

Chapter 1

The Original BOFH

The electronic rights of the original BOFH are owned by DATAMATION magazine.

1.1 Genesis (Striped Irregular Bucket #1)

I'm really bored. You know how bored you get when work's going on and on and on, and nothing interesting is happening, and you're listening to a radio that picks up ONE station on FM, and it's always the station with the least records in the city, about 5, and one of them is "You're so Vain" which wasn't too bad a song until you hear it about 3 times a day for a year, and *EVERY* time it plays, the announcer tells you it's about Warren Beaty 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 Beaty, 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 Beaty, 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 fizzes out (Which doesn't take all that long, surprisingly enough), then call our maintenance contractors and log a fault on the device. Sometimes they'll send someone who knows what they're doing, but it's a lot more fun when they don't - which is about 98% of the time.

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

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

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

"You got a dud terminal?" he asks pleasantly

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

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

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

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

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

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

"It just went dead" I say, in 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 an earthing strap?" I ask innocently.

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

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

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

>click< >BZZZZZZZZEEERRT!< >clunk!<

I ring the maintenance help-desk again...

It's Rhonda

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

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

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

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

1.2 The Birth of BOFH - Striped Irregular Bucket #5

I'm still bored.

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

that.

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

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

I know those sorts...

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

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

"Files? What files?"

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

"Gone ay? What's your username?"

"TURGEN"

"TROJAN?! LIKE THE CONDOM?"

"No TURGEN. T-U-R"

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

"I KNOW!"

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

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

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

Beautiful.... Shit I'm good!

He calls back.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I point it out to him.

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

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

"Chief Engineer"

Thought so.

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

"A little..."

>Click!< >Fzzzzzzeeet!< >Clunk<

1.4 The Bastard Operator From Hell #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 user rings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"HELLO, SALARIES!"

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

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

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

"Hello?" she answers

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

"I think so..." she says

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

"Um. Ok"

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

I hear her scrabbling at the terminal...

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

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

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

Another user rings.

"I need more space" he says

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

"No, on my account, stupid."

Stupid? Uh-Oh..

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

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

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

"Sure, hang on"

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

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

"How much have I got?" he simps

Now this *REALLY* *PISSSES* *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, savouring 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.

"aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaagggggghhhhH!"

I kill me; I really do!

1.5 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 to 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 click<

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

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

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

>clickety click<

"Oh no, I made a mistake" I say

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

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

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

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

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

"Which one was that?"

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

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

"But..."

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

"Oh, thank goodness!!!"

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

I'm such a prick!

1.6 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. No-one says anything. As usual.

...

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

"Yes?" I say, pausing the picture.

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

"You have? What was your username?"

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

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

"What?"

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

"Huh?"

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

"Huh?!!"

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

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

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

telling him what you think of him in such graphic terms..."

"I didn't send any.."

>clickety< >click<.....

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

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

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

I hang up.

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

Later, inside the Municipal Energy Authority Computer, as I'm modifying the poor 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 pleb's apartment I realise that for some, it just doesn't.

But tommorrow is another day.

1.7 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, hands held high. Shit, I hate myself sometimes!

1.8 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 sender's username to alt.singles.with.severe.social.dysfunctions on news, and make a note in my diary to be there with my camcorder. Should be a blast!

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

I move some tapes from the racks to the trolley to make it look like we really use them, then start looking thruarchie 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.

Now that's trying!

1.9 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 guy's 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"

"AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAaaaaaaagggggggghhhh!"

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..."

1.10 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... Hmmm...

"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..clikky...clikky..clicky. ...clickey.. . . BOOM!

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

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

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

"NO!"

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

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

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

She tells me....

1.11 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 happen- ing, 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 handpeice. 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 it's 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 clicky< 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 *

1.12 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 it- self 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...

...

1.13 BOFH #10

I get invited to a lecture as a guest speaker in "Computing Operations Fund- amentals", 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 scratch< "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

1.14 BOFH #11

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 at 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 Wizard section to see if any of my articles were published. All of them!!! Even the one about the c compiler that randomly removes one line from the source code it's compiling!

The phone rings.

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

"It's the power cord" I say

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

"It's the power cord" I say

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

"It's the power cord" I say

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

"The power cord?" I ask

"Yes... 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, ...

"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.

1.15 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...

1.16 BOFH #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 magnetic particles clinging to the head."

"Oh. Ok. Thanks"

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

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

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

>ALERT!<

Quick as I can, I press the panic button on our LAN-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.

1.17 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.

1.18 The Bastard System Manager From Hell #2

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

I get the first applicant in.

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

"Sure"

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

"Close their account"

"Good - But can you elaborate?"

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

"Excellent. What is a killfile?"

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

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

"Oh. Of course."

"Never mind. What is DCE?"

"Delete, Close and Erase"

"Good. DTR?"

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

"Well done. DBMS?"

"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!"

1.19 BOFH #14

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

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

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

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

"Computer Room" I say

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

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

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

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

"Darren? Is that Darren?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Sure. What was your username?"

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

He says it.

You just can't tell some people.

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

"THEY ARE!! GREAT!!"

The relief in his voice is overwhelming

>clickety< >clickety<

"Yep. Both your x-defaults and AND your newsrsrc 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.."

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

Another problem solved by the Bastard Operator from Hell

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

1.21 The Bastard Operator From Britain #1

.....

"...I'd like to escalate this call please.."

"I'm sorry?" I can't help but be a little surprised at this guy's tone.

"I'd like to escalate the severity of this call. Surely a person in your situation is aware of the new International Standard regarding fault logging and tracking..."

He's obviously insane. There's no other reason why he'd call me this early on a monday afternoon, as soon as I've got to work...

"What was your username?"

He tells me, and some all-too-familiar key clicking noises follow. I notice his account has the pervert flag set, and yet he has no gif files in his directory - which can only mean one thing....

"Now, this escalation business, you want me to increase the priority with which I'll handle this call?"

"Yes!"

"Tell you what, I'll double it" I say, in gentle, soothing tones

"Good" he mutters

"...Now, twice nothing is nothing, and because it's an ESCALATED priority call, it goes into the RED rubbish bin instead of the brown one."

"WHAT!" he screams "DO YOU KNOW WHO YOU'RE TALKING TO?!?!"

"Well, I could look up your username and find out, but we deal with so many people here. Your name wouldn't mean anything. Not unless we'd seen you doing something *really* depraved on one of our hidden security cameras - you know the sort that were destined to be put in the computing labs to stop piracy, but actually got put in toilet cubicles after the installation order got corrupted somewhere between the purchasing office and the maintenance department. A freak electrical storm maybe... Anyway, unless you'd done something really disgusting that got caught on film...

...like..

(I look him up in the blackmail book)

.. like dressing up in women's underthings and dancing what looked (to the untrained observer) like the lead from "Mary Poppins", I'm afraid that your name wouldn't mean anything to us...."

I've heard the sharp intake of breath - he knows I've heard it, for him it's all over.

"Of course, if you were one of THOSE people, well, I'd remember you immediately, especially when reminiscing to the promotions board, all of whom are squarer than a Rubik's Cube. But I'm in a forgetful mood at the moment. I hope you don't mind if I forget that you called..."

"Yes, of course" he says, the last vestiges of self-respect vanishing.

"Goodbye now!" I cry cheerfully "But before you go, if you could be so kind as to send some money to the Operators Benevolent fund, I'd be so grateful - in fact my gratitude might make me careless with the bulk eraser, if you see what I mean.. ... Mary.."

He makes some wild promise of a large amount, and I keep my side of the deal by being careless with the bulk eraser. His account backups are a mere memory... Then I look thru the exabyte rack for the video tape in question, (Labelled Archive-26/5/90) and throw it in the "Post awaiting cheque clearance" bag, addressed to his boss..

It's for the best really, he was under a *lot* of pressure.

The next call of the day is from the User-Union, a pressure group that sprung up because some users thought they were getting a rough deal.

There's no pleasing some people!

Anyway, to get them off my back, I invite them in to see just how hectic an operator's life really is, and have prepared lots of flashing lights and alert sounds to keep the mindless cretins fooled...

They all file into the control room, about 10 of them in all, the dweebish types who hang out in groups like this as a social event. Things are going well, I'm answering calls and resetting "alarms" when some sour-faced old lard jockey ruins everything.

"These bells and lights don't fool me you know. I was an engineer on these babies when they first came out. This alarm sequence is invalid. There's no such alarm as 00-10-03-15-E. That just can't happen. You've probably just programmed the status display to say that! This is all a sham!!"

Trust there to be some re-education loser in the audience to totally stuff up my day. That just leaves plan B, although it's risky...

"Yes, it's true" I admit, cowering like Joan Crawford on a bender "It's all fake. I just didn't want you seeing what's in the computer room..."

They can't resist the bait. As soon as it looks like I'm hiding something they're in for the kill like Piranha.

"WHAT'S IN THE COMPUTER ROOM?!?!?" they demand, chomping at the bit

"Well," I say in my best 'this-is-it' voice, "you'd best see for yourself.."

..... ..

Later that day, I help the police try and piece the shocking scenario together...

"It's shocking!" I say, voice oozing with the horror of it all, "just terrible!"

"Yes yes" the officer mumbles, irritated "Let's just go over this one more time. You left them in the computer room to go and change some paper and they inadvertently triggered the Halon fire extinguishers..."

"Yes, yes, it's awful isn't it officer?!"

"..and even though there's a 30 second warning, they didn't manage to make it out the door..."

"Yes, it's such a tragedy"

"..even though two of the people who are supposed to have been smoking and set off the extinguishers in the room are dedicated non-smokers.."

"Yes, what an unfortunate time to take up the habit!"

"..and even though it looks, judging by the scratch marks that the door was in some way locked or jammed..."

"..probably jammed officer, It's a matter of public record that I voiced some concern over this very topic although no-one could find any problem with the lock in question..."

"And even though someone outside at the viewing window could have sworn that they saw you pressing the manual release button on the Halon panel.."

"YES, to try and reset the system and save those poor, innocent people.."

"After ALL that, you still expect me to believe it was an accident?"

"...Well officer, I don't really know what I expect you to do, but your face looks vaguely familiar. You haven't used the toilets around here in the past have you?"

"Well, I may have once or twice - we get a lot of calls over here since you've been here - suicides mainly..."

"Yes yes officer, well how about we go into the control room and look at a copy of a video I have, with someone who looks awfully like you, and what they do to a loaf of bread...."

...

...

Things are looking up!

1.22 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.

1.23 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

"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 it in an envelope and send it to me

personally..."

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

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

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

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

"By computer?..."

"Oh! What do you want?"

"The New Operators"

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

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

"Then what do you want?"

"TO TRAIN THEM!"

.....

.....

..

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

We start from the very beginning..

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

"They're ok, I suppose" he answers

"OK?"

"Well, they can be a pain at times"

"at times?"

"Well, a lot of the time?"

"A lot?"

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

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

"What they want?"

"No"

"What we think they want?"

"No"

"What WE want?"

"No"

"I DON'T KNOW!"

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

"What we want?"

"Exactly. And WHY do we do it?"

"Because they deserve it?"

"No..."

"To convince users not to call?"

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

"Oh! I suppose you're right"

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

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

"No no Agent Starling. That is a mere bagatelle. That is simply the method. We want to know the result. What we do is BREAK them. What's the point of deleting their files if they never use them? What's the point in reading someone's private 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?"

>HMMMMMMMMM<

AAAAAGH!