

I want to be a cavewoman

I am in the throws of a love/hate relationship. This testy affair takes me from wide-eyed moments of incredulous wonder to bouts of teeming frustration. Don't get all excited — I'm talking about my computer.

Computers invaded our lives seemingly instantaneously, allowing us to shop on-line, chat with strangers from Bali and download information from Antarctica in moments. They calculate, format, draw and organize things in seconds that would take lowly humans hours, days or weeks.

Yet to an average 'user', the relationship with a computer is a shaky one, riddled with terror and caution. One thing goes wrong, one tiny little error forcing the program to perform an illegal operation resulting in shutdown, and we're lost. Is it hardware or software? Where is the reset button on this thing anyway?

The technologically apt individuals in society can't even begin to understand our predicament. When I ask how he knows all this cyber-stuff, my self-acclaimed 'computer geek' boyfriend responds with a complete lack of sympathy.

"Listen, science woman," he says tartly, "How do you think all those famous scientists discovered all the stuff science is based on?" Trial and error, of course.

He's right, but when Niels Bohr was attempting to devise a model of the atom, he knew vaguely what he was working with. My problem with computers is that I don't know what information I'm missing.

In an attempt to upgrade my inadequate database of computer knowledge, I took a computer course for people who know nothing about computers. Now I can use applications, send e-mail, FTP and make nice little web

pages in HTML. Great, but when something goes wrong, I'm still dead in the water.

The pop-up error windows

keyboard, it's easy to relate. Computers are such an integrated part of the modern world that we don't have a choice but to embrace their presence. If this reality were a nightmare, we would be running, lost on a giant motherboard, with menacing capacitors and circuits barrelling after us.

There must be a happy medium between "userhood" and "computer expert," but I have no idea how to get there. There is a need to bridge the gap between these segregated categories of people in this technological world. Average Joe computer user is sick of calling tech support hotlines, only to be snickered at by cocky folk who can reassemble a computer with one hand tied behind their back.

I want to know how my computer works, I want to know how to fix things when they go wrong, and even know what it is that went wrong in the first place. I know, if I take my computer apart to learn by trial and error that I'll end up with an irreparable puddle of microchips and two thousand dollars in the hole. Furthermore, I'll be filling the pockets of those who know how to put my computer back together, widening that gap between us.

Perhaps greater universal education on this topic will cut down on the number of e-mails I receive from likewise colleagues, entitled "I Hate Computers!"

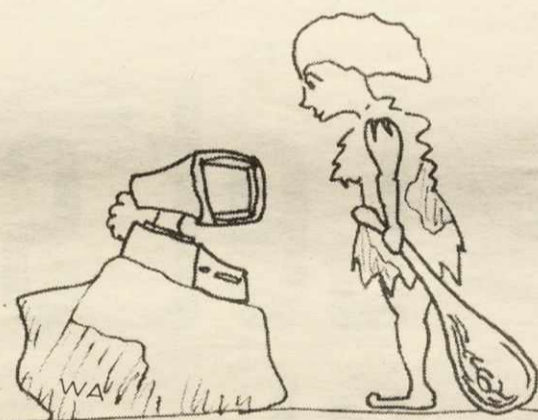
Janet French

with which a computer provides you are no consolation either. First, they're written in some dialect of Swahili that even the sharpest of computer geeks has difficulty deciphering. Secondly, a knowledgeable friend has informed me that some of the messages which appear aren't even the right ones, as they can mis-diagnose their own problems.

A frazzled user, panicking by this point, then turns to the only remaining part of the graphical user interface that might provide counsel — the help menu. Which raises the question, what sad, sorry Microserf came up with the phenomenon of a help menu completely void of useful information? It should be called the '500 things you already know how to do when using this application, and 15 things so obscure you will never need to do them' menu, but that didn't fit well on the title bar.

When you see videotape footage from surveillance cameras capturing office-cubicle staff turned psychotic, pummeling the heck out of a CPU with their

EDITORIAL



LETTERS

Bookstore reality check time

To the Editor,

Lately, I've been hearing about accusations against the bookstore claiming that the bookstore is gouging students. It's easy to believe that when you spend at least \$100 per book at the bookstore and you haven't even got to the taxes yet. But I think that the accusations of gouging are a little off the mark. The bookstore isn't gouging customers, the manager is just being plain stupid.

The bookstore claims that online competition has forced them to raise prices. It's true that many students are finding cheaper books online at places like Barnes & Noble. Of course, the average next-to-broke student will go for the cheaper books online. What the bookstore seems to think is that more students will come to the store if prices are raised. It doesn't take a genius to figure out that higher prices drive away customers.

So what is the bookstore's motivation for higher prices? Did the extra cash fund the recent commercials I've seen promoting area bookstores? What's to advertise? Every Dal student is aware of the bookstore's presence. Is it really to recover lost revenue? If the bookstore people wanted us to buy that one, wouldn't they have released their numbers showing roughly what they make so we can believe them? Without hard numbers, the "not enough revenue" line will not pass over on us.

Here's a reality check. Online bookstores are getting more and more business from us students. The bookstore needs to compete with these people to win back customers. If raising prices is how they think they are going to do it, they will have to learn the hard way. Eventually, there won't be enough of a customer base to keep the bookstore up. The bookstore will be out of business and students will have nowhere to turn to for supplies and Dal paraphernalia. The bookstore will die if this keeps up. Instead, why not lower prices next time, and see the sales figures rise again. With more book orders due to more students, cost will be reduced and the bookstore will be able to afford to sell books for these reduced prices.

The prices don't have to be quite as low as online bookstores, as the great service and convenience of buying on campus is worth a few extra dollars.

These are the basics of competition, and unless the bookstore wakes up and smells the coffee, the store will go under and I will help dig the grave by making online bookstores widely known and sending my money elsewhere.

Mark Annis

Point of cartoon was missed

To the Editor,

This is in response to Brendan Murphy's letter titled, "Poor Taste," in the September 30th issue of *the Gazette*. First of all, Mr. Murphy, I am sorry that you found this comic demeaning, that was not my intent. However, I have every right to express any thoughts or opinions I might have.

Secondly, you shouldn't criticize *the Gazette's* intellects due to this comic. The phrase "don't shoot the messenger" comes to mind. Johnny Gazette didn't draw the cartoon; it represents one person's independent view. You say it is not about Hollywood's objectification of women. That's your opinion, and you're entitled to it. However, you could say I was mocking eleven year old alien transsexuals and that would not make it true. I am sorry you perceived the comic the way you did, but I guess it's human nature for people to have very differing opinions.

Why, Mr. Murphy, did I demean the topic? Because I truthfully portrayed a situation that is all too familiar to many women in Hollywood? You're right when you say it is a topic that many are passionate about. Does that mean it's not allowed to be addressed anymore? I am not condoning or encouraging the type of behaviour in which the comic depicts. I am simply saying it's a rough business, and people are continuously being taken advantage of. My example was of a woman, but this is not strictly a female problem. Some people would even say this sort of thing creates awareness, but obviously you do not fall into this category.

Apparently I am not insightful enough for you. Controversial comedy does often force us to reconsider the society we live in, but who are you to set the standards of what controversial comedy should be? If I want to open people's eyes to the world we live in, or if I want to be as straightforward as *the Family Circus*, shouldn't that be my choice? Or should I get a philosophy degree before even considering drawing comics?

It is a played out line from a not so funny movie, and I am tired of hearing it. What I'm not tired of hearing is people speaking up about the many not so funny problems that face the society in which we live. You found this comic demeaning, I think you missed "de-meaning."

Varnson
"Dude who can't draw"

THE DALHOUSIE GAZETTE

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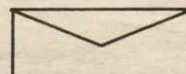
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All submissions must be typed double-spaced on paper, e-mailed, or on a Mac or IBM 3 1/2 inch disk, in a WP version not greater than Word 6.0 or equivalent. The deadline is Mondays at 4:30 p.m.

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