

The Crazy Helpdesk
and their brave users



or how to fall in love with a computer

@n IT novel

by Tannessen and the people of MOU XII

The Crazy HelpDesk

for my users ;-)

'Licence Agreement'

☞ The writer of this manual has worked in many Helpdesks, has answered calls from many thousands of users, had dozens of colleagues, has worked as and with Email Administrators, Webmasters, Programmers, Teachers, Support Staff. Hence any resemblance with existing persons is a pure and well meant coincidence, as only kind things can be said about them. ☞

The Crazy HelpDesk

Summary

Summary	5
Switch on	10
Start	11
The %Environnement%	14
The House	17
The day when chaos came	20
The new Helpdesk	22
Chaos installs	29
🎵 It's lunchtime	32
The visit of the Garden gnomes	39
📧 Make a distribution list in Outlook	43
The good Helpdesk	45
FAQs Windows	52
Menu Bars.....	53
Toolbars	53
Taskbar	54
🗑️ “Must I now right-click or left-click or what-click?”	54
Zip files, pdf files, expand & collapse	54
It's raining trainees	56
Active Directory	56
Logon.....	59
Change password.....	65
The Key and Super User	67
Network, LAN, router, hub, IP address, Gateway, TCP/IP	71
Tools-Options-Preferences	73
Registry.....	73
Where are my documents?	78
A dangerous command: Save and Save As.....	78
Files and Folders.....	81
Create a new folder	82
Servers	83

The Crazy HelpDesk

Shares.....	83
Permissions	85
♪ It's lunchtime.....	85
The mystery of the E: drive	86
Map – because what is life without an E: drive	89
Where put my documents	90
The diabolic plan	94
Sensitive Hardware	100
Blue screen of death.....	103
Restart your computer.....	104
Wrong Keyboard Driver	104
Printers stuck	104
What's a Driver.....	106
♪ It's lunchtime.....	107
Network problems	111
IP-Address	111
Sound not working.....	113
Digital camera.....	114
USB-FlashDisk.....	114
Icons and text too small	116
And all those cables	117
Phantom users	118
Permissions!.....	124
♪ It's lunchtime	125
Show this folder as an Email address book	127
All work and no play.....	131
♪ It's lunchtime	140
A Computer romance	143
♪ It's lunchtime	146
Logon not working	151
Wanted! The problem user	153
Black screen.....	154
♪ It's lunchtime.	160
The Light.....	164
Some VBScript code.....	166

The Crazy HelpDesk

Show this folder as an Email address book	168
Properties	169
🎵 It's lunchtime	170
The World is watching.....	173
Intranet & Internet	173
JavaScript.....	178
I love only two things in life.....	179
Magic is needed	188
🎵 It's lunchtime	192
Grateful users	194
Doctor Watson in jail.....	202
a Tab in a table.....	207
Copy a good text format elsewhere	207
Corrupted documents.....	208
Check Spelling as you type.....	212
🎵 It's lunchtime	212
The midnight fair	216
🎵 A Midnight lunch.....	216
Artificial Intelligence, Biometrics	218
Incognito Mailboxes	220
Birthday databases.....	223
Install a delegate Access	224
Tracking Options	228
🎵 It's lunchtime	232
A Birthday database in MS Access.....	233
Create a table	234
Create a Form	235
Print a Report.....	236
Create a Select Query in Access	237
Update Query.....	238
Relational databases.....	238
Web princes	241
Learn Internet in 5 minutes.....	241
Find a topic, save a picture of it, send the page by Email, save the link, page not found and HTTP 404	241

The Crazy HelpDesk

♪ It's lunchtime.....	246
Misty children.....	249
Minimum requirements for a PC	253
Web crushes.....	260
♪ It's lunchtime	266
@ Bracelet.....	269
♪ Instead of lunch	272
Search for files you can't find.....	273
Poetic formulas.....	276
Some mysterious formulas in Excel.	279
Carnival.....	286
♪ And some lunchtime.....	295
Garden of Software.....	297
Digital Sender	299
Acrobat PDF.....	299
Optical Character Recognition.....	299
Image editors	300
Audio editors	301
Burn a CD.....	302
Download sites.....	302
♪ It's lunchtime	304
A Bowl of Milk.....	305
A tangible formula	309
♪ It's lunchtime	311
Excel - Make a wish.....	314
Second line in an Excel cell.....	314
How to put an Excel table into Word.....	314
How to make a sheet fit on one page for printing.....	315
Print the table titles on each page	315
♪ It's lunchtime	319
Make a pretty signature in Outlook	319
Excel formulas. Date, String, If and more	321
Insert a Name for your end results.....	324
Lovely code	325
Macros	326

The Crazy HelpDesk

Loop.....	328
If-then-else.....	329
♪ It's lunchtime - but only an appointment yet	330
♪ It's lunchtime - but nothing happens.....	333
WordArt.....	333
The secret room.....	335
To catch a virus	340
Hackers, Crackers, Viruses, Spam and &	341
How to protect your Home PC.	346
An outspoken formula	348
♪ It's lunchtime.....	354
Filter in Outlook	355
Send a distribution list to a colleague	355
I did do nothing	358
Save your documents.....	358
Extensions *.doc, *.xls	359
Some famous file extensions	359
The Have Fun formula.....	372
Do a WebPage in 5 minutes.....	381
How to do a webpage in five minutes.....	385
Track them!	389
Prison.....	396
A free time formula.....	402
Hide annoying codes.....	405
♪ It's lunchtime.....	407
A testimony	414
The strange attractor	421
♪ It's lunchtime.....	422
Shutdown	427
Restart.....	430

Switch on



Press the button
to turn
the computer on

After you've pushed the button your personal computer will use his microprocessor to start a programme, the BIOS, the basic input/output system, to *boot* and load his *operating system*.

Don't let that worry you. The OS, the operating system, is the system which operates the computer, like the motor does a car. To express it mildly. One of those OS is *Windows*. Another one is called *Linux*.

The PC will thus boot, slowly, slowly, feeling important, wanting to convey this feeling to you.

Then, once the operating system is finally loaded, you can log on, by typing your username and password, and you'll see the Desktop appear and be ready to use the *peripherals* like the printer, mouse, keyboard and run *application programmes* like Word, Excel, Access, Outlook, Paint Shop Pro and trillions of others.

The Crazy HelpDesk



When a user¹ gets on my nerves, because I find him too slow, not up to date or of an older version, I always try to imagine what would happen if instead of dealing with computers I'd have to knit or do something like carve gems or iron, be a goldsmith or a jeweller, or work in mines.

Dreadful. Instead of using PC's I'd have to use knitting needles, and I'd have to have some manual gift. I imagine my hands holding files (metal, not logical ones) or twist drills, hot, sticky, cramped, all red even in the effort to succeed. I'd be in tears. Imagine my weak hand holding a heavy hammer, I just couldn't even lift it and would hit my own thumb all the time. Typing on a keyboard or devising complicated formulas suits me better.

I'd have to call the Iron or Gold Helpdesk. Moreover, this sort of craftsmanship would require patience, and of this kind of patience I have none.

All the beautiful gems would come to nothing. Diamonds, gold, silver, pearls, opals, sapphire, emeralds, rubies, topaz, would never join to become necklaces, rings, brooches, pendants or earrings.

Each of us has a gift of his own. There are star cooks, sensei's in martial arts, pilots for trains, planes and ships, doctors, chemists, biologists, physicians, painters, musicians, poets, singers, mothers, teachers, jewellers, iron workers, architects and informaticians. Everyone has learned a craft, has acquired experience in it and is doing it well. Fortunately we don't have to know all that on top of our own job. But for the computers.

Almost everyone nowadays has to use a computer in one way or the other. We're dealing with computers just as Monsieur Jourdain² was speaking in prose without knowing it. But this means doing two jobs. Doing two jobs at the same time is a lot to ask, and knowing all about computers takes a lot of time.

People are astonished to find us so gifted for our job, but that's because it's our job, and we are doing it all day long. The big difference with computers is that almost everyone who works in an office has to use them all the time, whereas we in our job do not need to write long reports, or devise law, nor do we have to translate or take steno or organise our bosses agenda or do one of all the many other office jobs you can imagine. But God help those who are not as good with computers as they are for their own job.

So those people can turn to the Computer Helpdesk for help. The Helpdesk is there for

¹ The Glossary at the end of the book explains the term

² Moliere's - The Bourgeois Gentleman

The Crazy HelpDesk

all people who do not have eight hours a day to know Computers from A to Z. The Helpdesk has to see that their users get working computers, well flowing programmes, all of which will allow them to work more quickly, efficiently and with less errors.

Now I can hear you laugh with some spite and you will say that this is not the case at all and that PC's are not always working, that Email falls down several times a week and is often slower than the postman. You are going to say that computer programmes instead of helping you are a permanent source of trouble and seem to do everything in their power to keep you from working.

You are going to tell me that basic things like the logon to your PC in the morning take an hour, and that even to type a simple letter in Word you must call the Helpdesk because you get an error message before you have even started to type.

Carl Sagan says that we live in a society exquisitely dependent on science and technology, in which hardly anyone knows anything about science and technology. Computers claim to make peoples lives easier but in many ways they rather poison them. One day you will come and hang us computer people like the French peasantry did with their aristocrats.

At this point, I may have joined the side of the enemy. Things have gotten out of hand. I believed that computers were going to help you, now I sometimes have the impression we have to protect you from them. As well as we can.

Because even the Computer Helpdesk has a limit, which might not be passed, a situation against which it is helpless, which it can't handle, and that is Chaos.

This is the story about the day Chaos came and the strange events that followed its apparition.

You call us IT people magicians sometimes; at least this has been said to me and my colleagues quite a lot. And since we are magicians, you believe we can convey our knowledge to you just by magic, just by some formula. You do not believe us when we say we can't, and suspect us of being stingy. Wanting to keep all this for ourselves. You say:

“Magician! How do you do it! Tell us how. We're sure you could, if you only would.”

But we were plain sure we couldn't just give you our knack with computers just by chanting some formula. But when chaos went really bad, and when we were really desperate too, when we felt we really could need some magic ourselves, we decided to try.

“Magician! How do you do it?”

Ok. You've asked for it. I don't know about the magic, but this is how we do it.

The book also strives to contain many of the most fashionable FAQs, but those change of course. A specific command doing the same thing will be slightly or very different from one version of the same software to the other. It changes all the time. This might make it a bit of a one night stand, but we hope to leave you with the spirit and wish that the underlying principles might stay with you.

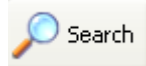
The Crazy HelpDesk

Most of it is easy, but if you don't understand something in this manual don't even try. If you see an apparently complicated formula or script then don't worry. Take it 'automagically'. Sit back, don't do anything, RELAX.

The %Environnement%

There was once a big, powerful computer, very beautiful, and his pretty little wife, very mighty too. They were reigning over a big park of PC's and were very, very happy. Their only secret sorrow was ..

Bohatia, the country we are living in, is rather small. There only 150.000 inhabitants or so. Small but rich. Of course. Imagine something like San Marino, Liechtenstein or Malta. Not quite as small as San Marino, not quite as big as Malta. Though it is neither of those. Ah you can Search Reader, all over your Hard and Floppy disks, CD's or DVD's, google it up, we just cannot let you find out.



On a map, the country is more difficult to find than a file in the Hidden Folders of Windows XP. It lies at a deeper level than even the sombre OLKxxx folder where Outlook disposes an attachment you open from within an email message. You may know about Bohatia, but you won't know you know.

It is quite a pretty country, with a landscape of hills and a curious formation of a multitude of grey rocks and high mountains at its borders. The rocks are elegant, sort of well-designed, and there are lots of rivers and little lakes and one quite big one. Contemporary technology and architecture have made it up to date and fit for our modern world. Bridges large and small, tunnels cutting through the rocks, tiny landing stages and piers at their feet make it easy to walk around in. With all those rocks and hills and the country being small there is not so much space left for living. It was advocated by the authorities not to spend too much money on cars and so people drive around in small electric vehicles and motorcycles, bicycles, roller skates, go carts, skateboards or go by foot. Thus traffic here was a dream for those of us who came from big cities like Paris, Buenos Aires, New York, Sidney or Tokyo.

All in all it is a really pretty little country; but maybe the weather is not too good.

Indeed for those who come from the South it rains a bit too much, and because of the rivers and ponds, there is a lot of mist. Misty days in Bohatia are common. One could say it was a country where one could not see quite through things most of the time.

Was this, like in some programmes, *'by Design'*?

Bohatia is rich and modern, equipped with ADSL and solar heating and windmills producing electricity, but it is also very old fashioned in some of its ways, because it is a Principality. Indeed, we have a Prince. Prince Martin. He is quite young too, and very

The Crazy HelpDesk

good looking and still not married, so that the girls can dream. His father, Prince Justin, has given the job over to him.

Bohatia's inhabitants come from many countries, joined in one single task: Work. We're immigrants, and indeed there are almost no natives in Bohatia except those few kids which have been born there since its 'creation' not very long ago. The few people who were already living there when we all came are a rather small, well-built and proud folk. It is a few thousands of them only, and their means of living is mostly of two kinds. One half is keeping wilds Goats. You could see them wandering around everywhere. The other half are Goldsmiths. Of course there was remaining minority which took care of the needs of daily life. Like bakers and doctors and librarians and so. Since there were not enough people to do all of those jobs, most Bohatians had two or even three of them.

Obviously those few natives considered themselves sort of invaded, but they took it well. It was a tolerant folk who still believed in honesty and would still reward good deeds.

Of the older inhabitants, and the country's history, not much is known. A people, who lived there up to the 14th century, but then mysteriously disappeared. No one knew where they come from, no one knew where they left to. There were only speculations. Archaeologists have searched and dug, but did not find out much about them, no old dwellings, no pictures, no graves... (Were they immortal maybe and have never died?) From the few findings, it seems that this old folk worked on gold and metal, and precious gems. They must have been making a quite impressive good living out of the gold and the gems that had once been here. Of the gold nothing seems to remain now, even if from time to time someone comes looking for it. At any rate the more ancient populace disappeared, probably together along with the last gem and gold nugget.

One thing we can be sure of: they liked to drink, juggling by the rather huge quantity of finely wrought goblets of all kinds that were found. Of those, there were many, so many that they were sold at quite cheap prices, and so I have one of them standing in my living room.

The old people left, and the new folk or the few of their later offspring resorted to goat keeping or jewellery. Prince Justin's father had called big mining companies to import their raw jewels to Bohatia. Jewels were now brought in from all over the world and transformed and assembled into necklaces, bracelets, earrings of a rare beauty. Those were jewels for the very rich ones only, to expensive even for our rather good salary.

But the 'White Gold', as the local goat cheese was called, was excellent too, and easy to afford. The friendly goats producing it were walking relatively freely around, and sometimes we could see one or two of them wandering by our offices.

Tales or rather now almost legends circulated affectionately among us new ones, like some thought the old people were still there, living sort of invisible among us, or having retreated into the grounds, into the depths of the caverns and mountains which surrounded Bohatia. Every now and then someone claimed to have seen one of them,

The Crazy HelpDesk

and even if it was a joke, the descriptions were strikingly similar: Small but strongly build men, with serious faces, and always a beard.

Of course, even those who had claimed to have had a glimpse of one of this folk, joked about this themselves, maybe because they hadn't wanted to believe their own eyes, maybe because they had no wish to be held for slightly deranged.

When you fly over Bohatia you will perceive the rocks and mountains of course, and the lakes, but you'll also see a lot of windows, in which the rocky landscape seems mirrored endlessly. This is where we work. It is the House.

The House

The House is a large place, it could be government or finance, research or profit, but in fact it's rather all of this. It could be any large organisation, your place even, if it's a fairly large place.

But the name of the place too must remain secret all along this booklet, because we're not allowed to talk or write about it in public without official permission. So let's just call it 'The House'. Let's say it's the House of Science. And if ever you guessed its name right then we would kindly ask you, the reader, to remain silent and share the secret with us.

Because I do not wish to be harsh on my House, I only wish to convey its magic to you. So should you find out, never tell, not even to your best friend, otherwise the magic will stop working. And then the House sure is full of secrets.

The House is huge, extending over several hundreds of meters up and down the mountains and along the river and around the lake. It's made out of at least twenty buildings, joined by bridges mainly, but also just leaning against each other.

The paths which join the buildings seem in perpetual movement. Sometimes one of them is just closed and one has to take a large roundabout route to reach his usual place, sometimes one of them opens unexpectedly and we can then cross to another building with more ease.

It is a labyrinth, three dimensional, and sometimes when you had to go to what seemed only one floor up you had to for instance first go south and walk along a long corridor, then turn west, walk a few meters, take an elevator down to the ground floor, walk another two hundred meters, take a stair flight up, turn east, walk some hundred paces, take an elevator up (if it was working), turn north, take a walk again, then turn around corner again and you were finally in the office just above yours.

Every so often there was no direct entrance to a building and you could only reach it by accessing it through still some other building, three or more afar.

One had to know shortcuts. If one knew them, one could spare hours of time. As you will if you know how to 'Add a Network Place' in 'My Computer' of Windows XP. In this labyrinth shortcuts were as precious to know as the highest officials. Almost as good as to have a blood link to them. Things would just go faster if you knew them. Shortcuts gave you as much power as if you were one of them. Shortcuts were kept secret, you would share them only with your most precious colleagues, and more, if they became to well know, they would be inevitably closed by security.

If you knew how to 'Add a Network Place'

you could reach a faraway destination, deeply nested at the bottom of a folder, in just one click instead of maybe fifteen.

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