

# The BOFH-Stories 2000

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## BOFH 2000 No. 1

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 pursue 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 shirtilly (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...

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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...

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### **BOFH 2000 No.3**

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<

"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.."

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BOFH 2000: Episode 4

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..."

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## **BOFH 2000: Episode 5**

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."

"ASIEMU?"

"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.

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## **BOFH 2000: Episode 6**

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 it's 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 2000: Episode 7**

"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!"

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 unplagiarised 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 an 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 characters 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 expect..?" 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 they 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 reseat 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  
>**ZZZZZZzzzzzzzzzzzz...**<

"Now what has he done wrong here?" I ask the fireworks spectators.

>**ZzzzzzZZzZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZ**<

"That's right, he's forgotten to check for a UPS unit in this cardboard box marked 'Printer Paper'!"

>**ZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZZeeeeeeerrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr...** <

"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 >**ZZZZZZZZZZZZEEERRRT!**<

"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?

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## **BOFH 2000: Episode 9**

"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 use 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...

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## **BOFH 2000: Episode 10**

"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<

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<

>ring<

"Why're you hanging up on me?!"

"We're no.." >click<

>ring<

"Networks and Systems, Hel.." >click<

>ring<

"Ne..." >click<

>ring<

>click<

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 2000: Chapter 11**

"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 PFU 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 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 2000: Chapter 12**

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...

---

### **BOFH 2000: Chapter 13 (THAT's unlucky...)**

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 no 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...

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## BOFH 2000: Episode 14

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 bumbles.

"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 2000: Episode 15**

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 2000: Episode 16**

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 2000: Episode 17**

"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!!!"

---

## **BOFH 2000: Episode 18**

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...

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## **BOFH2000: Episode 19 (THE EPISODE YOU NEVER SAW)**

"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...

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## **BOFH2000: Episode 20**

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**

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## **BOFH2000: Episode 21**

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.

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 if 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 2000: Episode 23**

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 feeps 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.."

>**EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE**<

Ah, maybe it isn't such a bad day after all.

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### **BOFH 2000 Episode 24 (Quiz no.3)**

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 B, 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!

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## **BOFH 2000. Episode 25**

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 dekko, "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 bumbles, 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....

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*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.

---

## **BOFH 2000: Episode 27**

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.

---

*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 composed 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 nosy
- 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.

---

### **BOFH 2000: Episode 29**

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?*

---

### **BOFH 2000: Episode 30**

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.

---

### **BOFH2000: Episode 31**

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, they 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 2000: Episode 32**

"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 stripped over a power cable and brought the lot down before now!"

...

A quick "woopsey" 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.

---

### **BOFH2000: Episode 33**

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<

"..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<

"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 2000: Episode 34**

"I'm a bit concerned about these viruses that seem to be springing up all over the world!" the Boss bumbles 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!< >**WHIRRRrrrrr...**<

"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<

>Click< >**wwwwwwWWWWHHHHIRRRRR...**<

"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<

"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....

?reg;

---

## **BOFH 2000: Episode 35**

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 to 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 >BZZZZZeeerrrt< 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...

---

### **BOFH 2000: Episode 36**

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<

"Ah well."

---

### **BOFH 2000: Episode 37**

"..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.

---

### **BOFH 2000: Episode 38**

**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 bumbles, 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 bumbles 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 - isa 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 2000: Episode 39**

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 suppose 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.

It's been a while and rumours 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.

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## **BOFH 2000: Episode 41**

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, spurring 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..."