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COLUMN HEADING: WHERE THE MACINTOSH ROAM

TITLE: DR. TECHNOLOGY BITES THE BIG ONE

It is Saturday and I sit and stare at an unhappy Mac icon on my screen. It is amazing that an icon so “cute” represents a condition which, right now at least, signals the end of the world. It’s, well, inappropriate, like wearing a “Have a nice day” button to a friend’s funeral.

It seems my computer will not boot up, and I have a sizable workbook project due to a client early Monday. I also have tickets to the U2 concert on Sunday.

I have a lot of work to do.

I am in trouble.

Saturday—12:30 p.m.

I first discover my Macintosh no longer works. After a brief moment of disbelief, which soon subsides and is replaced by calm, which is then buried under a mountain of terror, panic sets in.

Of course, this can’t be happening to me. I revel in my denial through one-dozen attempts to start my Macintosh. The insipid unhappy Mac icon greets my every attempt.

I then launch into a complicated series of advanced, highly technical troubleshooting procedures not described in any Macintosh manual.

First off, I strike the computer. Whether this is designed to jar some vital component into place or simply intimidate the machine into working, I don’t know. Striking the computer is highly therapeutic though, and I feel much better afterwards. The Mac still does not work.

Next I examine it. I place it in the middle of the desk and rotate it through both the horizontal and vertical planes while rubbing my face and murmuring. A really nice touch here is to light a pipe and stoke it while giving the computer alternating thoughtful and bemused looks. This procedure also fails, although the lack of a pipe probably doomed it from the start.

Another advanced technique is to tug on the tangle of cables which grow out of the back of every computer. I almost forego this technique as the fear of electrocution is strong within me. A good idea here is to ask a friend or neighbor to tug. If his hand comes back in an unblackened condition, you might want to give this a try yourself.

After failing with all the above methods, I immediately launch into the most advanced of all Macintosh troubleshooting techniques, a method which combines the best features of all the procedures described above with some really outstanding pacing about the room. Rending one’s clothes at this point is a nice touch, and alcohol can make a truly exceptional contribution.

This method also fails.

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In the end, I am left with torn clothes, empty beer cans and blackened, bruised hands.

I am in trouble.

2:37 p.m.

I have deduced that my SuperMac Enhance memory upgrade is to blame, although the methodology by which I have arrived at this conclusion is unclear to me. But, I realize I cannot fix a SuperMac Enhance memory upgrade. Why? Because it is designed by aliens from another dimension, and looks like a bunch of after-dinner mints globbed together on an unattractive serving platter.

Another theory, one which will better fit my capabilities, is in order.

Then I realize, in a blinding flash of insight, that the upgrade is not working, and that upgrades use power, and I remember reading that power is something in very short supply in older Macintoshes. So I figure that the power supply is to blame.

This is good, because I can adjust a power supply, as it is as simple as turning a screw-driver, which is exactly the skill involved.

Getting to the power supply however, is another story. A special tool kit is required to open the Macintosh, a kit consisting of a long screwdriver which is useless for any other application, a spring loaded contraption which looks like something Torquemada would have approved of, and a nine-pound sledgehammer.

These tools are of course expensive, and in short supply on your average Saturday afternoon. In fact, the chances of finding a complete set of them can be illustrated by taking a snowball and...

Well, anyway, I finally do locate a these tools, and after a brisk yet relaxing 46 mile drive, have a set resting on the table beside my computer. I pick up the screwdriver and...

If I was in trouble before, I am now in critical condition.

6:22 p.m.

My Macintosh lays in pieces before me. A multimeter lays to the side and blinks numbers at me. I do not know what the numbers represent, but I know what they are supposed to look like. Yet, I do not trust this multimeter, as it is much dumber than even my Macintosh computer, which for all its brains and expense, cannot purchase beer or order a meal at a fast food restaurant.

I pace nervously while my brother fiddles with my power supply. He finally grunts approvingly and sits back.

I switch on the computer.

6:23 p.m.—6:29 p.m.

I weep.

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6:35 p.m.

After several minutes where I “deal with things in a constructive way” by screaming obscenities at the top of my lungs and racing about the house, I realize that I must consider some alternatives.

At the moment, they consist of:

A. Suicide

B. An extended vacation in an exotic locale as far away from Santa Clara as I can afford. That would be Oakland. I discard this option and return to the first.

C. Borrowing a computer. It just so happens that a client has a Mac Plus that I doubt will see any use this Sunday. With trembling hands and the knowledge that a yes answer will doom my concert-going plans to oblivion, I call.

He says yes.

6:39 p.m.

I am elated to get the computer, but saddened by the knowledge that the concert on Sunday will go on without me. I feel I must compensate somehow, and do so by playing U2’s last four albums (in ascending order) while air drumming wildly to the music. I drink heavily.

Sunday—9:33 a.m.

I drive over to the client’s location and get the Mac Plus. After returning home, I realize my Appletalk connector will not fit on a Mac Plus.

10:02 a.m.

I return to the client’s location and procure the correct cable.

10:55 a.m.

I throw the power switch on the Mac Plus. It works. I look impressed. I get to work.

10:35 p.m.

I am still working, having had to fight my way through a whole raft of revisions. Plus, the workbook contains dozens of TIFF files, a file format obviously created by disk drive manufacturers who think that every desktop publisher should have a 140 megabyte hard disk. I don’t .

Also, each chapter takes slightly longer than the last ice age to print, even though I stand beside the laser printer and urge it on.

Monday—12:47 a.m.

A file I had approximately three hours worth of work into crashes. It cannot be opened again. I smile.

In this case, the computer acted too late. I have already printed this file, and was only making a minor adjustment before saving.

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1:25 a.m.

The final page rolls out of the laser printer, the black type contrasting neatly with the Laser Plus paper. I notice a defect. I print it again.

1:33 a.m.

The final page rolls out of the laser printer, the black type contrasting neatly with the Laser Plus paper. There is no defect.

1:42 a.m.

I turn off the borrowed Macintosh Plus and disconnect the cables. In less than five hours I will stagger out of bed and return the Mac Plus to its owner. In less than seven hours I will meet with the client, who will complain because I didn't have the workbook for him Sunday. I will wish I owned a gun.

After my meeting, I will come home and vegetate for one hour before thundering off to Berkeley in an attempt to get my Macintosh repaired.

When I get home in the late afternoon, I will plug in my Macintosh to make sure it does indeed work.

Then I will read the paper, which will say the concert was a wild and exciting affair. I will be overjoyed that those who got to see the concert had such a nice time.

I will then go into my office and stare at my Mac screen in an attempt to get some accounting done. I will fall asleep.