

The Original BOFH-Stories

The Bastard Operator from Hell

A Bastard Is Born

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

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

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

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

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

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

Because he's NEW and ALONE, he's what you call an appeasement engineer -- the new guy they always send so they can respond within the 4 hour guaranteed response period. (Things are getting better and better.)

Your average appeasement engineer is about as clued-up on computers as the average computer "hacker" is about B.O., and their main job is to make sure the power plug is in and switched on, then call back to the office for "PARTS". The really keen ones will sometimes even take a cover off the equipment and pretend that they see this stuff all the time. I wonder what sort today's is...

"You got a dud terminal?" he asks pleasantly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Shouldn't you be wearing a ground strap?" I ask innocently.

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

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

"Oh, it's OK" he says "the unit's not Plug..."

>click< >BZZZZZZZZEEERT!< >clunk!<

I ring the maintenance help-desk again...

It's Rhonda

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

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

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

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

Part I, Beginning Bastard

BOFH #1

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

A loser rings

"Do you know why the system is slow?" it asks.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"HELLO, SALARIES!"

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

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

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

"Hello?" she answers

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

"I think so..." she says

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

"Um. Ok"

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

I hear her scrabbling at the terminal...

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

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

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

Another loser rings.

"I need more space" it says.

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

"No, on my account, stupid."

Stupid? Uh-Oh..

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

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

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

"Sure, hang on."

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

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

"How much have I got?" he simps.

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

Back into Jimmy Stewart mode.

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

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

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

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

I say nothing. It'll come to him.

"aaagggggghhhhhH!"

I kill me; I really do!

Part 1, Beginning Bastard

BOFH # 2

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

"Hello?" I say.

"Who is this?" they say

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

"Me Who?"

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

Too LATE! I get killed.

Now I'm pissed!

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

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

"Which package is that?"

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

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

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

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

"The worst?"

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

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

He gives me his lusername. (What an idiot)

>clickety klik<

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

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

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

>clickety click<

"Oh no, I made a mistake" I say

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

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

"Huh?>wimper<

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

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

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

"Oh, yeah, her account was just after we discovered the virus."... >clickety clikc<

"But..."

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

"Oh, thank goodness!!!"

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

Part I, Beginning Bastard

BOFH #3

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

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

There's about 50 people waiting outside and I've got two printouts. That's about average for me. I thought I'd killed more tho. Anyway, I put out the printouts and walk slooowly inside, fingering the clipboard with "ACCOUNTS TO REMOVE" in big letters on the back. Noone says anything. As usual.

...

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

"Yes?" I say, pausing the picture.

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

"You have? What was your username?"

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

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

"What?"

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

"Huh?"

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

"Huh?!!"

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

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

"In the flesh, on the phone and in your account.... You shouldn't have called you know. You especially shouldn't have given me your username.."

>clickety<click

"I didn't send any.."

>clickety<> click<...

"No, you didn't did you? But who can tell these days? Not to worry though, It'll all be over VERY soon.."

>clickedy klik< "..change my username back, and..."

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

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

I hang up.

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

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

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

Part I, Beginning Bastard

BOFH # 4

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

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

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

Hook; Line; and Sinker...

"Oh. I'm sorry."

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

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

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

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

"Thanks"

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

The phone rings again.

"Hello?"

"Hi there" I say

"Is this the Operators?"

"Yes it is" I say, nice as pie

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

"Your username?" I ask

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

There's a HUUUUUUUGE pile of printouts there, and sure enough, his is at the top of the pile. I

pick it up, split it out of the rest and pour our ink-stained cleaning alcohol all over it, run it over a couple of times with the loaded tape trolley then slam it in the tape safe door some times as well.

Beautiful.

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

He takes a look and shits himself.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Geek pays up and starts blubbing.

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

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

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

"GREAT!"

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

"Huh?"

"No arguments, just do it."

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

Part II, The Real Bastard

BOFH # 5

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Has the comput.."

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

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

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

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

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

"Computer Room" I say, being efficient

"Hello, When will the compu..."

I hang up.

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

The phone rings again. I put it on hands free

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

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

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

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

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

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

Part II, The Real Bastard

BOFH #6

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

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

"Hello?" I say.

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

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

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

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

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

"Really?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaaagggggggghhhh!"

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

"What can I do?" he sniffs

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

"Some, but it's weeks old!"

I fire up the bulk eraser.

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

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

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

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

"NO! TIN FOIL'S THE WORST THING! YOU KNOW WHAT TIN FOIL DOES IN A

MICROWAVE DON'T YOU?!"

"Yes.."

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

"What's that?"

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

"Wow! Thanks"

"No worries at all..."

Part II, The Real Bastard

BOFH # 7

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

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

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

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

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

?!

Right.

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

"Yes?.."

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

"Oh!"

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

"Hey thanks!"

"No worries. What was your username again?"

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

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

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

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

"What's your username?" I ask

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"When did this happen?" I ask.

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

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

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

THE PHONE RINGS AGAIN!

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

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

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

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

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

"Have you got a spare power cord?"

"No.."

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

"Should I take my disks out?"

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

"Oh! NO! Ok.."

I listen carefully.. ..

...clicky..cliky...kliky..clicky. ...clickey.. . . BOOM!

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

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

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

"NO!"

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

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

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

She tells me....

Part II, The Real Bastard

BOFH #8

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

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

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

"What was your username please?" I say

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

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

"Thanks!"

"No worries. Have a nice day!"

WHAT IS THIS? you're asking yourself. Has the Bastard Operator from Hell turned over a new leaf? Sold out?! GONE INSANE?!!!Nope. The Bastard Operator from Hell is being LOGFILED. And if that's happening, I'm being bugged as well. So I'm being nice till I can find the bugs. It shouldn't be long - bear with me.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Director: "Are you sure about this?"

SysMgr: "OF COURSE!"

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

SysMgr "NEVER!"

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

SysMgr "EXCELLENT!"

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

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

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

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

"No..."

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

"Y.." His eyes widen slightly

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

Ametuers...

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

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

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

>clicccky<...

rm -r *

Part III, What a Bastard

BOFH #9

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes" I call

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

"Have you got your disk with you?"

"Sure!"

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

Six minutes later, he rings back.

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I will! Thanks!"

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

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

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

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

WELL I'LL JUST HAVE TO HELP!

I walk on in.

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

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

Part III, What a Bastard

BOFH #10

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

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

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

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

"What was your username please?"

"CMS1103"

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

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGGGGGH!"

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

"CMS1136. I was.."

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

"It's purely for research purposes!"

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

"NNGggggAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAGGGHGH!"

"Next please..."

...

..

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

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

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

I un-redirect the phone and drag the rubbish bin so it rests on the printer's stacker - another job well

done. The phone rings - this could be the big one!

"Hello?"

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

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

"Thanks"

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

The phone rings - it's them again.

"There's something wrong with spell"

"What makes you think that?"

"Because my file is all corrupt now!"

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

"Yes, but I can.."

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

"Um >clunka<, yes..."

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

DUMMY MODE ON

"Oh. What do I do?"

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

"Oh. OK"

>crash<

>crash<

>crash<

"Um, the screen went dark"

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

>crash<

>crash<

>crash<

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

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

Then everything goes dark

Part III, What a Bastard

BOFH #11 The Bastard LIVES!

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

I died.

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

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

Bastard Operator from Hell LIVES!

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

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

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

I sort through my snail mail and crack open the BOFH Monthly Newsletter, "kill -9" and check out the articles therein. There's a nice peice of making OS2 slow, boring and painful, but it looks

exactly like the OS2 installation instructions to me... Ah, who knows. I head straight to the BOFH Wizardsection to see if any of my articles were published. All of them!!! Even the one about the c compiler that randomly removes one line from the source code it's compiling!

The phone rings.

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

"It's the power cord" I say

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

"It's the power cord" I say

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

"It's the power cord" I say

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

"The power cord?" I ask

"Yes... Woopsy"

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

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

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

I listen carefully. Nothing. In other words, DUMMY MODE ON ...

"You can fix it permanently tho'" I say

"Really? How?"

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

"Oh!" (Dummy mode irrevocably engaged)

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

"Uh... no?"

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

"Oh. Ok!"

>Fzzzt<

>clunk!<

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

Part III, What a Bastard

BOFH #12

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

I like it!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I hear another shot and realise he won't be answering any calls today.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Ah! Of course.

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

"Huh?"

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

"But I'm wearing a wrist strap!"

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

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

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

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

"Hang on. Yeah"

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

"The one going to the power supply?"

"Yep, that's it"

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

> clunk<"

Another call solved by the helpdesk from hell...

Part III, What a Bastard

The Bastard Operator from Hell #13

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

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

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

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

The phone, the bane of my existence, rings.

"Hello, Computer Room" I say, being helpful

"Is this the Technicians?" The caller asks.

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

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

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

"Hmmm. How old is the drive?"

"About a year.."

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

"YES!"

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

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

>Bullshit mode ON<

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

"Duh. Oh"

>DUMMY MODE ON<

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

"Uh.... No?"

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

"Yeah."

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

"WHAT?!"

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

"Oh, yeah!"

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

"Oh. Ok. Thanks"

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

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

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

>ALERT!<

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

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

The other phone rings. I chuck it on hands free

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

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

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

I press the "I just got a raise" button (AKA "Stop Traffic Generation") on the Lan Analyser, and almost immediately the user shouts back

"Excellent, it's working now, thanks"

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

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

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

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

?!!!

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

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

"Monaro?"

"Ok"

"Sold!"

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

Part IV, Bastard Manages

The Bastard System Manager from Hell #1

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

I get a call from the big boss - he's been getting complaints about the Trainee Bastard Operator

from Hell. I ask him to forward all the complaints to me and that it would be best to let me deal with them. I ring the operator and get him to make an appointment with me.

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

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

"Kill them off?" The TBOFH replies

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

"Kill them off?"

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

"Why?"

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

"Kill them off?"

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

"Uh. No.."

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

"Kill them off?"

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

"Hang up?"

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

"Delete their files?"

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

"Swear at them?"

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

"Yes"

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

"But it's live!"

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

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

Of course I would.

He was no good anyway. No killing instinct.

Part IV, Bastard Manages

BSMH #2

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

I get the first applicant in.

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

"Sure"

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

"Close their account"

"Good - But can you elaborate?"

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

"Excellent. What is a killfile?"

"Uh. It's a list of usernames/topics/news items etc that you wish the news-reader to automatically

skip so you don't have to wade through rubbish"

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

"Oh. Of course."

"Never mind. What is DCE?"

"Delete, Close and Erase"

"Good. DTR?"

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

"Well done. DBMS?"

"Dont Bug My Supervisor. Probably the most important acronym around"

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

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

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

"I don't think so."

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

BZZZZZEEEEERETTT!

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

I push the body out onto the fire escape.

"NEXT!"

Part V, Quite a Bastard

#14 BOFH Rides Again

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

That's HIS entertainment.

So I'm back in the saddle. Unfortunately, that means there's a surplus of operators in the computer room. One slam of the tape safe door later, the problem is solved. The knocking dies down in a couple of hours, so I guess the safes really *are* airtight.

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

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

"Computer Room" I say

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

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

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

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

"Darren? Is that Darren?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sure. What was your username?"

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

He says it.

You just can't tell some people.

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

"THEY ARE!! GREAT!!"

The relief in his voice is overwhelming

>clickety< >clickety<

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

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

"Sorry?"

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

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

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

"What was her username?"

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

Is he going to do it? Is he?

He does.

Like running down a snail with a steamroller...

>clickety clickety<

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

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

"How do I do that?"

"Ok; can you login yet?"

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

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

>DUMMY MODE ON<

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

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

"Ok!"

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

"WH..? WHY?"

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

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

>DUMMY MODE IRREVOCABLY ON<

"Oh. Ok"

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

"Sure, ok"

He hangs up.

I ring campus security

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

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

The phone rings. It's my Mum.

"Hi Ma, what can I do for you"

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

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

"Yes"

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

"Oh, Ok Simon, Thanks"

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

"Yeah, why?"

"Oh, No reason.."

Part V, Quite a Bastard

BOFH #15

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

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

"Hello, Computer Room" I say

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

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

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

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

"Really?! How do they do that?"

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

"Yes..."

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

>D.M. ON<

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

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

"Hey thanks!"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The phone rings a couple of minutes later.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Yes!" She snarls

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

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

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

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

"Why?" she barks, a little uncertain.

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

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

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

No sense of humour.

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

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

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

Another problem solved by the Bastard Operator from Hell

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

Part VI, A Foreign Bastard

...

...

Things are looking up!

He's back from the beerfest, and he's hungover and annoyed. It's....

The Bastard Operator from Britain (#2)

"Ah Simon, thank you for coming, please sit down"

The promotions committee is strangely quiet today. Normally they're far more boisterous and sure of themselves. This has to be good news.

"Now Simon, as you know there's a vacancy for a Senior Operator in the Computer Centre following the tragic accident in the staff showers."

"Yes" I utter, "tragic"

"How the hell a toaster got in there in the first place is beyond the scope of this committee, as our main interest is to find a replacement as soon as possible. Ordinarily, we would appoint such a senior position externally, but following that awful business with the lift controller failure and the shortlisted candidates.."

"Awful" I sigh, my heart pity at the tragedy of three Senior Operator applicants plunging down a lift shaft to their deaths... Completely accidental you understand...

"..It still seems very strange; apparently the accident inspector stated that the lift appeared to be accelerating *faster* than the speed of gravity when it fell. But I guess we'll never know now that the lift control room had that big electrical fire.."

I could be oversensitive on this issue, but I'm feeling a little bit of dissent in the room around me. Some members of the promotions committee appear to be having problems making the decision of whether they should support the University's interests by appointing me senior operator or becoming involved in the next fatal campus accident. I decide to cut through the red tape and get to the point.

"So essentially, all supposition aside, you wish me to take over the role of Senior Operator.."

"Ah..." the chairman utters, looking around the room for backup, "..Yes"

"Ok, fine. I'll need a couple of K extra for the increased responsibility, say another K for relocation.."

"BUT YOU'RE ONLY TWO OFFICES AWAY!!!"

"Good point - another *TWO* K for relocation, and new office furniture. Leather Armchairs would be good. Oh, and an expresso machine."

I get up.

"Well, that should be all I think, so I'll just get off back to work"

While they mutter amongst themselves, I make my exit back to the control room. As it's getting towards the end of my working day (3pm) I write protect the userdisk and start a shutdown for 1 minute. The phone rings.

"I can't save my work" a voice sobs from the phone

"You really should try.."

"But the system won't let me" he wimpers, "can you halt the shutdown?"

"Well, I'd like to, but it's irrevocably committed to shutdown - there's no telling what might happen - we could lose all your work, there's no telling...."

"Um..." - You can almost hear the wheels turning - "...Uh.."

I hang up - they're obviously not committed.

The shutdown completes and I reboot, then decide to introduce a little fun to the network by pulling out random staff terminal lines and repatching them to the student areas and vice versa. Just like the big breakin of '91.

Next I choose a letter at random from the complaints box to use as this week's "External Penetration" victim, then delete all their files.

I decide to get into something new. I break out the telephone serviceman's handset and wander into the comms room and start eavesdropping on people's conversations.

Most of it is crap, but it gives me an idea. Pipe it all through voice recognition and look for words including my name (for security purposes), a sexual encounter, or live chickens. Definite possibilities...

A user rings.

"Oh, Hi - can you tell me what my password is please?" they ask

"I'm sorry" I say for the 1 billionth time "passwords are encrypted on the system, and it's far easier for me to change your password than to find out what it is." (Which is crap; I know what it is, the password changing routine does have a slight in-house modification which the implementers

probably weren't counting on.)

"Oh, ok - could you change it to 'desert' please - that was my old password"

"I'm sorry, but we can't change user's passwords to ones that they supply - that would compromise site security"

"Oh, then could you just give me a new password?"

"Sure. What about desert?"

"Huh? .. Oh, Ok, that would be fine"

I hang up, they hang up. 10 minutes later they call back.

"Have you changed that password yet?" they ask

"CHANGED the password?" I say "You just asked me to give you a new password, you said nothing about changing it"

"But... Oh. Well, could you change it to desert for me please?"

"I'm sorry, but I can't do that, because of the security compromise, as I told you before. If I knew your password, I could possibly log into your account without you knowing, couldn't I?"

"Well yes..."

"And if that happened, your data would be compromised, wouldn't it?"

"Uhh, yes, I suppose it would"

"So in other words, if two people have the password to an account, the security of it is at least halved, isn't it?"

"Yes, I suppose you're right"

"Of course I am, I'm the *OPERATOR*. I'm not only right, I'm wrong if I want to be as well.."

"Uh.."

He doesn't know whether to agree or not. Wimp.

"Now," I say, breaking the tension "I'll change your password for you"

"Ok, thanks"

"No worries. Bye now"

"B. >click<"

They ring back

"You didn't tell me my password!"

"Of course I didn't. We already agreed that two people knowing the password is less secure than one, didn't we?"

"Well, yes, but..."

"No buts, security is security, off you go..."

That's the problem with this job, it doesn't come naturally - you have to *WORK* on it.

The LAST Bastard Operator from Hell!

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

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

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

Bad sign.

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

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

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

"Just look at my machines" I say..

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

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

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

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

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

"HELLO?". The Big Boss himself answers

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

"WHAT?"

"A photo. One in a series of 24"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"By computer?.."

"Oh! What do you want?"

"The New Operators"

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

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

"Then what do you want?"

"TO TRAIN THEM!"

.....

.....

..

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

We start from the very beginning..

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

"They're ok, I suppose" he answers

"OK?"

"Well, they can be a pain at times"

"at times?"

"Well, a lot of the time?"

"A lot?"

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

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

"What they want?"

"No"

"What we think they want?"

"No"

"What WE want?"

"No"

"I DON'T KNOW!"

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

"What we want?"

"Exactly. And WHY do we do it?"

"Because they deserve it?"

"No..."

"To convince users not to call?"

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

"Oh! I suppose you're right"

"I KNOW I'm right. And if I'm not, I'm STILL right, because I'm the *OPERATOR*. It's that

simple! If you remember that phrase, there's nothing you can't do. Now the last question. What exactly do we do to users?"

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

"No no Agent Starling. That is a mere bagatelle. That is simply the method. We want to know the result. What we do is BREAK them. What's the point of deleting their files if they never use them? What's the point in reading someone's private correspondence if you're not going to let the user know you did it, then tell their friends or parents? Why scrap someone's backups unless they need them? You have to break the user's will so that they realise that they're the simple-minded sheep we know they are!"

"I see"

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

"Thank you sir"

"Sir?"

"Oh. Get out of my Computer Room!"

"That's more like it!"

The mantle is passed.

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

>HMMMMMMMMMM<

AAAAAGH!

```
-----  
      * *   It's:      "SPLAT - MY CAT!"  
-----  
-///-///-_  
+>\      --__ Slower than a speeding DATSUN 180B. Much slower.  
+>/      _-----_ Mortally slower, one might say. Rest in Peices.  
-\\-\\--  bastard@datamation.com  
-----
```

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

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

Because I used to be...

THE BASTARD OPERATOR FROM HELL!!!

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

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

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

I'm bored.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"You bastard!" one of the programmers utters

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

"YOU did it didn't you?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

.... .

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

Then the phone rings...

The BASTARD IS BACK!

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

THE BASTARD GOES TO THE TRADE SHOW!

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sorry?"

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

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

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

He runs off. The Regional Manager is no dummy. They're trained to recognise "SHITHEAD" spelt backwards. And upside down. And reverse. And lipread.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

>DUMMY MODE ON<

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

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

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

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

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

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

..to the next stall...

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

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

"HELL YES!"

One born every minute.

THE BASTARD'S STILL ABOUT!

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

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

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

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

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

"HI!" John gushes, powerdressed to the max.

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

"..and sent you email about.."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

We all have our dreams...

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

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

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

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

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

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

The boss giggles nervously and resumes his exit waddle.

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

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

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

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

"HELLO!" he shouts "WADDAYA WANT!"

Old habits do die hard

"SIMON HERE" I shout back

"SO?"

I compliment myself on a job well done.

"I want some information on a John Stern"

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

"The very same."

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

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

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

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

"Well, I'm afraid I can't tell you anything Simon. As you know all our information is carefully

monitored for compliance with the Data Security and Privacy Laws, and there's no way to extract information without it being monitored"

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

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

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

"Oh! I'm sorry!" I gush, helping John back to the nearest available seat..

..which unfortunately has his laptop with it's fragile liquid crystal display.

Tragic.

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

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

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

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

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

>WHOP< >WHOP< >WHOP<

Or should I say, WAS not.

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

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

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

...The Bastard Celebrates Christmas 95...

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

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

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

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

"Hello"

"Hi, how long will the network be down"

"Should only be a couple of days"

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

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

"B.."

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

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

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

"WHAT?!"

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

"I. I.." he splutters

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

Five minutes later I'm back in the computer room, stashing my spoils inside the covers of some

old-style 12" removable disk packs. Leaving the disks laying around would only draw undue attention and suspicion, so I dump them in the bin where they should've been put years ago, except that they have valuable corporate data on them.

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

"Is this the operator?" I hear

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

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

"Yes?"

"Well, is there anything you can do?"

"What sort of machine is it?"

"A Macintosh"

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

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

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

>Dummy Mode On<

"Duh. No, I guess not"

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

"But won't that.."

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

"Oh. Ok, thanks"

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

"Oh. Ok"

Mission Accomplished, I go to the smoko room and check out the Xmas tree. Sure enough, the

lights are the cheap, in series AC kind. I drop a bit of coffee and some water in the bottom of the boss's mug then fill the sink up with hot soapy water.

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

A promotion to a vacant position looks imminent...