rather a nice bottle of red from security and a box of chocolates from HR."

"Really? Well, I'd better go and collect our booty!" I say.

"Oh, I've got it here" the Boss says, handing over a couple of cards.

>scratchy< >rip< >fumble<

A couple of empty cards...

I... am disappointed.

Yes, that's the word, disappointed.

I mean it's not that I'm completely unprepared for this eventuality - because there might be a later delivery.

"Oh, and there's no second internal mail today." the Boss says.

But people will probably stop by in person...

"Are you going to drinks in the cafeteria at 11?"

"Drinks?"

"Oh, did you not get..." the Boss mumbles, tailing off.

So that's how it is then. Slaving away over weekends, offline defragging a mail store so as not to interrupt our users, performing overnight recoveries to get the place back up and running in as short a time as possible...

>sigh<

The Boss leaves and I slowly type in the PFY's cellphone number.

"Yep," he answers, moment later.

"Plan B," I say

"Really?" he gasps "Nothing?"

"A couple of cards."

"I see. Well I'll be dropping the puddings off in a minute or two."

"Righty ho."

True to his word the PFY drops the puddings off a few minutes later. Plan A called for them to be wrapped in Christmas paper and handed to grateful recipients. Plan B was much the same, the only difference being they were tossed, flaming into the offices concerned.

The resulting evacuation provides more than enough time for the PFY and me to rifle through company offices for the Christmas cheer we so sadly missed out on.

And list a couple of generators on eBay...

