



The Bastard Operator From Hell

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The Revised, King James Prehistory of BOFH. Revision 6f - Where It Came From, How and Why...



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

Where it came from:

I was an Operator at the University of Waikato, back in the heady days when "Helpdesk" meant nothing, disk quota meant everything, and lives could be bought and sold for a couple of pages of laser printout - And frequently were. We Operators had powers verging on the Technical-Superhero. On one hand, we had the SYSTEM and root passwords, on the other hand, we had the excuse "Really? I didn't know DEL *.*;* would do that - I'm just an operator.."

All the power and none of the responsibility. Good Times. You could do ANYTHING to a user and no one would know. Well, they'd know, but they couldn't prove a thing. Still, I was bored, and frequently annoyed. In the late 80s, I even started to get bitter and twisted in the self-righteous way that people tend to get when they've got a cushy job.

However, I had in my hot little grasp a TRS80 Model 100 with a whopping 23K of memory (and no disk) with an onboard firmware text editor which I'd scored out of the bin during a building move. Part of a building management system that was never powered on because no one knew how to use it... BONUS! I started writing articles on it at home and posting them to Usenet news from work - the most difficult and important part being remembering to bring the Trash-80 in to do the upload as it'd only hold about 3 or so rants before the memory ran out. Sigh.

So I was writing the Striped Irregular Bucket (one of a series of oddball articles which had less to do with a storyline and more to do with emptying the bucket of a stream on unconsciousness) around 1988-89 or so - it's hard to remember - and I was in much the same situation as the poor operator I was writing about. I was bored. So I chunked out an episode which was far less offensive than some of my previous posts, (I was reading far too much of "alt.tasteless" at the time). Somewhere along the line, I mentioned computing and The Bastard Operator from Hell Manual. I started getting email from people very shortly after it was published, mentioning they liked the idea of a manual about how to be mean to users. (Remember, at this point in time Usenet News was really only used by the computer semi-literate and above, and not the cloven-hooved luser types who use it now.

So there was a higher percentage of support types to luser types back then, and they liked the idea of a world balanced in their favour for a The Bastard Operator From Hell change). Receiving email was unusual enough in itself, but receiving non-local and non-whiney email was almost unheard of. I was surprised. I thought it was just a quick fad however, and ignored what was blatantly obvious (that people liked it) and went on with other writing, resurrecting BOFH (who was as yet pretty much unnamed) in Striped Irregular Bucket #5.

More email came in and I'm no slow learner, so I thought I'd bash out a couple of BOFH articles. And still more email came in. I wrote a bit more, and then killed the BOFH off (as I had a tendency to do with characters that were written into a corner) only to find that people didn't want him dead. I resurrected him for a bit, then ran out of imagination and ideas and let it rest. I'd whack out a quick article for Christmas some years, usually just before, or during, the office party. I toyed with the Bastard System Manager From Hell for a bit, then put that to sleep as well. In late '92 I went to

London for a year to seek my fortune and see if the streets were paved with gold. They were not, but it was a great time for IT and I ended up working for a small oil company over there. To this day, whenever I think of Mission Control I think of the 2nd floor Operations Room of Enterprise Oil overlooking the Sherlock Holmes pub on Northumberland Street.

I bricked out a couple of episodes while I was there and posted them in a huuuugely roundabout manner because the company didn't have an internet connection at the time. Basically, I had to sneak into a basement at the University College London between the last lab time and the building closure time, write the article, send it to a NZ username, then post it to Usenet via an extremely laggy telnet link to a VMS machine running NEWS.

Talk about shocking response time... I still recall the heady delight when the Oil company finally got a dialup link to the real world. Good Times... During my UK time I'd get maybe one mail message a week from someone who'd just read it for the first time. I got back home, took up a job as Analyst Programmer, kissed the Computer Room goodbye, and thought that would make a fitting end to the BOFH.

That was the idea anyway.

Then enter Maxwell Cooter with a cunning plan...