

n the beginning (in the Mac universe, January 1, 1904 or Superbowl Sunday, 1984—take your pick), there was IBM. Big Brother. Public Enemy Number One. And it was bad.

If you don't believe me, check out Apple's infamous "1984" television commercial. This advertisement, aired internationally a single time during the 1984 SuperBowl, set up Big Blue as the Evil Empire; enemy of our personal freedom. The Macintosh would win out this epic battle against the dark. And not without just cause.

In the 1980's IBM made one of the most egregious blunders in the history of business decision making. A mistake that made the Ford Edsel look like a great idea. The company, whose motto was "THINK," thought the personal computers constituted too insignificant a market to waste valuable time developing their own chips and software. The company which had maintained a stronghold on computer industry since the day transistor had been invented instead decided to farm out chip production to the Intel Corporation, and contracted Bill Gates for the operating system.

Since that time, Intel has become the biggest producer of intelligent silicon on the planet. And Mr. Bill has become the world's richest man (and owns almost every piece of art to prove it). Meanwhile, IBM lost billions of dollars and had to cut loose blue suited employees by the hundred of thousands.

THINK indeed!

In 1984 we knew for certain who was bad. In the nineties, we learned they were foolish at best; criminally stupid at worst. "The Real Think" wasn't the real think anymore.

I'm not talking about Bill Cosby pitching us new Coke. (Who was he kidding anyway?) One fine day we woke up to find out that our beloved Mac was sleeping with the enemy. In a move designed to break the hegemony of Wintel's near monopoly on hardware and software, our favourite multi-colored fruit company got a bluish tinge when it jumped into bed with IBM (and Motorola) to concoct the PowerPC series of processors.

From that stunning moment, the writing was on the wall. If the two companies—bipolar opposites no less—could share processor technology, then they could also sell each other's system software. Hardly a month has gone by without some computer pundit somewhere telling us he told us so. Apple had to license its precious Macintosh operating system to its new partner-in-crime: IBM.

If Apple didn't wake up and smell the coffee soon...If it didn't complete the selling of its soul to the devil...If it didn't license System 7.x to 1984's worst enemy...well, then, its days were

truly numbered.

If I had a nickel for every time I read one of those editorials in Macworld, MacUser, MacWEEK, etc., well...I'd have enough semolians to buy me a Power Mac 9500 with all the trimmings!

And now, it has all come to pass. All of it.

Apple is now buddy-buddy with Big Brother. So much so that the Mac OS has a big blue vanity license plate on its backside. Apple has even tried to make Big Blue feel better by doing its "hemorrhaging money" impression: For the last six months, the company has seen hundreds of millions (not billions, yet) slip through its whethered fingers.

The lesson?

In 1984, International Business Machines corporation thought that personal computers were no way to make money. "Farm out the hardware. Farm out the software."

Across the great divide, Apple thought it could win out by holding all the hardware and software marbles in its own hands. "Don't farm out the hardware; Don't farm out the software."

They were both wrong.

In 1980, nobody at the world's biggest computer corporation could think through a simple Einsteinian thought experiment: What if a desktop computer became as smart as a mainframe?

What if a super computer's power could be put on the desk of Joe office worker and Jane home business owner at prices they could afford? What if they could make the PC as ubiquitous as the transistor radio?

What if you didn't need to buy a shrink-wrapped box of OS software along with your new PC box? What if you could get your operating system over the Internet when you brought your new bundle of joy home and plugged it in?

What if the real story this month is that Microsoft (and Apple) have licensed Java, and not that IBM has licensed the Mac OS?

THINK.

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