

Beware the Power of Root

When you're logged in as root, you have increased power over your system and your system's network. This is great! It's part of the power of UNIX. It also means that you have to be careful, because you can do serious damage to your system if you inadvertently press the wrong key.

In System Software Release 2.0 and 2.1, for instance, a user logged in as root can initialize the system disk from the Workspace menu (we realize that this is not an ideal feature). Under the Disk command in the Workspace menu, you can choose Initialize. If the directory or file that you have selected in your File Viewer is on the hard disk, your hard disk will be initialized. The only way to recover from this is to restore your disk from a *current* backup.

After you click Initialize, a panel comes up that says: "Do you really want to erase hard disk?" (The default choice is erase.) This looks almost identical to the panel that comes up when you are initializing floppy disks: "Do you really want to erase floppy disk `disk_name'?" Remember, the path that you have selected in the File Viewer determines the device that the Workspace will try to initialize.

To avoid such a mistake, only log in as root when absolutely necessary (this is usually pretty rare). You can su to root in a shell, and all of the NeXT administration applications will ask you for a root password if you are not logged in as root. If you must log in as root, be *very* careful and never leave your machine unattended.

You only need to use the Initialize command in the Workspace menu if you are reinitializing a floppy disk (the first initialization is automatic).