

The Elves and the Computer-maker



Once upon a time, in a galaxy far, far away...

(Oops, wrong story).

Ahem.

Once upon a time, somewhere in deepest, darkest Wales, there lived an old, old computer-maker. He was so old that - gather closer, boys and girls, because this is a scary bit - he could remember when Windows first came out!!

Now it came to pass that a terrible recession afflicted the land and the computer-maker became so poor that finally he had only enough components to build one more PC. He worked late into the night but he was just too tired to finish so he went home and left the parts on the bench in his workshop.

Imagine his astonishment when he came back the next morning! *(Well at least try. A degree of audience participation wouldn't kill you).* There on the bench was a perfectly built PC! The silver trim on the case gleamed. The labels were scrupulously aligned. Stunned, he pressed the power button. The system *booted*. Windows *ran*. *(NB. This is never a foregone conclusion in any version of Windows and is, in fact, a design feature created by Microsoft to render computer-makers old before their time).* The computer-maker was amazed. He took the computer and placed it in the window and within an hour, a customer came in and bought it.

The computer-maker was thrilled. Now he had enough money to build two PCs. He ordered the parts for delivery the next day. Unfortunately, there was a new delivery driver on the route and he trusted to his sat-nav, which steered him into a narrow cul-de-sac and left him stranded by the bollards, which can be a nasty experience for a young lad. By the time he was rescued and the parts delivered, it was too late to begin work, so the computer-maker laid them on the bench, ready for him to make a start in the morning.

So imagine his astonishment when he came back the next day! There on the bench were *two* perfectly built PCs! The computer-maker could not believe his good fortune and quickly sold these PCs as well. Now he could buy parts for *four* PCs! *(Oh stop trying to work out his profit margin. This isn't Ask The Family. It's a fairy story for heaven's sake).*

When the parts arrived, the computer-maker

thought "I shall stay hidden here tonight, and see who is building my PCs".

At about 3am, a scampering of little feet woke him from a fitful sleep. Swarming all over the bench were little elves in red pointy hats *(yeah, yeah, it's racial stereotyping. So sue me)*. The computer-maker tiptoed across to watch. Finally, one of the elves noticed him and nudged his neighbour. The nudges multiplied till all activity had stopped. The computer-maker found himself the baleful focus of a hundred pairs of little squinty eyes.

"What you looking at, boyo?" snapped one of the elves, his beard bristling with indignation.

"I... I'm sorry. I just wanted to see what you were doing", replied the computer-maker.

"Well if we wanted an audience, see, we'd come in the daytime, isn't it?"

An elf with a clipboard and a beard you could hide a pygmy in stomped over.

"What's this? Why've you lot stopped? Here, you haven't gone on ... on..."

His face turned puce, "on....*ssstrike*!" he hissed.

A hundred little pointy hats swivelled in unison. "Nossir... *mumble, mumble*... never, not us, *mumble*... absolutely not."

The elves went back to work. A motherboard with an elf on each corner disappeared inside the case.

The elf with the clipboard squinted up at the computer-maker and stuck out a tiny hand. "Jones the Clipboard. I'm in charge here, see?"

The computer-maker took the hand gingerly between two of his fingers.

"Pleased to meet you. And who are these other fine fellows, pray?"

The elf waved vaguely. "Jones the Memory, Jones the Drive, Jones the Processor, Jones the Case...." Elves nodded, raised a hand or occasionally said 'Yo!' "...Jones the Cable Tie, Jones the Snips, ...*sigh*... Evans the Steps..." This last was directed at a gormless-looking individual perched on a heatsink, singing "*Love Me Tender*".

"He doesn't look like an elf", said the computer-maker.

"No, well he's not. He's a gnome, see? He just thinks he's Elvish." *(It'll get worse, honest).*

"What's his job?" asked the computer-maker.

"Well if we're working up high, we stand on him."

"Oh, but surely that's not safe?"

The elf recoiled as though he'd been slapped.

"Safe? Look you, you're not one of those people from..." he spat, "...*Ellin Safety*?" *(Told ya).*

"No, no, certainly not", stammered the computer-



maker. "What do they do then?"

"Do? *Do?* Interfere, isn't it? *You can't be standing on Evans the Steps*, they said. *He hasn't been risk-assessed*. Well that's a lie for a start! I assessed him myself, see, and he's a risk to the whole damned team in fact! Last time we let him help on a build, he went and plugged all the loose cables in. All of them! Just plugged them in anywhere. Well!! Young Jones the Power pressed the button...." The elf shook his head and several cable ties fell out of his beard. "Duw duw. Poor lad. That's him over there." Jones the Clipboard pointed at a twitching elf with no eyebrows and a beard that looked like a bad example of slash and burn agriculture.

"And now the latest thing", Jones the Clipboard was on a roll, "the latest thing, mind you, is hard hats. *Ellin Safety says you must wear hard hats when working inside the case*". Waves of indignation radiated from the elf. "You can't ask an elf to take off his pointy hat!!!" Behind him, two sticks of memory were lobbed inside the case and caught by a team of elves.

"And night shifts!" Jones the Clipboard was building up a real head of steam - the computer-maker could see wisps of it curling out his ears. "*Working unsocial hours* they call it. Well I say take it up with the bugger who wrote the story!"

"Grimm", supplied the computer-maker.

"It bloody is, I don't mind telling you!"

The first computer was completely built now. An elf scampered over the keyboard while another recited the Windows product key.

"*Grumpy... Sneazy... 1... Dopey... 4... dash... Happy... 7... 9... Itchy... Bashful...*"

"That's an... ummm... unusual phonetic alphabet", ventured the computer-maker.

"What? Oh, the Dwarf Alphabet?"

"Well yes. I'm familiar with Grumpy and Sneazy, but er... Itchy...?"

"Ah well, there's lots of dwarves never made it to Hollywood like Doc and the boys. And one hit wonders, weren't they? Film was a huge success, but. Strangers shouting 'Hi-ho!' at them in the street. So word was there was going to be another film about the Seven, and this time the bald one would be the star, see? Well imagine!! Dopey was on cloud nine, wasn't he but?" Jones the Clipboard shook his head sadly, dislodging another couple of cable ties and four case screws. "Turned out to be some kind of cowboy film. They cast Yul Brynner...."

A *da-daaaaaang!* behind them confirmed the first computer was now up and running.

"That really was jolly quick", noted the computer-maker. As one, the elves gasped in horror.

"No, no, no!" Jones the Clipboard waved at him frantically. "You mustn't use the j-word!!"

"Why ever not? I thought elves were always jo... er.. happy. Santa's little helpers and all that."

More gasps from the assembled elves. One or two keeled over in a dead faint.

Jones the Clipboard smacked him hard with his clipboard.

"You're really getting on my pointy hat, you know boyo?" He lowered his voice. "Thing is, we all used to be Little Helpers, see? But... well... it didn't work out. Too much fiddling."

"*You stole?*" The computer-maker was aghast.

"Course not! *Tweaking*. Making the toys more *realistic*, see? 'Cept we didn't know when to stop". He sighed. "Came to a head when a mouse chewed its way out of some kiddie's *Mousetrap*, widdled all over the board and disappeared into the skirting." He drew a deep breath. "Anyway, Santa sacked the lot of us. Terrible, it was. Stripped of our pointy hats and turned out into the wilderness."

"That's *awful!*"

"Duw, duw, wasn't it but? The j-word still brings us out in a sweat. But there. We're happy now. Got our own IT company: Pointy Red Hat. We wanted just Red Hat", he confided, "but some other buggers had nabbed that".

"So it's all run by elves, then?"

"There's a couple of dwarves on the board, but they're just... *miner* shareholders! Ha!" Jones the Clipboard was tickled pink by this witticism.

"Ha. Yes. And you manage to earn a living?"

"Well we take a commission on the computers we build, don't we?"

"Er... I haven't paid you anything", the computer-maker observed hesitantly.

"Not as yet, no. But since you brought it up..." Jones the Clipboard pulled a pencil from behind his ear and started to write. "Seven computers... £20 commission each..." The computer-maker did some quick calculations. He could still make a half-decent profit. But Jones the Clipboard was still scribbling. "...travelling expenses... £28.20... per elf... compensation to Jones the Case... £500" He wagged his finger at the computer-maker. "Shoddy cases you bought, boyo. Edges like razors. Poor Jones got a nasty cut...." He stopped and totted up. "There. £3,460".

"*How much?!!*" The computer-maker was ashen.

"Ah, no, silly me, I've got it wrong". Jones the Clipboard rubbed out the total and the computer-maker breathed again. "It's £3,460 *plus VAT*. Duw! Always forget the VAT, me".

And so the elves lived happily ever after, while the computer-maker had to file for bankruptcy, suffered a nervous breakdown and was eventually sectioned under the Mental Elf Act.....