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```
#======= THIS IS THE JARGON FILE, VERSION 4.2.0, 31 JAN 2000 =======#
```

This is the Jargon File, a comprehensive compendium of hacker slang illuminating many aspects of hackish tradition, folklore, and humor.

This document (the Jargon File) is in the public domain, to be freely used, shared, and modified. There are (by intention) no legal restraints on what you can do with it, but there are traditions about its proper use to which many hackers are quite strongly attached. Please extend the courtesy of proper citation when you quote the File, ideally with a version number, as it will change and grow over time. (Examples of appropriate citation form: "Jargon File 4.2.0" or "The on-line hacker Jargon File, version 4.2.0, 31 JAN 2000".)

The Jargon File is a common heritage of the hacker culture. Over the years a number of individuals have volunteered considerable time to maintaining the File and been recognized by the net at large as editors of it. Editorial responsibilities include: to collate contributions and suggestions from others; to seek out corroborating information; to cross-reference related entries; to keep the file in a consistent format; and to announce and distribute updated versions periodically. Current volunteer editors include:

Eric Raymond esr@snark.thyrsus.com

Although there is no requirement that you do so, it is considered good form to check with an editor before quoting the File in a published work or commercial product. We may have additional information that would be helpful to you and can assist you in framing your quote to reflect not only the letter of the File but its spirit as well.

All contributions and suggestions about this file sent to a volunteer editor are gratefully received and will be regarded, unless otherwise labelled, as freely given donations for possible use as part of this public-domain file.

From time to time a snapshot of this file has been polished, edited, and formatted for commercial publication with the cooperation of the volunteer editors and the hacker community at large. If you wish to have a bound paper copy of this file, you may find it convenient to purchase one of these. They often contain additional material not found in on-line versions. The two `authorized' editions so far are described in the Revision History section; there may be more in the future.

- Introduction: The purpose and scope of this File
- A Few Terms: Of Slang, Jargon and Techspeak
- Revision History: How the File came to be

- Jargon Construction: How hackers invent jargon
- Hacker Writing Style: How they write
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- Hacker Speech Style: How hackers talk
- International Style: Some notes on usage outside the U.S.
- Lamer-speak: Crackers, Phreaks, and Lamers

- Pronunciation Guide: How to read the pronunciation keys
- Other Lexicon Conventions: How to read lexicon entries
- Format for New Entries: How to submit new entries for the File

- The Jargon Lexicon: The lexicon itself

- Appendix A: Hacker Folklore
- Appendix B: A Portrait of J. Random Hacker
- Appendix C: Helping Hacker Culture Grow
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Introduction

This document is a collection of slang terms used by various subcultures of computer hackers. Though some technical material is included for background and flavor, it is not a technical dictionary; what we describe here is the language hackers use among themselves for fun, social communication, and technical debate.

The `hacker culture' is actually a loosely networked collection of subcultures that is nevertheless conscious of some important shared experiences, shared roots, and shared values. It has its own myths, heroes, villains, folk epics, in-jokes, taboos, and dreams. Because hackers as a group are particularly creative people who define themselves partly by rejection of `normal' values and working habits, it has unusually rich and conscious traditions for an intentional culture less than 40 years old.

As usual with slang, the special vocabulary of hackers helps hold their culture together -- it helps hackers recognize each other's places in the community and expresses shared values and experiences. Also as usual, *not* knowing the slang (or using it inappropriately) defines one as an outsider, a mundane, or (worst of all in hackish vocabulary) possibly even a **suit**. All human cultures use slang in this threefold way -- as a tool of communication, and of inclusion, and of exclusion.

Among hackers, though, slang has a subtler aspect, paralleled perhaps in the slang of jazz musicians and some kinds of fine artists but hard to detect in most technical or scientific cultures; parts of it are code for shared states of *consciousness*. There is a whole range of altered states and problem-solving mental stances basic to high-level hacking which don't fit into conventional linguistic reality any better than a Coltrane solo or one of Maurits Escher's `trompe l'oeil' compositions (Escher is a favorite of hackers), and hacker slang encodes these subtleties in many unobvious ways. As a simple example, take the distinction between a **kluge** and an **elegant** solution, and the differing connotations attached to each. The distinction is not only of engineering significance; it reaches right back into the nature of the generative processes in program design and asserts something important about two different kinds of relationship between the hacker and the hack. Hacker slang is unusually rich in implications of this kind, of overtones and undertones that illuminate the hackish psyche.

But there is more. Hackers, as a rule, love wordplay and are very conscious and inventive in their use of language. These traits seem to be common in young children, but the conformity-enforcing machine we are pleased to call an educational system bludgeons them out of most of us before adolescence. Thus, linguistic invention in most subcultures of the modern West is a halting and largely unconscious process. Hackers, by contrast, regard slang formation and use as a game to be played for conscious pleasure. Their inventions thus display an almost unique combination of the neotenous enjoyment of language-play with the discrimination of educated and powerful intelligence. Further, the electronic media which knit them together are fluid, `hot' connections, well adapted to both the dissemination of new slang and the ruthless culling of weak and superannuated specimens. The results of this process give us perhaps a uniquely intense and accelerated view of linguistic evolution in action.

Hacker slang also challenges some common linguistic and anthropological assumptions. For example, it has recently become fashionable to speak of `low-context' versus `high-context' communication, and to classify cultures by the preferred context level of their languages and art forms. It is usually claimed that

low-context communication (characterized by precision, clarity, and completeness of self-contained utterances) is typical in cultures which value logic, objectivity, individualism, and competition; by contrast, high-context communication (elliptical, emotive, nuance-filled, multi-modal, heavily coded) is associated with cultures which value subjectivity, consensus, cooperation, and tradition. What then are we to make of hackerdom, which is themed around extremely low-context interaction with computers and exhibits primarily "low-context" values, but cultivates an almost absurdly high-context slang style?

The intensity and consciousness of hackish invention make a compilation of hacker slang a particularly effective window into the surrounding culture -- and, in fact, this one is the latest version of an evolving compilation called the `Jargon File', maintained by hackers themselves for over 15 years. This one (like its ancestors) is primarily a lexicon, but also includes topic entries which collect background or sidelight information on hacker culture that would be awkward to try to subsume under individual slang definitions.

Though the format is that of a reference volume, it is intended that the material be enjoyable to browse. Even a complete outsider should find at least a chuckle on nearly every page, and much that is amusingly thought-provoking. But it is also true that hackers use humorous wordplay to make strong, sometimes combative statements about what they feel. Some of these entries reflect the views of opposing sides in disputes that have been genuinely passionate; this is deliberate. We have not tried to moderate or pretty up these disputes; rather we have attempted to ensure that *everyone's* sacred cows get gored, impartially. Compromise is not particularly a hackish virtue, but the honest presentation of divergent viewpoints is.

The reader with minimal computer background who finds some references incomprehensibly technical can safely ignore them. We have not felt it either necessary or desirable to eliminate all such; they, too, contribute flavor, and one of this document's major intended audiences -- fledgling hackers already partway inside the culture -- will benefit from them.

A selection of longer items of hacker folklore and humor is included in **Appendix A**. The `outside' reader's attention is particularly directed to the Portrait of J. Random Hacker in **Appendix B**. Appendix C, the **Bibliography**, lists some non-technical works which have either influenced or described the hacker culture.

Because hackerdom is an intentional culture (one each individual must choose by action to join), one should not be surprised that the line between description and influence can become more than a little blurred. Earlier versions of the Jargon File have played a central role in spreading hacker language and the culture that goes with it to successively larger populations, and we hope and expect that this one will do likewise.

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Of Slang, Jargon, and Techspeak

Linguists usually refer to informal language as `slang' and reserve the term `jargon' for the technical vocabularies of various occupations. However, the ancestor of this collection was called the `Jargon File', and hacker slang is traditionally `the jargon'. When talking about the jargon there is therefore no convenient way to distinguish it from what a *linguist* would call hackers' jargon -- the formal vocabulary they learn from textbooks, technical papers, and manuals.

To make a confused situation worse, the line between hacker slang and the vocabulary of technical programming and computer science is fuzzy, and shifts over time. Further, this vocabulary is shared with a wider technical culture of programmers, many of whom are not hackers and do not speak or recognize hackish slang.

Accordingly, this lexicon will try to be as precise as the facts of usage permit about the distinctions among three categories:

- `slang': informal language from mainstream English or non-technical subcultures (bikers, rock fans, surfers, etc).
- `jargon': without qualifier, denotes informal `slangy' language peculiar to or predominantly found among hackers -- the subject of this lexicon.
- `techspeak': the formal technical vocabulary of programming, computer science, electronics, and other fields connected to hacking.

This terminology will be consistently used throughout the remainder of this lexicon.

The jargon/techspeak distinction is the delicate one. A lot of techspeak originated as jargon, and there is a steady continuing uptake of jargon into techspeak. On the other hand, a lot of jargon arises from overgeneralization of techspeak terms (there is more about this in the **Jargon Construction** section below).

In general, we have considered techspeak any term that communicates primarily by a denotation well established in textbooks, technical dictionaries, or standards documents.

A few obviously techspeak terms (names of operating systems, languages, or documents) are listed when they are tied to hacker folklore that isn't covered in formal sources, or sometimes to convey critical historical background necessary to understand other entries to which they are cross-referenced. Some other techspeak senses of jargon words are listed in order to make the jargon senses clear; where the text does not specify that a straight technical sense is under discussion, these are marked with `[techspeak]' as an etymology. Some entries have a primary sense marked this way, with subsequent jargon meanings explained in terms of it.

We have also tried to indicate (where known) the apparent origins of terms. The results are probably the least reliable information in the lexicon, for several reasons. For one thing, it is well known that many hackish usages have been independently reinvented multiple times, even among the more obscure and intricate neologisms. It often seems that the generative processes underlying hackish jargon formation have an internal logic so powerful as to create substantial parallelism across separate cultures and even in different languages! For another, the networks tend to propagate innovations so quickly that `first use' is often impossible to pin down. And, finally, compendia like this one alter what they observe by implicitly stamping cultural approval on terms and widening their use.

Despite these problems, the organized collection of jargon-related oral history for the new compilations has enabled us to put to rest quite a number of folk etymologies, place credit where credit is due, and illuminate the early history of many important hackerisms such as **kluge**, **cruft**, and **foo**. We believe specialist lexicographers will find many of the historical notes more than casually instructive.

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Revision History

The original Jargon File was a collection of hacker jargon from technical cultures including the MIT AI Lab, the Stanford AI lab (SAIL), and others of the old ARPANET AI/LISP/PDP-10 communities including Bolt, Beranek and Newman (BBN), Carnegie-Mellon University (CMU), and Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI).

The Jargon File (hereafter referred to as `jargon-1' or `the File') was begun by Raphael Finkel at Stanford in 1975. From this time until the plug was finally pulled on the SAIL computer in 1991, the File was

named AIWORD.RF[UP,DOC] there. Some terms in it date back considerably earlier (**frob** and some senses of **moby**, for instance, go back to the Tech Model Railroad Club at MIT and are believed to date at least back to the early 1960s). The revisions of jargon-1 were all unnumbered and may be collectively considered `Version 1'.

In 1976, Mark Crispin, having seen an announcement about the File on the SAIL computer, **FTP**ed a copy of the File to MIT. He noticed that it was hardly restricted to `AI words' and so stored the file on his directory as AI:MRC;SAIL JARGON.

The file was quickly renamed JARGON > (the `>' caused versioning under ITS) as a flurry of enhancements were made by Mark Crispin and Guy L. Steele Jr. Unfortunately, amidst all this activity, nobody thought of correcting the term `jargon' to `slang' until the compendium had already become widely known as the Jargon File.

Raphael Finkel dropped out of active participation shortly thereafter and Don Woods became the SAIL contact for the File (which was subsequently kept in duplicate at SAIL and MIT, with periodic resynchronizations).

The File expanded by fits and starts until about 1983; Richard Stallman was prominent among the contributors, adding many MIT and ITS-related coinages.

In Spring 1981, a hacker named Charles Spurgeon got a large chunk of the File published in Stewart Brand's "CoEvolution Quarterly" (issue 29, pages 26-35) with illustrations by Phil Wadler and Guy Steele (including a couple of the Crunchly cartoons). This appears to have been the File's first paper publication.

A late version of jargon-1, expanded with commentary for the mass market, was edited by Guy Steele into a book published in 1983 as "The Hacker's Dictionary" (Harper & Row CN 1082, ISBN 0-06-091082-8). The other jargon-1 editors (Raphael Finkel, Don Woods, and Mark Crispin) contributed to this revision, as did Richard M. Stallman and Geoff Goodfellow. This book (now out of print) is hereafter referred to as `Steele-1983' and those six as the Steele-1983 coauthors.

Shortly after the publication of Steele-1983, the File effectively stopped growing and changing. Originally, this was due to a desire to freeze the file temporarily to facilitate the production of Steele-1983, but external conditions caused the `temporary' freeze to become permanent.

The AI Lab culture had been hit hard in the late 1970s by funding cuts and the resulting administrative decision to use vendor-supported hardware and software instead of homebrew whenever possible. At MIT, most AI work had turned to dedicated LISP Machines. At the same time, the commercialization of AI technology lured some of the AI Lab's best and brightest away to startups along the Route 128 strip in Massachusetts and out West in Silicon Valley. The startups built LISP machines for MIT; the central MIT-AI computer became a **TWENEX** system rather than a host for the AI hackers' beloved **ITS**.

The Stanford AI Lab had effectively ceased to exist by 1980, although the SAIL computer continued as a Computer Science Department resource until 1991. Stanford became a major **TWENEX** site, at one point operating more than a dozen TOPS-20 systems; but by the mid-1980s most of the interesting software work was being done on the emerging BSD Unix standard.

In April 1983, the PDP-10-centered cultures that had nourished the File were dealt a death-blow by the cancellation of the Jupiter project at Digital Equipment Corporation. The File's compilers, already dispersed, moved on to other things. Steele-1983 was partly a monument to what its authors thought was a dying tradition; no one involved realized at the time just how wide its influence was to be.

By the mid-1980s the File's content was dated, but the legend that had grown up around it never quite died out. The book, and softcopies obtained off the ARPANET, circulated even in cultures far removed from MIT and Stanford; the content exerted a strong and continuing influence on hacker language and humor. Even as the advent of the microcomputer and other trends fueled a tremendous expansion of

hackerdom, the File (and related materials such as the **Some AI Koans** in Appendix A) came to be seen as a sort of sacred epic, a hacker-culture Matter of Britain chronicling the heroic exploits of the Knights of the Lab. The pace of change in hackerdom at large accelerated tremendously -- but the Jargon File, having passed from living document to icon, remained essentially untouched for seven years.

This revision contains nearly the entire text of a late version of jargon-1 (a few obsolete PDP-10-related entries were dropped after careful consultation with the editors of Steele-1983). It merges in about 80% of the Steele-1983 text, omitting some framing material and a very few entries introduced in Steele-1983 that are now also obsolete.

This new version casts a wider net than the old Jargon File; its aim is to cover not just AI or PDP-10 hacker culture but all the technical computing cultures wherein the true hacker-nature is manifested. More than half of the entries now derive from **Usenet** and represent jargon now current in the C and Unix communities, but special efforts have been made to collect jargon from other cultures including IBM PC programmers, Amiga fans, Mac enthusiasts, and even the IBM mainframe world.

Eric S. Raymond <esr@snark.thyrsus.com> maintains the new File with assistance from Guy L. Steele Jr. <gls@think.com>; these are the persons primarily reflected in the File's editorial `we', though we take pleasure in acknowledging the special contribution of the other coauthors of Steele-1983. Please email all additions, corrections, and correspondence relating to the Jargon File to jargon@thyrsus.com.

(Warning: other email addresses appear in this file *but are not guaranteed to be correct* later than the revision date on the first line. *Don't* email us if an attempt to reach your idol bounces -- we have no magic way of checking addresses or looking up people.)

The 2.9.6 version became the main text of "The New Hacker's Dictionary", by Eric Raymond (ed.), MIT Press 1991, ISBN 0-262-68069-6.

The 3.0.0 version was published in September 1993 as the second edition of "The New Hacker's Dictionary", again from MIT Press (ISBN 0-262-18154-1).

If you want the book, you should be able to find it at any of the major bookstore chains. Failing that, you can order by mail from

The MIT Press 55 Hayward Street Cambridge, MA 02142

or order by phone at (800)-356-0343 or (617)-625-8481.

The maintainers are committed to updating the on-line version of the Jargon File through and beyond paper publication, and will continue to make it available to archives and public-access sites as a trust of the hacker community.

Here is a chronology of the high points in the recent on-line revisions:

Version 2.1.1, Jun 12 1990: the Jargon File comes alive again after a seven-year hiatus. Reorganization and massive additions were by Eric S. Raymond, approved by Guy Steele. Many items of UNIX, C, USENET, and microcomputer-based jargon were added at that time.

Version 2.9.6, Aug 16 1991: corresponds to reproduction copy for book. This version had 18952 lines, 148629 words, 975551 characters, and 1702 entries.

Version 2.9.7, Oct 28 1991: first markup for hypertext browser. This version had 19432 lines, 152132 words, 999595 characters, and 1750 entries.

Version 2.9.8, Jan 01 1992: first public release since the book, including over fifty new entries and numerous corrections/additions to old ones. Packaged with version 1.1 of vh(1) hypertext reader. This

version had 19509 lines, 153108 words, 1006023 characters, and 1760 entries.

Version 2.9.9, Apr 01 1992: folded in XEROX PARC lexicon. This version had 20298 lines, 159651 words, 1048909 characters, and 1821 entries.

Version 2.9.10, Jul 01 1992: lots of new historical material. This version had 21349 lines, 168330 words, 1106991 characters, and 1891 entries.

Version 2.9.11, Jan 01 1993: lots of new historical material. This version had 21725 lines, 171169 words, 1125880 characters, and 1922 entries.

Version 2.9.12, May 10 1993: a few new entries & changes, marginal MUD/IRC slang and some borderline techspeak removed, all in preparation for 2nd Edition of TNHD. This version had 22238 lines, 175114 words, 1152467 characters, and 1946 entries.

Version 3.0.0, Jul 27 1993: manuscript freeze for 2nd edition of TNHD. This version had 22548 lines, 177520 words, 1169372 characters, and 1961 entries.

Version 3.1.0, Oct 15 1994: interim release to test WWW conversion. This version had 23197 lines, 181001 words, 1193818 characters, and 1990 entries.

Version 3.2.0, Mar 15 1995: Spring 1995 update. This version had 23822 lines, 185961 words, 1226358 characters, and 2031 entries.

Version 3.3.0, Jan 20 1996: Winter 1996 update. This version had 24055 lines, 187957 words, 1239604 characters, and 2045 entries.

Version 3.3.1, Jan 25 1996: Copy-corrected improvement on 3.3.0 shipped to MIT Press as a step towards TNHD III. This version had 24147 lines, 188728 words, 1244554 characters, and 2050 entries.

Version 3.3.2, Mar 20 1996: A number of new entries pursuant on 3.3.2. This version had 24442 lines, 190867 words, 1262468 characters, and 2061 entries.

Version 3.3.3, Mar 25 1996: Cleanup before TNHD III manuscript freeze. This version had 24584 lines, 191932 words, 1269996 characters, and 2064 entries.

Version 4.0.0, Jul 25 1996: The actual TNHD III version after copy-edit. This version had 24801 lines, 193697 words, 1281402 characters, and 2067 entries.

Version 4.1.0, 8 Apr 1999: The Jargon File rides again after three years. This version had 25777 lines, 206825 words, 1359992 characters, and 2217 entries.

Version 4.1.1, 18 Apr 1999: Corrections for minor errors in 4.1.0, and some new entries. This version had 25921 lines, 208483 words, 1371279 characters, and 2225 entries.

Version 4.1.2, 28 Apr 1999: Moving texi2html out of the production path. This version had 26006 lines, 209479 words, 1377687 characters, and 2225 entries.

Version 4.1.3, 14 Jun 1999: Minor updates and markup fixes. This version had 26108 lines, 210480 words, 1384546 characters, and 2234 entries.

Version 4.1.4, 17 Jun 1999: Markup fixes for framed HTML. This version had 26117 lines, 210527 words, 1384902 characters, and 2234 entries.

Version 4.2.0, 31 Jan 2000: Markup fixes for framed HTML. This version had 26598 lines, 214639 words, 1412243 characters, and 2267 entries.

Version numbering: Version numbers should be read as *major.minor.revision*. Major version 1 is reserved for the `old' (ITS) Jargon File, jargon-1. Major version 2 encompasses revisions by ESR (Eric S. Raymond) with assistance from GLS (Guy L. Steele, Jr.) leading up to and including the second paper edition. From now on, major version number N.00 will probably correspond to the Nth paper edition. Usually later versions will either completely supersede or incorporate earlier versions, so there is generally no point in keeping old versions around.

Our thanks to the coauthors of Steele-1983 for oversight and assistance, and to the hundreds of Usenetters (too many to name here) who contributed entries and encouragement. More thanks go to several of the old-timers on the Usenet group *alt.folklore.computers*, who contributed much useful commentary and many corrections and valuable historical perspective: Joseph M. Newcomer <jn11+@andrew.cmu.edu>, Bernie Cosell <cosell@bbn.com>, Earl Boebert <boebert@SCTC.com>, and Joe Morris <jcmorris@mwunix.mitre.org>.

We were fortunate enough to have the aid of some accomplished linguists. David Stampe <stampe@hawaii.edu> and Charles Hoequist <hoequist@bnr.ca> contributed valuable criticism; Joe Keane <jgk@osc.osc.com> helped us improve the pronunciation guides.

A few bits of this text quote previous works. We are indebted to Brian A. LaMacchia <bal@zurich.ai.mit.edu> for obtaining permission for us to use material from the "TMRC Dictionary"; also, Don Libes <libes@cme.nist.gov> contributed some appropriate material from his excellent book "Life With UNIX". We thank Per Lindberg <per@front.se>, author of the remarkable Swedish-language 'zine "Hackerbladet", for bringing "FOO!" comics to our attention and smuggling one of the IBM hacker underground's own baby jargon files out to us. Thanks also to Maarten Litmaath for generously allowing the inclusion of the ASCII pronunciation guide he formerly maintained. And our gratitude to Marc Weiser of XEROX PARC <Marc_Weiser.PARC@xerox.com> for securing us permission to quote from PARC's own jargon lexicon and shipping us a copy.

It is a particular pleasure to acknowledge the major contributions of Mark Brader <msb@sq.com> and Steve Summit <scs@eskimo.com> to the File and Dictionary; they have read and reread many drafts, checked facts, caught typos, submitted an amazing number of thoughtful comments, and done yeoman service in catching typos and minor usage bobbles. Their rare combination of enthusiasm, persistence, wide-ranging technical knowledge, and precisionism in matters of language has been of invaluable help. Indeed, the sustained volume and quality of Mr. Brader's input over several years and several different editions has only allowed him to escape co-editor credit by the slimmest of margins.

Finally, George V. Reilly <georgere@microsoft.com> helped with TeX arcana and painstakingly proofread some 2.7 and 2.8 versions, and Eric Tiedemann <est@thyrsus.com> contributed sage advice throughout on rhetoric, amphigory, and philosophunculism.

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How Jargon Works

Jargon Construction

There are some standard methods of jargonification that became established quite early (i.e., before 1970), spreading from such sources as the Tech Model Railroad Club, the PDP-1 SPACEWAR hackers, and John McCarthy's original crew of LISPers. These include verb doubling, soundalike slang, the `-P' convention, overgeneralization, spoken inarticulations, and anthropomorphization. Each is discussed below. We also cover the standard comparatives for design quality.

Of these six, verb doubling, overgeneralization, anthropomorphization, and (especially) spoken inarticulations have become quite general; but soundalike slang is still largely confined to MIT and other large universities, and the `-P' convention is found only where LISPers flourish.

- Verb Doubling: Doubling a verb may change its semantics
- Soundalike Slang: Punning jargon
- The -P convention: A LISPy way to form questions
- Overgeneralization: Standard abuses of grammar
- Spoken Inarticulations: Sighing and <*sigh*>ing
- Anthropomorphization: Homunculi, daemons, and confused programs
- Comparatives: Standard comparatives for design quality

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Verb Doubling

A standard construction in English is to double a verb and use it as an exclamation, such as "Bang, bang!" or "Quack, quack!". Most of these are names for noises. Hackers also double verbs as a concise, sometimes sarcastic comment on what the implied subject does. Also, a doubled verb is often used to terminate a conversation, in the process remarking on the current state of affairs or what the speaker intends to do next. Typical examples involve **win**, **lose**, **hack**, **flame**, **barf**, **chomp**:

> "The disk heads just crashed." "Lose, lose."
> "Mostly he talked about his latest crock. Flame, flame."
> "Boy, what a bagbiter! Chomp, chomp!"

Some verb-doubled constructions have special meanings not immediately obvious from the verb. These have their own listings in the lexicon.

The **Usenet** culture has one *tripling* convention unrelated to this; the names of `joke' topic groups often have a tripled last element. The first and paradigmatic example was *alt.swedish.chef.bork.bork.bork* (a "Muppet Show" reference); other infamous examples have included:

> *alt.french.captain.borg.borg.borg*
> *alt.wesley.crusher.die.die.die*
> *comp.unix.internals.system.calls.brk.brk.brk*
> *sci.physics.edward.teller.boom.boom.boom*
> *alt.sadistic.dentists.drill.drill.drill*

Node:Soundalike Slang, Next:The -P convention, Previous:Verb Doubling, Up:Jargon Construction

Soundalike slang

Hackers will often make rhymes or puns in order to convert an ordinary word or phrase into something more interesting. It is considered particularly **flavorful** if the phrase is bent so as to include some other jargon word; thus the computer hobbyist magazine "Dr. Dobb's Journal" is almost always referred to among hackers as `Dr. Frob's Journal' or simply `Dr. Frob's'. Terms of this kind that have been in fairly wide use include names for newspapers:

```
Boston Herald => Horrid (or Harried)
Boston Globe => Boston Glob
```

```
Houston (or San Francisco) Chronicle
       => the Crocknicle (or the Comical)
New York Times => New York Slime
Wall Street Journal => Wall Street Urinal
```

However, terms like these are often made up on the spur of the moment. Standard examples include:

```
Data General => Dirty Genitals
IBM 360 => IBM Three-Sickly
Government Property --- Do Not Duplicate (on keys)
        => Government Duplicity --- Do Not Propagate
for historical reasons => for hysterical raisins
Margaret Jacks Hall (the CS building at Stanford)
        => Marginal Hacks Hall
Microsoft => Microsloth
Internet Explorer => Internet Exploiter
```

This is not really similar to the Cockney rhyming slang it has been compared to in the past, because Cockney substitutions are opaque whereas hacker punning jargon is intentionally transparent.

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The `-P' convention

Turning a word into a question by appending the syllable `P'; from the LISP convention of appending the letter `P' to denote a predicate (a boolean-valued function). The question should expect a yes/no answer, though it needn't. (See **T** and **NIL**.)

```
At dinnertime:

      Q: ``Foodp?''

      A: ``Yeah, I'm pretty hungry.'' or ``T!''


At any time:

      Q: ``State-of-the-world-P?''

      A: (Straight) ``I'm about to go home.''

      A: (Humorous) ``Yes, the world has a state.''


On the phone to Florida:

      Q: ``State-p Florida?''

      A: ``Been reading JARGON.TXT again, eh?''
```

[One of the best of these is a **Gosperism**. Once, when we were at a Chinese restaurant, Bill Gosper wanted to know whether someone would like to share with him a two-person-sized bowl of soup. His inquiry was: "Split-p soup?" -- GLS]

Node:Overgeneralization, Next:Spoken Inarticulations, Previous:The -P convention, Up:Jargon Construction

Overgeneralization

A very conspicuous feature of jargon is the frequency with which techspeak items such as names of program tools, command language primitives, and even assembler opcodes are applied to contexts outside of computing wherever hackers find amusing analogies to them. Thus (to cite one of the best-known examples) Unix hackers often **grep** for things rather than searching for them. Many of the lexicon entries are generalizations of exactly this kind.

Hackers enjoy overgeneralization on the grammatical level as well. Many hackers love to take various words and add the wrong endings to them to make nouns and verbs, often by extending a standard rule to nonuniform cases (or vice versa). For example, because

> porous => porosity
> generous => generosity

hackers happily generalize:

> mysterious => mysteriosity
> ferrous => ferrosity
> obvious => obviosity
> dubious => dubiosity

Another class of common construction uses the suffix `-itude' to abstract a quality from just about any adjective or noun. This usage arises especially in cases where mainstream English would perform the same abstraction through `-iness' or `-ingness'. Thus:

> win => winnitude (a common exclamation)
> loss => lossitude
> cruft => cruftitude
> lame => lameitude

Some hackers cheerfully reverse this transformation; they argue, for example, that the horizontal degree lines on a globe ought to be called `lats' -- after all, they're measuring latitude!

Also, note that all nouns can be verbed. E.g.: "All nouns can be verbed", "I'll mouse it up", "Hang on while I clipboard it over", "I'm grepping the files". English as a whole is already heading in this direction (towards pure-positional grammar like Chinese); hackers are simply a bit ahead of the curve.

The suffix "-full" can also be applied in generalized and fanciful ways, as in "As soon as you have more than one cachefull of data, the system starts thrashing," or "As soon as I have more than one headfull of ideas, I start writing it all down." A common use is "screenfull", meaning the amount of text that will fit on one screen, usually in text mode where you have no choice as to character size. Another common form is "bufferfull".

However, hackers avoid the unimaginative verb-making techniques characteristic of marketroids, bean-counters, and the Pentagon; a hacker would never, for example, `productize', `prioritize', or `securitize' things. Hackers have a strong aversion to bureaucratic bafflegab and regard those who use it with contempt.

Similarly, all verbs can be nouned. This is only a slight overgeneralization in modern English; in hackish, however, it is good form to mark them in some standard nonstandard way. Thus:

> win => winnitude, winnage
> disgust => disgustitude
> hack => hackification

Further, note the prevalence of certain kinds of nonstandard plural forms. Some of these go back quite a ways; the TMRC Dictionary includes an entry which implies that the plural of `mouse' is **meeces**, and notes that the defined plural of `caboose' is `cabeese'. This latter has apparently been standard (or at least a standard joke) among railfans (railroad enthusiasts) for many years.

On a similarly Anglo-Saxon note, almost anything ending in `x' may form plurals in `-xen' (see **VAXen** and **boxen** in the main text). Even words ending in phonetic /k/ alone are sometimes treated this way; e.g., `soxen' for a bunch of socks. Other funny plurals are `frobbotzim' for the plural of `frobbozz' (see **frobnitz**) and `Unices' and `Twenices' (rather than `Unixes' and `Twenexes'; see **Unix**, **TWENEX** in main text). But note that `Unixen' and `Twenexen' are never used; it has been suggested that this is because `-ix' and `-ex' are Latin singular endings that attract a Latinate plural. Finally, it has been suggested to general approval that the plural of `mongoose' ought to be `polygoose'.

The pattern here, as with other hackish grammatical quirks, is generalization of an inflectional rule that in English is either an import or a fossil (such as the Hebrew plural ending `-im', or the Anglo-Saxon plural suffix `-en') to cases where it isn't normally considered to apply.

This is not `poor grammar', as hackers are generally quite well aware of what they are doing when they distort the language. It is grammatical creativity, a form of playfulness. It is done not to impress but to amuse, and never at the expense of clarity.

Node:Spoken Inarticulations, Next:Anthropomorphization, Previous:Overgeneralization, Up:Jargon Construction

Spoken inarticulations

Words such as `mumble', `sigh', and `groan' are spoken in places where their referent might more naturally be used. It has been suggested that this usage derives from the impossibility of representing such noises on a comm link or in electronic mail, MUDs, and IRC channels (interestingly, the same sorts of constructions have been showing up with increasing frequency in comic strips). Another expression sometimes heard is "Complain!", meaning "I have a complaint!"

Node:Anthropomorphization, Next:Comparatives, Previous:Spoken Inarticulations, Up:Jargon Construction

Anthropomorphization

Semantically, one rich source of jargon constructions is the hackish tendency to anthropomorphize hardware and software. This isn't done in a naive way; hackers don't personalize their stuff in the sense of feeling empathy with it, nor do they mystically believe that the things they work on every day are `alive'. What *is* common is to hear hardware or software talked about as though it has homunculi talking to each other inside it, with intentions and desires. Thus, one hears "The protocol handler got confused", or that programs "are trying" to do things, or one may say of a routine that "its goal in life is to X". One even hears explanations like "... and its poor little brain couldn't understand X, and it died." Sometimes modelling things this way actually seems to make them easier to understand, perhaps because it's instinctively natural to think of anything with a really complex behavioral repertoire as `like a person' rather than `like a thing'.

Node:Comparatives, Previous:Anthropomorphization, Up:Jargon Construction

Comparatives

Finally, note that many words in hacker jargon have to be understood as members of sets of comparatives. This is especially true of the adjectives and nouns used to describe the beauty and functional quality of code. Here is an approximately correct spectrum:

> monstrosity brain-damage screw bug lose misfeature
> crock kluge hack win feature elegance perfection

The last is spoken of as a mythical absolute, approximated but never actually attained. Another similar scale is used for describing the reliability of software:

> broken flaky dodgy fragile brittle
> solid robust bulletproof armor-plated

Note, however, that `dodgy' is primarily Commonwealth Hackish (it is rare in the U.S.) and may change places with `flaky' for some speakers.

Coinages for describing **lossage** seem to call forth the very finest in hackish linguistic inventiveness; it has been truly said that hackers have even more words for equipment failures than Yiddish has for obnoxious people.

Node:Hacker Writing Style, Next:Email Quotes, Previous:Jargon Construction, Up:Top

Hacker Writing Style

We've already seen that hackers often coin jargon by overgeneralizing grammatical rules. This is one aspect of a more general fondness for form-versus-content language jokes that shows up particularly in hackish writing. One correspondent reports that he consistently misspells `wrong' as `worng'. Others have been known to criticize glitches in Jargon File drafts by observing (in the mode of Douglas Hofstadter) "This sentence no verb", or "Too repetetetive", or "Bad speling", or "Incorrectspa cing." Similarly, intentional spoonerisms are often made of phrases relating to confusion or things that are confusing; `dain bramage' for `brain damage' is perhaps the most common (similarly, a hacker would be likely to write "Excuse me, I'm cixelsyd today", rather than "I'm dyslexic today"). This sort of thing is quite common and is enjoyed by all concerned.

Hackers tend to use quotes as balanced delimiters like parentheses, much to the dismay of American editors. Thus, if "Jim is going" is a phrase, and so are "Bill runs" and "Spock groks", then hackers generally prefer to write: "Jim is going", "Bill runs", and "Spock groks". This is incorrect according to standard American usage (which would put the continuation commas and the final period inside the string quotes); however, it is counter-intuitive to hackers to mutilate literal strings with characters that don't belong in them. Given the sorts of examples that can come up in discussions of programming, American-style quoting can even be grossly misleading. When communicating command lines or small pieces of code, extra characters can be a real pain in the neck.

Consider, for example, a sentence in a **vi** tutorial that looks like this:

> Then delete a line from the file by typing "dd".

Standard usage would make this

> Then delete a line from the file by typing "dd."

but that would be very bad -- because the reader would be prone to type the string d-d-dot, and it happens that in `vi(1)` dot repeats the last command accepted. The net result would be to delete *two* lines!

The Jargon File follows hackish usage throughout.

Interestingly, a similar style is now preferred practice in Great Britain, though the older style (which became established for typographical reasons having to do with the aesthetics of comma and quotes in typeset text) is still accepted there. "Hart's Rules" and the "Oxford Dictionary for Writers and Editors" call the hacker-like style `new' or `logical' quoting. This turn British English to the style Latin languages (including Spanish, French, Italian, Catalan) have been using this style all along.

Another hacker habit is a tendency to distinguish between `scare' quotes and `speech' quotes; that is, to use British-style single quotes for marking and reserve American-style double quotes for actual reports of speech or text included from elsewhere. Interestingly, some authorities describe this as correct general usage, but mainstream American English has gone to using double-quotes indiscriminately enough that hacker usage appears marked [and, in fact, I thought this was a personal quirk of mine until I checked with Usenet --ESR]. One further permutation that is definitely *not* standard is a hackish tendency to do marking quotes by using apostrophes (single quotes) in pairs; that is, 'like this'. This is modelled on string and character literal syntax in some programming languages (reinforced by the fact that many character-only terminals display the apostrophe in typewriter style, as a vertical single quote).

One quirk that shows up frequently in the **email** style of Unix hackers in particular is a tendency for some things that are normally all-lowercase (including usernames and the names of commands and C routines) to remain uncapitalized even when they occur at the beginning of sentences. It is clear that, for many hackers, the case of such identifiers becomes a part of their internal representation (the `spelling') and cannot be overridden without mental effort (an appropriate reflex because Unix and C both distinguish cases and confusing them can lead to **lossage**). A way of escaping this dilemma is simply to avoid using these constructions at the beginning of sentences.

There seems to be a meta-rule behind these nonstandard hackerisms to the effect that precision of expression is more important than conformance to traditional rules; where the latter create ambiguity or lose information they can be discarded without a second thought. It is notable in this respect that other hackish inventions (for example, in vocabulary) also tend to carry very precise shades of meaning even when constructed to appear slangy and loose. In fact, to a hacker, the contrast between `loose' form and `tight' content in jargon is a substantial part of its humor!

Hackers have also developed a number of punctuation and emphasis conventions adapted to single-font all-ASCII communications links, and these are occasionally carried over into written documents even when normal means of font changes, underlining, and the like are available.

One of these is that TEXT IN ALL CAPS IS INTERPRETED AS `LOUD', and this becomes such an ingrained synesthetic reflex that a person who goes to caps-lock while in **talk mode** may be asked to "stop shouting, please, you're hurting my ears!".

Also, it is common to use bracketing with unusual characters to signify emphasis. The asterisk is most common, as in "What the *hell*?" even though this interferes with the common use of the asterisk suffix as a footnote mark. The underscore is also common, suggesting underlining (this is particularly common with book titles; for example, "It is often alleged that Joe Haldeman wrote _The_Forever_War_ as a rebuttal to Robert Heinlein's earlier novel of the future military, _Starship_Troopers_."). Other forms exemplified by "=hell=", "\hell/", or "/hell/" are occasionally seen (it's claimed that in the last example the first slash pushes the letters over to the right to make them italic, and the second keeps them from falling over). On FidoNet, you might see #bright# and ^dark^ text, which was actually interpreted by some reader software. Finally, words may also be emphasized L I K E T H I S, or by a series of carets (^) under them on the next line of the text.

There is a semantic difference between *emphasis like this* (which emphasizes the phrase as a whole),

and *emphasis* *like* *this* (which suggests the writer speaking very slowly and distinctly, as if to a very young child or a mentally impaired person). Bracketing a word with the `*' character may also indicate that the writer wishes readers to consider that an action is taking place or that a sound is being made. Examples: *bang*, *hic*, *ring*, *grin*, *kick*, *stomp*, *mumble*.

One might also see the above sound effects as <bang>, <hic>, <ring>, <grin>, <kick>, <stomp>, <mumble>. This use of angle brackets to mark their contents originally derives from conventions used in **BNF**, but since about 1993 it has been reinforced by the HTML markup used on the World Wide Web.

Angle-bracket enclosure is also used to indicate that a term stands for some **random** member of a larger class (this is straight from **BNF**). Examples like the following are common:

```
So this <ethnic> walks into a bar one day...
```

There is also an accepted convention for `writing under erasure'; the text

```
Be nice to this fool^H^H^H^Hgentleman,
he's visiting from corporate HQ.
```

reads roughly as "Be nice to this fool, er, gentleman...". This comes from the fact that the digraph ^H is often used as a print representation for a backspace. It parallels (and may have been influenced by) the ironic use of `slashouts' in science-fiction fanzines.

A related habit uses editor commands to signify corrections to previous text. This custom is fading as more mailers get good editing capabilities, but one occasionally still sees things like this:

```
I've seen that term used on alt.foobar often.
Send it to Erik for the File.
Oops...s/Erik/Eric/.
```

The s/Erik/Eric/ says "change Erik to Eric in the preceding". This syntax is borrowed from the Unix editing tools `ed` and `sed`, but is widely recognized by non-Unix hackers as well.

In a formula, `*` signifies multiplication but two asterisks in a row are a shorthand for exponentiation (this derives from FORTRAN). Thus, one might write 2 ** 8 = 256.

Another notation for exponentiation one sees more frequently uses the caret (^, ASCII 1011110); one might write instead `2^8 = 256`. This goes all the way back to Algol-60, which used the archaic ASCII `up-arrow' that later became the caret; this was picked up by Kemeny and Kurtz's original BASIC, which in turn influenced the design of the `bc(1)` and `dc(1)` Unix tools, which have probably done most to reinforce the convention on Usenet. (TeX math mode also uses ^ for exponention.) The notation is mildly confusing to C programmers, because ^ means bitwise exclusive-or in C. Despite this, it was favored 3:1 over ** in a late-1990 snapshot of Usenet. It is used consistently in this lexicon.

In on-line exchanges, hackers tend to use decimal forms or improper fractions (`3.5' or `7/2') rather than `typewriter style' mixed fractions (`3-1/2'). The major motive here is probably that the former are more readable in a monospaced font, together with a desire to avoid the risk that the latter might be read as `three minus one-half'. The decimal form is definitely preferred for fractions with a terminating decimal representation; there may be some cultural influence here from the high status of scientific notation.

Another on-line convention, used especially for very large or very small numbers, is taken from C (which derived it from FORTRAN). This is a form of `scientific notation' using `e' to replace `*10^'; for example, one year is about 3e7 seconds long.

The tilde (~) is commonly used in a quantifying sense of `approximately'; that is, `~50` means `about fifty'.

On Usenet and in the **MUD** world, common C boolean, logical, and relational operators such as `|`, `&`, `||`,

`&&`, `!`, `==`, `!=`, `>`, `<`, `>=`, and `=<` are often combined with English. The Pascal not-equals, `<>`, is also recognized, and occasionally one sees `/=` for not-equals (from Ada, Common Lisp, and Fortran 90). The use of prefix `!' as a loose synonym for `not-' or `no-' is particularly common; thus, `!clue' is read `no-clue' or `clueless'.

A related practice borrows syntax from preferred programming languages to express ideas in a natural-language text. For example, one might see the following:

```
In <jrh578689@thudpucker.com> J. R. Hacker wrote:
>I recently had occasion to field-test the Snafu
>Systems 2300E adaptive gonkulator.  The price was
>right, and the racing stripe on the case looked
>kind of neat, but its performance left something
>to be desired.

Yeah, I tried one out too.

#ifdef FLAME
Hasn't anyone told those idiots that you can't get
decent bogon suppression with AFJ filters at today's
net volumes?
#endif /* FLAME */

I guess they figured the price premium for true
frame-based semantic analysis was too high.
Unfortunately, it's also the only workable approach.
I wouldn't recommend purchase of this product unless
you're on a *very* tight budget.

#include <disclaimer.h>
--
                == Frank Foonly (Fubarco Systems)
```

In the above, the `#ifdef`/`#endif` pair is a conditional compilation syntax from C; here, it implies that the text between (which is a **flame**) should be evaluated only if you have turned on (or defined on) the switch FLAME. The `#include` at the end is C for "include standard disclaimer here"; the `standard disclaimer' is understood to read, roughly, "These are my personal opinions and not to be construed as the official position of my employer."

The top section in the example, with > at the left margin, is an example of an inclusion convention we'll discuss below.

More recently, following on the huge popularity of the World Wide Web, pseudo-HTML markup has become popular for similar purposes:

```
<flame>
Your father was a hamster and your mother smelt of elderberries!
</flame>
```

You'll even see this with an HTML-style modifier:

```
<flame intensity="100%">
You seem well-suited for a career in government.
</flame>
```

Another recent (late 1990s) construction now common on USENET seems to be borrowed from Perl. It consists of using a dollar sign before an uppercased form of a word or acronym to suggest any **random** member of the class indicated by the word. Thus: `$PHB' means "any random member of the class `Pointy-Haired Boss'".

Hackers also mix letters and numbers more freely than in mainstream usage. In particular, it is good hackish style to write a digit sequence where you intend the reader to understand the text string that names that number in English. So, hackers prefer to write `1970s' rather than `nineteen-seventies' or `1970's' (the latter looks like a possessive).

It should also be noted that hackers exhibit much less reluctance to use multiply nested parentheses than is normal in English. Part of this is almost certainly due to influence from LISP (which uses deeply nested parentheses (like this (see?)) in its syntax a lot), but it has also been suggested that a more basic hacker trait of enjoying playing with complexity and pushing systems to their limits is in operation.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that many studies of on-line communication have shown that electronic links have a de-inhibiting effect on people. Deprived of the body-language cues through which emotional state is expressed, people tend to forget everything about other parties except what is presented over that ASCII link. This has both good and bad effects. A good one is that it encourages honesty and tends to break down hierarchical authority relationships; a bad one is that it may encourage depersonalization and gratuitous rudeness. Perhaps in response to this, experienced netters often display a sort of conscious formal *politesse* in their writing that has passed out of fashion in other spoken and written media (for example, the phrase "Well said, sir!" is not uncommon).

Many introverted hackers who are next to inarticulate in person communicate with considerable fluency over the net, perhaps precisely because they can forget on an unconscious level that they are dealing with people and thus don't feel stressed and anxious as they would face to face.

Though it is considered gauche to publicly criticize posters for poor spelling or grammar, the network places a premium on literacy and clarity of expression. It may well be that future historians of literature will see in it a revival of the great tradition of personal letters as art.

Node:Email Quotes, Next:Hacker Speech Style, Previous:Hacker Writing Style, Up:Top

Email Quotes and Inclusion Conventions

One area where conventions for on-line writing are still in some flux is the marking of included material from earlier messages -- what would be called `block quotations' in ordinary English. From the usual typographic convention employed for these (smaller font at an extra indent), there derived a practice of included text being indented by one ASCII TAB (0001001) character, which under Unix and many other environments gives the appearance of an 8-space indent.

Early mail and netnews readers had no facility for including messages this way, so people had to paste in copy manually. BSD `Mail(1)` was the first message agent to support inclusion, and early Usenetters emulated its style. But the TAB character tended to push included text too far to the right (especially in multiply nested inclusions), leading to ugly wraparounds. After a brief period of confusion (during which an inclusion leader consisting of three or four spaces became established in EMACS and a few mailers), the use of leading > or > became standard, perhaps owing to its use in `ed(1)` to display tabs (alternatively, it may derive from the > that some early Unix mailers used to quote lines starting with "From" in text, so they wouldn't look like the beginnings of new message headers). Inclusions within inclusions keep their > leaders, so the `nesting level' of a quotation is visually apparent.

The practice of including text from the parent article when posting a followup helped solve what had been

a major nuisance on Usenet: the fact that articles do not arrive at different sites in the same order. Careless posters used to post articles that would begin with, or even consist entirely of, "No, that's wrong" or "I agree" or the like. It was hard to see who was responding to what. Consequently, around 1984, new news-posting software evolved a facility to automatically include the text of a previous article, marked with "> " or whatever the poster chose. The poster was expected to delete all but the relevant lines. The result has been that, now, careless posters post articles containing the *entire* text of a preceding article, *followed* only by "No, that's wrong" or "I agree".

Many people feel that this cure is worse than the original disease, and there soon appeared newsreader software designed to let the reader skip over included text if desired. Today, some posting software rejects articles containing too high a proportion of lines beginning with `>' -- but this too has led to undesirable workarounds, such as the deliberate inclusion of zero-content filler lines which aren't quoted and thus pull the message below the rejection threshold.

Because the default mailers supplied with Unix and other operating systems haven't evolved as quickly as human usage, the older conventions using a leading TAB or three or four spaces are still alive; however, >-inclusion is now clearly the prevalent form in both netnews and mail.

Inclusion practice is still evolving, and disputes over the `correct' inclusion style occasionally lead to **holy wars**.

Most netters view an inclusion as a promise that comment on it will immediately follow. The preferred, conversational style looks like this,

```
> relevant excerpt 1
response to excerpt
> relevant excerpt 2
response to excerpt
> relevant excerpt 3
response to excerpt
```

or for short messages like this:

```
> entire message
response to message
```

Thanks to poor design of some PC-based mail agents, one will occasionally see the entire quoted message *after* the response, like this

```
response to message
> entire message
```

but this practice is strongly deprecated.

Though > remains the standard inclusion leader, | is occasionally used for extended quotations where original variations in indentation are being retained (one mailer even combines these and uses |>). One also sees different styles of quoting a number of authors in the same message: one (deprecated because it loses information) uses a leader of > for everyone, another (the most common) is > > > > , > > > , etc. (or >>>> , >>>, etc., depending on line length and nesting depth) reflecting the original order of messages, and yet another is to use a different citation leader for each author, say > , : , | , } (preserving nesting so that the inclusion order of messages is still apparent, or tagging the inclusions with authors' names). Yet *another* style is to use each poster's initials (or login name) as a citation leader for that poster.

Occasionally one sees a # leader used for quotations from authoritative sources such as standards documents; the intended allusion is to the root prompt (the special Unix command prompt issued when one is running as the privileged super-user).

Hacker Speech Style

Hackish speech generally features extremely precise diction, careful word choice, a relatively large working vocabulary, and relatively little use of contractions or street slang. Dry humor, irony, puns, and a mildly flippant attitude are highly valued -- but an underlying seriousness and intelligence are essential. One should use just enough jargon to communicate precisely and identify oneself as a member of the culture; overuse of jargon or a breathless, excessively gung-ho attitude is considered tacky and the mark of a loser.

This speech style is a variety of the precisionist English normally spoken by scientists, design engineers, and academics in technical fields. In contrast with the methods of jargon construction, it is fairly constant throughout hackerdom.

It has been observed that many hackers are confused by negative questions -- or, at least, that the people to whom they are talking are often confused by the sense of their answers. The problem is that they have done so much programming that distinguishes between

```
if (going) ...
```

and

```
if (!going) ...
```

that when they parse the question "Aren't you going?" it may seem to be asking the opposite question from "Are you going?", and so to merit an answer in the opposite sense. This confuses English-speaking non-hackers because they were taught to answer as though the negative part weren't there. In some other languages (including Russian, Chinese, and Japanese) the hackish interpretation is standard and the problem wouldn't arise. Hackers often find themselves wishing for a word like French `si', German `doch', or Dutch `jawel' - a word with which one could unambiguously answer `yes' to a negative question. (See also **mu**)

For similar reasons, English-speaking hackers almost never use double negatives, even if they live in a region where colloquial usage allows them. The thought of uttering something that logically ought to be an affirmative knowing it will be misparsed as a negative tends to disturb them.

In a related vein, hackers sometimes make a game of answering questions containing logical connectives with a strictly literal rather than colloquial interpretation. A non-hacker who is indelicate enough to ask a question like "So, are you working on finding that bug *now* or leaving it until later?" is likely to get the perfectly correct answer "Yes!" (that is, "Yes, I'm doing it either now or later, and you didn't ask which!").

International Style

Although the Jargon File remains primarily a lexicon of hacker usage in American English, we have made some effort to get input from abroad. Though the hacker-speak of other languages often uses translations of jargon from English (often as transmitted to them by earlier Jargon File versions!), the local variations

are interesting, and knowledge of them may be of some use to travelling hackers.

There are some references herein to `Commonwealth hackish'. These are intended to describe some variations in hacker usage as reported in the English spoken in Great Britain and the Commonwealth (Canada, Australia, India, etc. -- though Canada is heavily influenced by American usage). There is also an entry on **Commonwealth Hackish** reporting some general phonetic and vocabulary differences from U.S. hackish.

Hackers in Western Europe and (especially) Scandinavia report that they often use a mixture of English and their native languages for technical conversation. Occasionally they develop idioms in their English usage that are influenced by their native-language styles. Some of these are reported here.

On the other hand, English often gives rise to grammatical and vocabulary mutations in the native language. For example, Italian hackers often use the nonexistent verbs `scrollare' (to scroll) and `deletare' (to delete) rather than native Italian `scorrere' and `cancellare'. Similarly, the English verb `to hack' has been seen conjugated in Swedish. And Spanish-speaking hackers use `linkar' (to link), `debugear' (to debug), and `lockear' (to lock).

European hackers report that this happens partly because the English terms make finer distinctions than are available in their native vocabularies, and partly because deliberate language-crossing makes for amusing wordplay.

A few notes on hackish usages in Russian have been added where they are parallel with English idioms and thus comprehensible to English-speakers.

Node:Lamer-speak, Next:Pronunciation Guide, Previous:International Style, Up:Top

Crackers, Phreaks, and Lamers

From the early 1980s onward, a flourishing culture of local, MS-DOS-based bulletin boards has been developing separately from Internet hackerdom. The BBS culture has, as its seamy underside, a stratum of `pirate boards' inhabited by **cracker**s, phone phreaks, and **warez d00dz**. These people (mostly teenagers running IBM-PC clones from their bedrooms) have developed their own characteristic jargon, heavily influenced by skateboard lingo and underground-rock slang.

Though crackers often call themselves `hackers', they aren't (they typically have neither significant programming ability, nor Internet expertise, nor experience with UNIX or other true multi-user systems). Their vocabulary has little overlap with hackerdom's. Nevertheless, this lexicon covers much of it so the reader will be able to understand what goes by on bulletin-board systems.

Here is a brief guide to cracker and **warez d00dz** usage:

- Misspell frequently. The substitutions

  ```
  phone => fone
  freak => phreak
  ```

  are obligatory.

- Always substitute `z's for `s's. (i.e. "codes" -> "codez").
- Type random emphasis characters after a post line (i.e. "Hey Dudes!#!$#$!#!$").
- Use the emphatic `k' prefix ("k-kool", "k-rad", "k-awesome") frequently.
- Abbreviate compulsively ("I got lotsa warez w/ docs").

- Substitute `0' for `o' ("r0dent", "l0zer").
- TYPE ALL IN CAPS LOCK, SO IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'RE YELLING ALL THE TIME.

These traits are similar to those of **B1FF**, who originated as a parody of naive **BBS** users. Occasionally, this sort of distortion may be used as heavy sarcasm by a real hacker, as in:

```
> I got X Windows running under Linux!

d00d!  u R an '1337 hax0r
```

The only practice resembling this in actual hacker usage is the substitution of a dollar sign of `s' in names of products or service felt to be excessively expensive, e.g. Compu$erve, Micro$oft.

For further discussion of the pirate-board subculture, see **lamer**, **elite**, **leech**, **poser**, **cracker**, and especially **warez d00dz**.

Node:Pronunciation Guide, Next:Other Lexicon Conventions, Previous:Lamer-speak, Up:Top

How to Use the Lexicon

Pronunciation Guide

Pronunciation keys are provided in the jargon listings for all entries that are neither dictionary words pronounced as in standard English nor obvious compounds thereof. Slashes bracket phonetic pronunciations, which are to be interpreted using the following conventions:

1. Syllables are hyphen-separated, except that an accent or back-accent follows each accented syllable (the back-accent marks a secondary accent in some words of four or more syllables). If no accent is given, the word is pronounced with equal accentuation on all syllables (this is common for abbreviations).
2. Consonants are pronounced as in American English. The letter `g' is always hard (as in "got" rather than "giant"); `ch' is soft ("church" rather than "chemist"). The letter `j' is the sound that occurs twice in "judge". The letter `s' is always as in "pass", never a z sound. The digraph `kh' is the guttural of "loch" or "l'chaim". The digraph 'gh' is the aspirated g+h of "bughouse" or "ragheap" (rare in English).
3. Uppercase letters are pronounced as their English letter names; thus (for example) /H-L-L/ is equivalent to /aych el el/. /Z/ may be pronounced /zee/ or /zed/ depending on your local dialect.
4. Vowels are represented as follows:

   back, that

   father, palm (see note)

   far, mark

   flaw, caught

   bake, rain

   less, men

   easy, ski

their, software

trip, hit

life, sky

block, stock (see note)

flow, sew

loot, through

more, door

out, how

boy, coin

but, some

put, foot

yet, young

few, chew

/oo/ with optional fronting as in `news' (/nooz/ or /nyooz/)

The glyph /*/ is used for the `schwa' sound of unstressed or occluded vowels (the one that is often written with an upside-down `e'). The schwa vowel is omitted in syllables containing vocalic r, l, m or n; that is, `kitten' and `color' would be rendered /kit'n/ and /kuhl'r/, not /kit'*n/ and /kuhl'*r/.

Note that the above table reflects mainly distinctions found in standard American English (that is, the neutral dialect spoken by TV network announcers and typical of educated speech in the Upper Midwest, Chicago, Minneapolis/St. Paul and Philadelphia). However, we separate /o/ from /ah/, which tend to merge in standard American. This may help readers accustomed to accents resembling British Received Pronunciation.

The intent of this scheme is to permit as many readers as possible to map the pronunciations into their local dialect by ignoring some subset of the distinctions we make. Speakers of British RP, for example, can smash terminal /r/ and all unstressed vowels. Speakers of many varieties of southern American will automatically map /o/ to /aw/; and so forth. (Standard American makes a good reference dialect for this purpose because it has crisp consonants and more vowel distinctions than other major dialects, and tends to retain distinctions between unstressed vowels. It also happens to be what your editor speaks.)

Entries with a pronunciation of `//' are written-only usages. (No, Unix weenies, this does *not* mean `pronounce like previous pronunciation'!)

Node:Other Lexicon Conventions, Next:Format for New Entries, Previous:Pronunciation Guide, Up:Top

Other Lexicon Conventions

Entries are sorted in case-blind ASCII collation order (rather than the letter-by-letter order ignoring

interword spacing common in mainstream dictionaries), except that all entries beginning with nonalphabetic characters are sorted after Z. The case-blindness is a feature, not a bug.

The beginning of each entry is marked by a colon (`:`) at the left margin. This convention helps out tools like hypertext browsers that benefit from knowing where entry boundaries are, but aren't as context-sensitive as humans.

In pure ASCII renderings of the Jargon File, you will see {} used to bracket words which themselves have entries in the File. This isn't done all the time for every such word, but it is done everywhere that a reminder seems useful that the term has a jargon meaning and one might wish to refer to its entry.

In this all-ASCII version, headwords for topic entries are distinguished from those for ordinary entries by being followed by "::" rather than ":"; similarly, references are surrounded by "{{" and "}}" rather than "{" and "}".

Defining instances of terms and phrases appear in `slanted type'. A defining instance is one which occurs near to or as part of an explanation of it.

Prefixed ** is used as linguists do; to mark examples of incorrect usage.

We follow the `logical' quoting convention described in the Writing Style section above. In addition, we reserve double quotes for actual excerpts of text or (sometimes invented) speech. Scare quotes (which mark a word being used in a nonstandard way), and philosopher's quotes (which turn an utterance into the string of letters or words that name it) are both rendered with single quotes.

References such as `malloc(3)` and `patch(1)` are to Unix facilities (some of which, such as `patch(1)`, are actually freeware distributed over Usenet). The Unix manuals use `foo(n)` to refer to item foo in section (n) of the manual, where n=1 is utilities, n=2 is system calls, n=3 is C library routines, n=6 is games, and n=8 (where present) is system administration utilities. Sections 4, 5, and 7 of the manuals have changed roles frequently and in any case are not referred to in any of the entries.

Various abbreviations used frequently in the lexicon are summarized here:

abbrev.
: abbreviation

adj.
: adjective

adv.
: adverb

alt.
: alternate

cav.
: caveat

conj.
: conjunction

esp.
: especially

excl.
: exclamation

imp.
: imperative

interj.
: interjection

n.
: noun

obs.

obsolete

pl.
: plural

poss.
: possibly

pref.
: prefix

prob.
: probably

prov.
: proverbial

quant.
: quantifier

suff.
: suffix

syn.
: synonym (or synonymous with)

v.
: verb (may be transitive or intransitive)

var.
: variant

vi.
: intransitive verb

vt.
: transitive verb

Where alternate spellings or pronunciations are given, *alt.* separates two possibilities with nearly equal distribution, while *var.* prefixes one that is markedly less common than the primary.

Where a term can be attributed to a particular subculture or is known to have originated there, we have tried to so indicate. Here is a list of abbreviations used in etymologies:

Amateur Packet Radio
: A technical culture of ham-radio sites using AX.25 and TCP/IP for wide-area networking and BBS systems.

Berkeley
: University of California at Berkeley

BBN
: Bolt, Beranek & Newman

Cambridge
: the university in England (*not* the city in Massachusetts where MIT happens to be located!)

CMU
: Carnegie-Mellon University

Commodore
: Commodore Business Machines

DEC
: The Digital Equipment Corporation (now Compaq).

Fairchild
: The Fairchild Instruments Palo Alto development group

FidoNet
: See the **FidoNet** entry

IBM
: International Business Machines

MIT
: Massachusetts Institute of Technology; esp. the legendary MIT AI Lab culture of roughly 1971 to 1983 and its feeder groups, including the Tech Model Railroad Club

NRL
: Naval Research Laboratories

NYU
: New York University

OED
: The Oxford English Dictionary

Purdue
: Purdue University

SAIL
: Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory (at Stanford University)

SI
: From *Système International*, the name for the standard conventions of metric nomenclature used in the sciences

Stanford
: Stanford University

Sun
: Sun Microsystems

TMRC
: Some MITisms go back as far as the Tech Model Railroad Club (TMRC) at MIT c. 1960. Material marked TMRC is from "An Abridged Dictionary of the TMRC Language", originally compiled by Pete Samson in 1959

UCLA
: University of California at Los Angeles

UK
: the United Kingdom (England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland)

Usenet
: See the **Usenet** entry

WPI
: Worcester Polytechnic Institute, site of a very active community of PDP-10 hackers during the 1970s

WWW
: The World-Wide-Web.

XEROX PARC
: XEROX's Palo Alto Research Center, site of much pioneering research in user interface design and networking

Yale
: Yale University

Some other etymology abbreviations such as **Unix** and **PDP-10** refer to technical cultures surrounding specific operating systems, processors, or other environments. The fact that a term is labelled with any one of these abbreviations does not necessarily mean its use is confined to that culture. In particular, many terms labelled `MIT' and `Stanford' are in quite general use. We have tried to give some indication of the distribution of speakers in the usage notes; however, a number of factors mentioned in the introduction conspire to make these indications less definite than might be desirable.

A few new definitions attached to entries are marked [proposed]. These are usually generalizations suggested by editors or Usenet respondents in the process of commenting on previous definitions of those entries. These are *not* represented as established jargon.

Format For New Entries

You can mail submissions for the Jargon File to jargon@snark.thyrsus.com.

We welcome new jargon, and corrections to or amplifications of existing entries. You can improve your submission's chances of being included by adding background information on user population and years of currency. References to actual usage via URLs and/or DejaNews pointers are particularly welcomed.

All contributions and suggestions about the Jargon File will be considered donations to be placed in the public domain as part of this File, and may be used in subsequent paper editions. Submissions may be edited for accuracy, clarity and concision.

We are looking to expand the File's range of technical specialties covered. There are doubtless rich veins of jargon yet untapped in the scientific computing, graphics, and networking hacker communities; also in numerical analysis, computer architectures and VLSI design, language design, and many other related fields. Send us your jargon!

We are *not* interested in straight technical terms explained by textbooks or technical dictionaries unless an entry illuminates `underground' meanings or aspects not covered by official histories. We are also not interested in `joke' entries -- there is a lot of humor in the file but it must flow naturally out of the explanations of what hackers do and how they think.

It is OK to submit items of jargon you have originated if they have spread to the point of being used by people who are not personally acquainted with you. We prefer items to be attested by independent submission from two different sites.

An HTML version of the File is available at http://www.tuxedo.org/jargon. Please send us URLs for materials related to the entries, so we can enrich the File's link structure.

The Jargon File will be regularly maintained and made available for browsing on the World Wide Web, and will include a version number. Read it, pass it around, contribute -- this is *your* monument!

Node:The Jargon Lexicon, Next:Appendix A, Previous:Format for New Entries, Up:Top

The Jargon Lexicon

- = 0 =:
- = A =:
- = B =:
- = C =:
- = D =:
- = E =:
- = F =:
- = G =:
- = H =:
- = I =:
- = J =:
- = K =:
- = L =:
- = M =:
- = N =:

- = O =:
- = P =:
- = Q =:
- = R =:
- = S =:
- = T =:
- = U =:
- = V =:
- = W =:
- = X =:
- = Y =:
- = Z =:

Node:= 0 =, Next:= A =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= 0 =

- 0:
- 1TBS:
- 120 reset:
- 2:
- 404:
- 404 compliant:
- 4.2:
- @-party:

Node:0, Next:1TBS, Up:= 0 =

0

Numeric zero, as opposed to the letter `O' (the 15th letter of the English alphabet). In their unmodified forms they look a lot alike, and various kluges invented to make them visually distinct have compounded the confusion. If your zero is center-dotted and letter-O is not, or if letter-O looks almost rectangular but zero looks more like an American football stood on end (or the reverse), you're probably looking at a modern character display (though the dotted zero seems to have originated as an option on IBM 3270 controllers). If your zero is slashed but letter-O is not, you're probably looking at an old-style ASCII graphic set descended from the default typewheel on the venerable ASR-33 Teletype (Scandinavians, for whom Ø is a letter, curse this arrangement). (Interestingly, the slashed zero long predates computers; Florian Cajori's monumental "A History of Mathematical Notations" notes that it was used in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.) If letter-O has a slash across it and the zero does not, your display is tuned for a very old convention used at IBM and a few other early mainframe makers (Scandinavians curse *this* arrangement even more, because it means two of their letters collide). Some Burroughs/Unisys equipment displays a zero with a *reversed* slash. Old CDC computers rendered letter O as an unbroken oval and 0 as an oval broken at upper right and lower left. And yet another convention common on early line printers left zero unornamented but added a tail or hook to the letter-O so that it resembled an inverted Q or cursive capital letter-O (this was endorsed by a draft ANSI standard for how to draw ASCII characters, but the final standard changed the distinguisher to a tick-mark in the upper-left corner). Are we sufficiently confused yet?

Node:1TBS, Next:120 reset, Previous:0, Up:= 0 =

1TBS // n.

The "One True Brace Style"; see **indent style**.

Node:120 reset, Next:2, Previous:1TBS, Up:= 0 =

120 reset /wuhn-twen'tee ree'set/ n.

[from 120 volts, U.S. wall voltage] To cycle power on a machine in order to reset or unjam it. Compare **Big Red Switch**, **power cycle**.

Node:2, Next:404, Previous:120 reset, Up:= 0 =

2 infix.

In translation software written by hackers, infix 2 often represents the syllable *to* with the connotation `translate to': as in dvi2ps (DVI to PostScript), int2string (integer to string), and texi2roff (Texinfo to [nt]roff). Several versions of a joke have floated around the internet in which some idiot programmer fixes the Y2K bug by changing all the Y's in something to K's, as in Januark, Februark, etc.

Node:404, Next:404 compliant, Previous:2, Up:= 0 =

404 // n.

[from the HTTP error "file not found on server"] Extended to humans to convey that the subject has no idea or no clue - sapience not found. May be used reflexively; "Uh, I'm 404ing" means "I'm drawing a blank".

Node:404 compliant, Next:4.2, Previous:404, Up:= 0 =

404 compliant adj.

The status of a website which has been completely removed, usually by the administrators of the hosting site as a result of net abuse by the website operators. The term is a tongue-in-cheek reference to the standard "301 compliant" Murkowski Bill disclaimer used by spammers. See also: **spam**, **spamvertize**.

Node:4.2, Next:@-party, Previous:404 compliant, Up:= 0 =

4.2 /for' poynt too'/ n.

Without a prefix, this almost invariably refers to **BSD** Unix release 4.2. Note that it is an indication of cluelessness to say "version 4.2", and "release 4.2" is rare; the number stands on its own, or is used in the more explicit forms 4.2BSD or (less commonly) BSD 4.2. Similar remarks apply to "4.3", "4.4" and to earlier, less-widespread releases 4.1 and 2.9.

Node:@-party, Next:abbrev, Previous:4.2, Up:= 0 =

@-party /at'par`tee/ n.

[from the @-sign in an Internet address] (alt. `@-sign party' /at'si:n par`tee/) A semi-closed party thrown for hackers at a science-fiction convention (esp. the annual World Science Fiction Convention or "Worldcon"); one must have a **network address** to get in, or at least be in company with someone who does. One of the most reliable opportunities for hackers to meet face to face with people who might otherwise be represented by mere phosphor dots on their screens. Compare **boink**.

The first recorded @-party was held at the Westercon (a California SF convention) over the July 4th weekend in 1980. It is not clear exactly when the canonical @-party venue shifted to the Worldcon but it had certainly become established by Constellation in 1983. Sadly, the @-party tradition has been in decline since about 1996, mainly because having an @-address no longer functions as an effective lodge pin.

Node:= A =, Next:= B =, Previous:= 0 =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= A =

- abbrev:
- ABEND:
- accumulator:
- ACK:
- Acme:
- acolyte:
- ad-hockery:
- Ada:
- address harvester:
- adger:
- admin:
- ADVENT:
- AFAIK:
- AFJ:
- AFK:
- AI:
- AI-complete:
- AI koans:
- AIDS:
- AIDX:
- airplane rule:
- Alderson loop:
- aliasing bug:
- Alice and Bob:
- all-elbows:
- alpha geek:
- alpha particles:
- alt:
- alt bit:
- Aluminum Book:
- ambimouseterous:

- Amiga:
- Amiga Persecution Complex:
- amoeba:
- amp off:
- amper:
- Angband:
- angle brackets:
- angry fruit salad:
- annoybot:
- annoyware:
- ANSI:
- ANSI standard:
- ANSI standard pizza:
- AOL!:
- app:
- arena:
- arg:
- ARMM:
- armor-plated:
- asbestos:
- asbestos cork award:
- asbestos longjohns:
- ASCII:
- ASCII art:
- ASCIIbetical order:
- astroturfing:
- atomic:
- attoparsec:
- AUP:
- autobogotiphobia:
- automagically:
- avatar:
- awk:

Node:abbrev, Next:ABEND, Previous:@-party, Up:= A =

abbrev /*-breev'/, /*-brev'/ n.

Common abbreviation for `abbreviation'.

Node:ABEND, Next:accumulator, Previous:abbrev, Up:= A =

ABEND /a'bend/, /*-bend'/ n.

[ABnormal END] 1. Abnormal termination (of software); **crash**; **lossage**. Derives from an error message on the IBM 360; used jokingly by hackers but seriously mainly by **code grinder**s. Usually capitalized, but may appear as `abend'. Hackers will try to persuade you that ABEND is called `abend' because it is what system operators do to the machine late on Friday when they want to call it a day, and hence is from the German `Abend' = `Evening'. 2. [*alt.callahans*] Absent By Enforced Net Deprivation - used in the subject lines of postings warning friends of an imminent loss of Internet access. (This can be because of

computer downtime, loss of provider, moving or illness.) Variants of this also appear: ABVND = `Absent By Voluntary Net Deprivation' and ABSEND = `Absent By Self-Enforced Net Deprivation' have been sighted.

Node:accumulator, Next:ACK, Previous:ABEND, Up:= A =

accumulator n. obs.

1. Archaic term for a register. On-line use of it as a synonym for `register' is a fairly reliable indication that the user has been around for quite a while and/or that the architecture under discussion is quite old. The term in full is almost never used of microprocessor registers, for example, though symbolic names for arithmetic registers beginning in `A' derive from historical use of the term `accumulator' (and not, actually, from `arithmetic'). Confusingly, though, an `A' register name prefix may also stand for `address', as for example on the Motorola 680x0 family. 2. A register being used for arithmetic or logic (as opposed to addressing or a loop index), especially one being used to accumulate a sum or count of many items. This use is in context of a particular routine or stretch of code. "The FOOBAZ routine uses A3 as an accumulator." 3. One's in-basket (esp. among old-timers who might use sense 1). "You want this reviewed? Sure, just put it in the accumulator." (See **stack**.)

Node:ACK, Next:Acme, Previous:accumulator, Up:= A =

ACK /ak/ interj.

1. [common; from the ASCII mnemonic for 0000110] Acknowledge. Used to register one's presence (compare mainstream *Yo!*). An appropriate response to **ping** or **ENQ**. 2. [from the comic strip "Bloom County"] An exclamation of surprised disgust, esp. in "Ack pffft!" Semi-humorous. Generally this sense is not spelled in caps (ACK) and is distinguished by a following exclamation point. 3. Used to politely interrupt someone to tell them you understand their point (see **NAK**). Thus, for example, you might cut off an overly long explanation with "Ack. Ack. Ack. I get it now".

There is also a usage "ACK?" (from sense 1) meaning "Are you there?", often used in email when earlier mail has produced no reply, or during a lull in **talk mode** to see if the person has gone away (the standard humorous response is of course **NAK** (sense 2), i.e., "I'm not here").

Node:Acme, Next:acolyte, Previous:ACK, Up:= A =

Acme n.

The canonical supplier of bizarre, elaborate, and non-functional gadgetry - where Rube Goldberg and Heath Robinson (two cartoonists who specialized in elaborate contraptions) shop. The name has been humorously expanded as A (or American) Company Making Everything. (In fact, Acme was a real brand sold from Sears Roebuck catalogs in the early 1900s.) Describing some X as an "Acme X" either means "This is **insanely great**", or, more likely, "This looks **insanely great** on paper, but in practice it's really easy to shoot yourself in the foot with it." Compare **pistol**.

This term, specially cherished by American hackers and explained here for the benefit of our overseas brethren, comes from the Warner Brothers' series of "Roadrunner" cartoons. In these cartoons, the famished Wile E. Coyote was forever attempting to catch up with, trap, and eat the Roadrunner. His attempts usually involved one or more high-technology Rube Goldberg devices - rocket jetpacks, catapults, magnetic traps, high-powered slingshots, etc. These were usually delivered in large cardboard boxes, labeled prominently with the Acme name. These devices invariably malfunctioned in improbable

and violent ways.

Node:acolyte, Next:ad-hockery, Previous:Acme, Up:= A =

acolyte n. obs.

[TMRC] An **OSU** privileged enough to submit data and programs to a member of the **priesthood**.

Node:ad-hockery, Next:Ada, Previous:acolyte, Up:= A =

ad-hockery /ad-hok'*r-ee/ n.

[Purdue] 1. Gratuitous assumptions made inside certain programs, esp. expert systems, which lead to the appearance of semi-intelligent behavior but are in fact entirely arbitrary. For example, fuzzy-matching of input tokens that might be typing errors against a symbol table can make it look as though a program knows how to spell. 2. Special-case code to cope with some awkward input that would otherwise cause a program to **choke**, presuming normal inputs are dealt with in some cleaner and more regular way. Also called `ad-hackery', `ad-hocity' (/ad-hos'*-tee/), `ad-crockery'. See also **ELIZA effect**.

Node:Ada, Next:address harvester, Previous:ad-hockery, Up:= A =

Ada n.

A **Pascal**-descended language that has been made mandatory for Department of Defense software projects by the Pentagon. Hackers are nearly unanimous in observing that, technically, it is precisely what one might expect given that kind of endorsement by fiat; designed by committee, crockish, difficult to use, and overall a disastrous, multi-billion-dollar boondoggle (one common description wss "The PL/I of the 1980s"). Hackers find Ada's exception-handling and inter-process communication features particularly hilarious. Ada Lovelace (the daughter of Lord Byron who became the world's first programmer while cooperating with Charles Babbage on the design of his mechanical computing engines in the mid-1800s) would almost certainly blanch at the use to which her name has latterly been put; the kindest thing that has been said about it is that there is probably a good small language screaming to get out from inside its vast, **elephantine** bulk.

Node:address harvester, Next:adger, Previous:Ada, Up:= A =

address harvester n.

A robot that searches web pages and/or filters netnews traffic looking for valid email addresses. Some address harvesters are benign, used only for compiling address directories. Most, unfortunately, are run by miscreants compiling address lists to **spam**. Address harvesters can be foiled by a **teergrube**.

Node:adger, Next:admin, Previous:address harvester, Up:= A =

adger /aj'r/ vt.

[UCLA mutant of **nadger**, poss. also from the middle name of an infamous **tenured graduate student**] To make a bonehead move with consequences that could have been foreseen with even slight mental

effort. E.g., "He started removing files and promptly adgered the whole project". Compare **dumbass attack**.

Node:admin, Next:ADVENT, Previous:adger, Up:= A =

admin /ad-min'/ n.

Short for `administrator'; very commonly used in speech or on-line to refer to the systems person in charge on a computer. Common constructions on this include `sysadmin' and `site admin' (emphasizing the administrator's role as a site contact for email and news) or `newsadmin' (focusing specifically on news). Compare **postmaster**, **sysop**, **system mangler**.

Node:ADVENT, Next:AFAIK, Previous:admin, Up:= A =

ADVENT /ad'vent/ n.

The prototypical computer adventure game, first designed by Will Crowther on the **PDP-10** in the mid-1970s as an attempt at computer-refereed fantasy gaming, and expanded into a puzzle-oriented game by Don Woods at Stanford in 1976. (Woods had been one of the authors of **INTERCAL**.) Now better known as Adventure, but the **TOPS-10** operating system permitted only six-letter filenames. See also **vadding**, **Zork**, and **Infocom**.

This game defined the terse, dryly humorous style since expected in text adventure games, and popularized several tag lines that have become fixtures of hacker-speak: "A huge green fierce snake bars the way!" "I see no X here" (for some noun X). "You are in a maze of twisty little passages, all alike." "You are in a little maze of twisty passages, all different." The `magic words' **xyzzy** and **plugh** also derive from this game.

Crowther, by the way, participated in the exploration of the Mammoth & Flint Ridge cave system; it actually *has* a `Colossal Cave' and a `Bedquilt' as in the game, and the `Y2' that also turns up is cavers' jargon for a map reference to a secondary entrance.

ADVENT sources are available for FTP at ftp://ftp.wustl.edu/doc/misc/if-archive/games/source/advent.tar.Z. There's a version implemented as a set of web scripts at http://tjwww.stanford.edu/adventure/.

Node:AFAIK, Next:AFJ, Previous:ADVENT, Up:= A =

AFAIK // n.

[Usenet] Abbrev. for "As Far As I Know".

Node:AFJ, Next:AFK, Previous:AFAIK, Up:= A =

AFJ // n.

Written-only abbreviation for "April Fool's Joke". Elaborate April Fool's hoaxes are a long-established tradition on Usenet and Internet; see **kremvax** for an example. In fact, April Fool's Day is the *only* seasonal holiday consistently marked by customary observances on Internet and other hacker networks.

Node:AFK, Next:AI, Previous:AFJ, Up:= A =

AFK

[MUD] Abbrev. for "Away From Keyboard". Used to notify others that you will be momentarily unavailable online. eg. "Let's not go kill that frost giant yet, I need to go AFK to make a phone call". Often MUDs will have a command to politely inform others of your absence when they try to talk with you. The term is not restricted to MUDs, however, and has become common in many chat situations, from IRC to Unix talk.

Node:AI, Next:AI-complete, Previous:AFK, Up:= A =

AI /A-I/ n.

Abbreviation for `Artificial Intelligence', so common that the full form is almost never written or spoken among hackers.

Node:AI-complete, Next:AI koans, Previous:AI, Up:= A =

AI-complete /A-I k*m-pleet'/ adj.

[MIT, Stanford: by analogy with `NP-complete' (see **NP-**)] Used to describe problems or subproblems in AI, to indicate that the solution presupposes a solution to the `strong AI problem' (that is, the synthesis of a human-level intelligence). A problem that is AI-complete is, in other words, just too hard.

Examples of AI-complete problems are `The Vision Problem' (building a system that can see as well as a human) and `The Natural Language Problem' (building a system that can understand and speak a natural language as well as a human). These may appear to be modular, but all attempts so far (1999) to solve them have foundered on the amount of context information and `intelligence' they seem to require. See also **gedanken**.

Node:AI koans, Next:AIDS, Previous:AI-complete, Up:= A =

AI koans /A-I koh'anz/ pl.n.

A series of pastiches of Zen teaching riddles created by Danny Hillis at the MIT AI Lab around various major figures of the Lab's culture (several are included under **Some AI Koans** in Appendix A). See also **ha ha only serious**, **mu**, and **hacker humor**.

Node:AIDS, Next:AIDX, Previous:AI koans, Up:= A =

AIDS /aydz/ n.

Short for A* Infected Disk Syndrome (`A*' is a **glob** pattern that matches, but is not limited to, Apple or Amiga), this condition is quite often the result of practicing unsafe **SEX**. See **virus**, **worm**, **Trojan horse**, **virgin**.

Node:AIDX, Next:airplane rule, Previous:AIDS, Up:= A =

AIDX /ayd'k*z/ n.

Derogatory term for IBM's perverted version of Unix, AIX, especially for the AIX 3.? used in the IBM RS/6000 series (some hackers think it is funnier just to pronounce "AIX" as "aches"). A victim of the dreaded "hybridism" disease, this attempt to combine the two main currents of the Unix stream (**BSD** and **USG Unix**) became a **monstrosity** to haunt system administrators' dreams. For example, if new accounts are created while many users are logged on, the load average jumps quickly over 20 due to silly implementation of the user databases. For a quite similar disease, compare **HP-SUX**. Also, compare **Macintrash**, **Nominal Semidestructor**, **ScumOS**, **sun-stools**.

Node:airplane rule, Next:Alderson loop, Previous:AIDX, Up:= A =

airplane rule n.

"Complexity increases the possibility of failure; a twin-engine airplane has twice as many engine problems as a single-engine airplane." By analogy, in both software and electronics, the rule that simplicity increases robustness. It is correspondingly argued that the right way to build reliable systems is to put all your eggs in one basket, after making sure that you've built a really *good* basket. See also **KISS Principle**, **elegant**.

Node:Alderson loop, Next:aliasing bug, Previous:airplane rule, Up:= A =

Alderson loop n.

[Intel] A special version of an **infinite loop** where there is an exit condition available, but inaccessible in the current implementation of the code. Typically this is created while debugging user interface code. An example would be when there is a menu stating, "Select 1-3 or 9 to quit" and 9 is not allowed by the function that takes the selection from the user.

This term received its name from a programmer who had coded a modal message box in MSAccess with no Ok or Cancel buttons, thereby disabling the entire program whenever the box came up. The message box had the proper code for dismissal and even was set up so that when the non-existent Ok button was pressed the proper code would be called.

Node:aliasing bug, Next:Alice and Bob, Previous:Alderson loop, Up:= A =

aliasing bug n.

A class of subtle programming errors that can arise in code that does dynamic allocation, esp. via `malloc(3)` or equivalent. If several pointers address (`aliases for') a given hunk of storage, it may happen that the storage is freed or reallocated (and thus moved) through one alias and then referenced through another, which may lead to subtle (and possibly intermittent) lossage depending on the state and the allocation history of the malloc **arena**. Avoidable by use of allocation strategies that never alias allocated core, or by use of higher-level languages, such as **LISP**, which employ a garbage collector (see **GC**). Also called a **stale pointer bug**. See also **precedence lossage**, **smash the stack**, **fandango on core**, **memory leak**, **memory smash**, **overrun screw**, **spam**.

Historical note: Though this term is nowadays associated with C programming, it was already in use in a very similar sense in the Algol-60 and FORTRAN communities in the 1960s.

Node:Alice and Bob, Next:all-elbows, Previous:aliasing bug, Up:= A =

Alice and Bob n.

The archetypal individuals used as examples in discussions of cryptographic protocols. Originally, theorists would say something like: "A communicates with someone who claims to be B, So to be sure, A tests that B knows a secret number K. So A sends to B a random number X. B then forms Y by encrypting X under key K and sends Y back to A" Because this sort of thing is is quite hard to follow, theorists stopped using the unadorned letters A and B to represent the main players and started calling them Alice and Bob. So now we say "Alice communicates with someone claiming to be Bob, and to be sure, So Alice tests that Bob knows a secret number K. Alice sends to Bob a random number X. Bob then forms Y by encrypting X under key K and sends Y back to Alice". A whole mythology rapidly grew up around Alice and Bob; see http://www.conceptlabs.co.uk/alicebob.html.

In Bruce Schneier's definitive introductory text "Applied Cryptography" (2nd ed., 1996, John Wiley & Sons, ISBN 0-471-11709-9) he introduces a table of dramatis personae headed by Alice and Bob. Others include Carol (a participant in three- and four-party protocols), Dave (a participant in four-party protocols), Eve (an eavesdropper), Mallory (a malicious active attacker), Trent (a trusted arbitrator), Walter (a warden), Peggy (a prover) and Victor (a verifier). These names for roles are either already standard or, given the wide popularity of the book, may be expected to quickly become so.

Node:all-elbows, Next:alpha geek, Previous:Alice and Bob, Up:= A =

all-elbows adj.

[MS-DOS] Of a TSR (terminate-and-stay-resident) IBM PC program, such as the N pop-up calendar and calculator utilities that circulate on **BBS** systems: unsociable. Used to describe a program that rudely steals the resources that it needs without considering that other TSRs may also be resident. One particularly common form of rudeness is lock-up due to programs fighting over the keyboard interrupt. See **rude**, also **mess-dos**.

Node:alpha geek, Next:alpha particles, Previous:all-elbows, Up:= A =

alpha geek n.

[from animal ethologists' `alpha male'] The most technically accomplished or skillful person in some implied context. "Ask Larry, he's the alpha geek here."

Node:alpha particles, Next:alt, Previous:alpha geek, Up:= A =

alpha particles n.

See **bit rot**.

Node:alt, Next:alt bit, Previous:alpha particles, Up:= A =

alt /awlt/

1. n. The alt shift key on an IBM PC or **clone** keyboard; see **bucky bits**, sense 2 (though typical PC usage does not simply set the 0200 bit). 2. n. The `option' key on a Macintosh; use of this term usually reveals that the speaker hacked PCs before coming to the Mac (see also **feature key**, which is sometimes *incorrectly* called `alt'). 3. n.,obs. [PDP-10; often capitalized to ALT] Alternate name for the ASCII ESC character (ASCII 0011011), after the keycap labeling on some older terminals; also `altmode' (/awlt'mohd/). This character was almost never pronounced `escape' on an ITS system, in **TECO**, or under TOPS-10 -- always alt, as in "Type alt alt to end a TECO command" or "alt-U onto the system" (for "log onto the [ITS] system"). This usage probably arose because alt is more convenient to say than `escape', especially when followed by another alt or a character (or another alt *and* a character, for that matter). 4. The *alt* hierarchy on Usenet, the tree of newsgroups created by users without a formal vote and approval procedure. There is a myth, not entirely implausible, that *alt* is acronymic for "anarchists, lunatics, and terrorists"; but in fact it is simply short for "alternative".

Node:alt bit, Next:Aluminum Book, Previous:alt, Up:= A =

alt bit /awlt bit/ [from alternate] adj.

See **meta bit**.

Node:Aluminum Book, Next:ambimouseterous, Previous:alt bit, Up:= A =

Aluminum Book n.

[MIT] "Common LISP: The Language", by Guy L. Steele Jr. (Digital Press, first edition 1984, second edition 1990). Note that due to a technical screwup some printings of the second edition are actually of a color the author describes succinctly as "yucky green". See also **book titles**.

Node:ambimouseterous, Next:Amiga, Previous:Aluminum Book, Up:= A =

ambimouseterous /am-b*-mows'ter-us/ or /am-b*-mows'trus/ adj.

[modeled on *ambidextrous*] Able to use a mouse with either hand.

Node:Amiga, Next:Amiga Persecution Complex, Previous:ambimouseterous, Up:= A =

Amiga n

A series of personal computer models originally sold by Commodore, based on 680x0 processors, custom support chips and an operating system that combined some of the best features of Macintosh and Unix with compatibility with neither.

The Amiga was released just as the personal computing world standardized on IBM-PC clones. This prevented it from gaining serious market share, despite the fact that the first Amigas had a substantial technological lead on the IBM XTs of the time. Instead, it acquired a small but zealous population of enthusiastic hackers who dreamt of one day unseating the clones (see **Amiga Persecution Complex**). The traits of this culture are both spoofed and illuminated in The BLAZE Humor Viewer. The strength of the Amiga platform seeded a small industry of companies building software and hardware for the platform, especially in graphics and video applications (see **video toaster**).

Due to spectacular mismanagement, Commodore did hardly any R&D, allowing the competition to close

Amiga's technological lead. After Commodore went bankrupt in 1994 the technology passed through several hands, none of whom did much with it. However, the Amiga is still being produced in Europe under license and has a substantial number of fans, which will probably extend the platform's life considerably.

Node:Amiga Persecution Complex, Next:amoeba, Previous:Amiga, Up:= A =

Amiga Persecution Complex n.

The disorder suffered by a particularly egregious variety of **bigot**, those who believe that the marginality of their preferred machine is the result of some kind of industry-wide conspiracy (for without a conspiracy of some kind, the eminent superiority of their beloved shining jewel of a platform would obviously win over all, market pressures be damned!) Those afflicted are prone to engaging in **flame war**s and calling for boycotts and mailbombings. Amiga Persecution Complex is by no means limited to Amiga users; NeXT, **NeWS**, **OS/2**, Macintosh, **LISP**, and **GNU** users are also common victims. **Linux** users used to display symptoms very frequently before Linux started winning; some still do. See also **newbie**, **troll**, **holy wars**, **weenie**, **Get a life!**.

Node:amoeba, Next:amp off, Previous:Amiga Persecution Complex, Up:= A =

amoeba n.

Humorous term for the Commodore Amiga personal computer.

Node:amp off, Next:amper, Previous:amoeba, Up:= A =

amp off vt.

[Purdue] To run in **background**. From the Unix shell `&' operator.

Node:amper, Next:Angband, Previous:amp off, Up:= A =

amper n.

Common abbreviation for the name of the ampersand (`&', ASCII 0100110) character. See **ASCII** for other synonyms.

Node:Angband, Next:angle brackets, Previous:amper, Up:= A =

Angband n. /ang'band/

Like **nethack**, **moria**, and **rogue**, one of the large freely distributed Dungeons-and-Dragons-like simulation games, available for a wide range of machines and operating systems. The name is from Tolkien's Pits of Angband (compare **elder days**, **elvish**). Has been described as "Moria on steroids"; but, unlike Moria, many aspects of the game are customizable. This leads many hackers and would-be hackers into fooling with these instead of doing productive work. There are many Angband variants, of which the most notorious is probably the rather whimsical Zangband. In this game, when a key that does not correspond to a command is pressed, the game will display "Type ? for help" 50% of the time. The other

50% of the time, random error messages including "An error has occurred because an error of type 42 has occurred" and "Windows 95 uninstalled successfully" will be displayed. Zangband also allows the player to kill Santa Claus (who has some really good stuff, but also has a lot of friends), "Bull Gates", and Barney the Dinosaur (but be watchful; Barney has a nasty case of halitosis). There is an official angband home page at http://www.phial.com/angband and a zangband one at http://thangorodrim.angband.org. See also **Random Number God**.

Node:angle brackets, Next:angry fruit salad, Previous:Angband, Up:= A =

angle brackets n.

Either of the characters < (ASCII 0111100) and > (ASCII 0111110) (ASCII less-than or greater-than signs). Typographers in the **Real World** use angle brackets which are either taller and slimmer (the ISO `Bra' and `Ket' characters), or significantly smaller (single or double guillemets) than the less-than and greater-than signs. See **broket**, **ASCII**.

Node:angry fruit salad, Next:annoybot, Previous:angle brackets, Up:= A =

angry fruit salad n.

A bad visual-interface design that uses too many colors. (This term derives, of course, from the bizarre day-glo colors found in canned fruit salad.) Too often one sees similar effects from interface designers using color window systems such as **X**; there is a tendency to create displays that are flashy and attention-getting but uncomfortable for long-term use.

Node:annoybot, Next:annoyware, Previous:angry fruit salad, Up:= A =

annoybot /*-noy-bot/ n.

[IRC] See **bot**.

Node:annoyware, Next:ANSI, Previous:annoybot, Up:= A =

annoyware n.

A type of **shareware** that frequently disrupts normal program operation to display requests for payment to the author in return for the ability to disable the request messages. (Also called `nagware') The requests generally require user action to acknowledge the message before normal operation is resumed and are often tied to the most frequently used features of the software. See also **careware**, **charityware**, **crippleware**, **freeware**, **FRS**, **guiltware**, **postcardware**, and **-ware**; compare **payware**.

Node:ANSI, Next:ANSI standard, Previous:annoyware, Up:= A =

ANSI /an'see/

1. n. [techspeak] The American National Standards Institute. ANSI, along with the International Organization for Standards (ISO), standardized the C programming language (see **K&R**, **Classic C**), and promulgates many other important software standards. 2. n. [techspeak] A terminal may be said to be

`ANSI' if it meets the ANSI X.364 standard for terminal control. Unfortunately, this standard was both over-complicated and too permissive. It has been retired and replaced by the ECMA-48 standard, which shares both flaws. 3. n. [BBS jargon] The set of screen-painting codes that most MS-DOS and Amiga computers accept. This comes from the ANSI.SYS device driver that must be loaded on an MS-DOS computer to view such codes. Unfortunately, neither DOS ANSI nor the BBS ANSIs derived from it exactly match the ANSI X.364 terminal standard. For example, the ESC-[1m code turns on the bold highlight on large machines, but in IBM PC/MS-DOS ANSI, it turns on `intense' (bright) colors. Also, in BBS-land, the term `ANSI' is often used to imply that a particular computer uses or can emulate the IBM high-half character set from MS-DOS. Particular use depends on context. Occasionally, the vanilla ASCII character set is used with the color codes, but on BBSs, ANSI and `IBM characters' tend to go together.

Node:ANSI standard, Next:ANSI standard pizza, Previous:ANSI, Up:= A =

ANSI standard /an'see stan'd*rd/

The ANSI standard usage of `ANSI standard' refers to any practice which is typical or broadly done. It's most appropriately applied to things that everyone does that are not quite regulation. For example: ANSI standard shaking of a laser printer cartridge to get extra life from it, or the ANSI standard word tripling in names of usenet alt groups.

Node:ANSI standard pizza, Next:AOL!, Previous:ANSI standard, Up:= A =

ANSI standard pizza /an'see stan'd*rd peet'z*/

[CMU] Pepperoni and mushroom pizza. Coined allegedly because most pizzas ordered by CMU hackers during some period leading up to mid-1990 were of that flavor. See also **rotary debugger**; compare **ISO standard cup of tea**.

Node:AOL!, Next:app, Previous:ANSI standard pizza, Up:= A =

AOL! n.

[Usenet] Common synonym for "Me, too!" alluding to the legendary propensity of America Online users to utter contentless "Me, too!" postings. The number of exclamation points following varies from zero to five or so. The pseudo-HTML

<AOL>Me, too!</AOL>

is also frequently seen. See also **September that never ended**.

Node:app, Next:arena, Previous:AOL!, Up:= A =

app /ap/ n.

Short for `application program', as opposed to a systems program. Apps are what systems vendors are forever chasing developers to create for their environments so they can sell more boxes. Hackers tend not to think of the things they themselves run as apps; thus, in hacker parlance the term excludes compilers, program editors, games, and messaging systems, though a user would consider all those to be apps. (Broadly, an app is often a self-contained environment for performing some well-defined task such as `word processing'; hackers tend to prefer more general-purpose tools.) See **killer app**; oppose **tool**,

operating system.

Node:arena, Next:arg, Previous:app, Up:= A =

arena n.

[common; Unix] The area of memory attached to a process by `brk(2)` and `sbrk(2)` and used by `malloc(3)` as dynamic storage. So named from a `malloc: corrupt arena` message emitted when some early versions detected an impossible value in the free block list. See **overrun screw**, **aliasing bug**, **memory leak**, **memory smash**, **smash the stack**.

Node:arg, Next:ARMM, Previous:arena, Up:= A =

arg /arg/ n.

Abbreviation for `argument' (to a function), used so often as to have become a new word (like `piano' from `pianoforte'). "The sine function takes 1 arg, but the arc-tangent function can take either 1 or 2 args." Compare **param**, **parm**, **var**.

Node:ARMM, Next:armor-plated, Previous:arg, Up:= A =

ARMM n.

[acronym, `Automated Retroactive Minimal Moderation'] A Usenet **cancelbot** created by Dick Depew of Munroe Falls, Ohio. ARMM was intended to automatically cancel posts from anonymous-posting sites. Unfortunately, the robot's recognizer for anonymous postings triggered on its own automatically-generated control messages! Transformed by this stroke of programming ineptitude into a monster of Frankensteinian proportions, it broke loose on the night of March 31, 1993 and proceeded to **spam** *news.admin.policy* with a recursive explosion of over 200 messages.

ARMM's bug produced a recursive **cascade** of messages each of which mechanically added text to the ID and Subject and some other headers of its parent. This produced a flood of messages in which each header took up several screens and each message ID and subject line got longer and longer and longer.

Reactions varied from amusement to outrage. The pathological messages crashed at least one mail system, and upset people paying line charges for their Usenet feeds. One poster described the ARMM debacle as "instant Usenet history" (also establishing the term **despew**), and it has since been widely cited as a cautionary example of the havoc the combination of good intentions and incompetence can wreak on a network. Compare **Great Worm**; **sorcerer's apprentice mode**. See also **software laser**, **network meltdown**.

Node:armor-plated, Next:asbestos, Previous:ARMM, Up:= A =

armor-plated n.

Syn. for **bulletproof**.

Node:asbestos, Next:asbestos cork award, Previous:armor-plated, Up:= A =

asbestos adj.

[common] Used as a modifier to anything intended to protect one from **flame**s; also in other highly **flame**-suggestive usages. See, for example, **asbestos longjohns** and **asbestos cork award**.

Node:asbestos cork award, Next:asbestos longjohns, Previous:asbestos, Up:= A =

asbestos cork award n.

Once, long ago at MIT, there was a **flamer** so consistently obnoxious that another hacker designed, had made, and distributed posters announcing that said flamer had been nominated for the `asbestos cork award'. (Any reader in doubt as to the intended application of the cork should consult the etymology under **flame**.) Since then, it is agreed that only a select few have risen to the heights of bombast required to earn this dubious dignity -- but there is no agreement on *which* few.

Node:asbestos longjohns, Next:ASCII, Previous:asbestos cork award, Up:= A =

asbestos longjohns n.

Notional garments donned by **Usenet** posters just before emitting a remark they expect will elicit **flamage**. This is the most common of the **asbestos** coinages. Also `asbestos underwear', `asbestos overcoat', etc.

Node:ASCII, Next:ASCII art, Previous:asbestos longjohns, Up:= A =

ASCII /as'kee/ n.

[originally an acronym (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) but now merely conventional] The predominant character set encoding of present-day computers. The standard version uses 7 bits for each character, whereas most earlier codes (including early drafts of of ASCII prior to June 1961) used fewer. This change allowed the inclusion of lowercase letters -- a major **win** -- but it did not provide for accented letters or any other letterforms not used in English (such as the German sharp-S or the ae-ligature which is a letter in, for example, Norwegian). It could be worse, though. It could be much worse. See **EBCDIC** to understand how. A history of ASCII and its ancestors is at http://www.wps.com/texts/codes/index.html.

Computers are much pickier and less flexible about spelling than humans; thus, hackers need to be very precise when talking about characters, and have developed a considerable amount of verbal shorthand for them. Every character has one or more names -- some formal, some concise, some silly. Common jargon names for ASCII characters are collected here. See also individual entries for **bang**, **excl**, **open**, **ques**, **semi**, **shriek**, **splat**, **twiddle**, and **Yu-Shiang Whole Fish**.

This list derives from revision 2.3 of the Usenet ASCII pronunciation guide. Single characters are listed in ASCII order; character pairs are sorted in by first member. For each character, common names are given in rough order of popularity, followed by names that are reported but rarely seen; official ANSI/CCITT names are surrounded by brokets: <>. Square brackets mark the particularly silly names introduced by **INTERCAL**. The abbreviations "l/r" and "o/c" stand for left/right and "open/close" respectively. Ordinary parentheticals provide some usage information.

!
: Common: **bang**; pling; excl; shriek; <exclamation mark>. Rare: factorial; exclam; smash; cuss;

boing; yell; wow; hey; wham; eureka; [spark-spot]; soldier, control.

`"`

Common: double quote; quote. Rare: literal mark; double-glitch; <quotation marks>; <dieresis>; dirk; [rabbit-ears]; double prime.

`#`

Common: number sign; pound; pound sign; hash; sharp; **crunch**; hex; [mesh]. Rare: grid; crosshatch; octothorpe; flash; <square>, pig-pen; tictactoe; scratchmark; thud; thump; **splat**.

`$`

Common: dollar; <dollar sign>. Rare: currency symbol; buck; cash; string (from BASIC); escape (when used as the echo of ASCII ESC); ding; cache; [big money].

`%`

Common: percent; <percent sign>; mod; grapes. Rare: [double-oh-seven].

`&`

Common: <ampersand>; amper; and. Rare: address (from C); reference (from C++); andpersand; bitand; background (from `sh(1)`); pretzel; amp. [INTERCAL called this `ampersand'; what could be sillier?]

`'`

Common: single quote; quote; <apostrophe>. Rare: prime; glitch; tick; irk; pop; [spark]; <closing single quotation mark>; <acute accent>.

`( )`

Common: l/r paren; l/r parenthesis; left/right; open/close; paren/thesis; o/c paren; o/c parenthesis; l/r parenthesis; l/r banana. Rare: so/already; lparen/rparen; <opening/closing parenthesis>; o/c round bracket, l/r round bracket, [wax/wane]; parenthisey/unparenthisey; l/r ear.

`*`

Common: star; [**splat**]; <asterisk>. Rare: wildcard; gear; dingle; mult; spider; aster; times; twinkle; glob (see **glob**); **Nathan Hale**.

`+`

Common: <plus>; add. Rare: cross; [intersection].

`,`

Common: <comma>. Rare: <cedilla>; [tail].

`-`

Common: dash; <hyphen>; <minus>. Rare: [worm]; option; dak; bithorpe.

`.`

Common: dot; point; <period>; <decimal point>. Rare: radix point; full stop; [spot].

`/`

Common: slash; stroke; <slant>; forward slash. Rare: diagonal; solidus; over; slak; virgule; [slat].

`:`

Common: <colon>. Rare: dots; [two-spot].

`;`

Common: <semicolon>; semi. Rare: weenie; [hybrid], pit-thwong.

`< >`

Common: <less/greater than>; bra/ket; l/r angle; l/r angle bracket; l/r broket. Rare: from/{into, towards}; read from/write to; suck/blow; comes-from/gozinta; in/out; crunch/zap (all from UNIX); [angle/right angle].

`=`

Common: <equals>; gets; takes. Rare: quadrathorpe; [half-mesh].

`?`

Common: query; <question mark>; **ques**. Rare: whatmark; [what]; wildchar; huh; hook; buttonhook; hunchback.

`@`

Common: at sign; at; strudel. Rare: each; vortex; whorl; [whirlpool]; cyclone; snail; ape; cat; rose; cabbage; <commercial at>.

`V`

Rare: [book].

`[ ]`

Common: l/r square bracket; l/r bracket; <opening/closing bracket>; bracket/unbracket. Rare: square/unsquare; [U turn/U turn back].

\

Common: backslash, hack, whack; escape (from C/UNIX); reverse slash; slosh; backslant; backwhack. Rare: bash; <reverse slant>; reversed virgule; [backslat].

^

Common: hat; control; uparrow; caret; <circumflex>. Rare: chevron; [shark (or shark-fin)]; to the (`to the power of'); fang; pointer (in Pascal).

_

Common: <underline>; underscore; underbar; under. Rare: score; backarrow; skid; [flatworm].

`

Common: backquote; left quote; left single quote; open quote; <grave accent>; grave. Rare: backprime; [backspark]; unapostrophe; birk; blugle; back tick; back glitch; push; <opening single quotation mark>; quasiquote.

{ }

Common: o/c brace; l/r brace; l/r squiggly; l/r squiggly bracket/brace; l/r curly bracket/brace; <opening/closing brace>. Rare: brace/unbrace; curly/uncurly; leftit/rytit; l/r squirrelly; [embrace/bracelet].

|

Common: bar; or; or-bar; v-bar; pipe; vertical bar. Rare: <vertical line>; gozinta; thru; pipesinta (last three from UNIX); [spike].

~

Common: <tilde>; squiggle; **twiddle**; not. Rare: approx; wiggle; swung dash; enyay; [sqiggle (sic)].

The pronunciation of # as `pound' is common in the U.S. but a bad idea; **Commonwealth Hackish** has its own, rather more apposite use of `pound sign' (confusingly, on British keyboards the pound graphic happens to replace #; thus Britishers sometimes call # on a U.S.-ASCII keyboard `pound', compounding the American error). The U.S. usage derives from an old-fashioned commercial practice of using a # suffix to tag pound weights on bills of lading. The character is usually pronounced `hash' outside the U.S. There are more culture wars over the correct pronunciation of this character than any other, which has led to the **ha ha only serious** suggestion that it be pronounced `shibboleth' (see Judges 12.6 in an Old Testament or Torah).

The `uparrow' name for circumflex and `leftarrow' name for underline are historical relics from archaic ASCII (the 1963 version), which had these graphics in those character positions rather than the modern punctuation characters.

The `swung dash' or `approximation' sign is not quite the same as tilde in typeset material but the ASCII tilde serves for both (compare **angle brackets**).

Some other common usages cause odd overlaps. The #, $, >, and & characters, for example, are all pronounced "hex" in different communities because various assemblers use them as a prefix tag for hexadecimal constants (in particular, # in many assembler-programming cultures, $ in the 6502 world, > at Texas Instruments, and & on the BBC Micro, Sinclair, and some Z80 machines). See also **splat**.

The inability of ASCII text to correctly represent any of the world's other major languages makes the designers' choice of 7 bits look more and more like a serious **misfeature** as the use of international networks continues to increase (see **software rot**). Hardware and software from the U.S. still tends to embody the assumption that ASCII is the universal character set and that characters have 7 bits; this is a major irritant to people who want to use a character set suited to their own languages. Perversely, though, efforts to solve this problem by proliferating `national' character sets produce an evolutionary pressure to use a *smaller* subset common to all those in use.

ASCII art n.

The fine art of drawing diagrams using the ASCII character set (mainly `|`, `-`, `/`, `\`, and `+`). Also known as `character graphics' or `ASCII graphics'; see also **boxology**. Here is a serious example:

```
    o----)||(--+--|<----+   +---------o + D O
      L  )||(  |        |   |             C U
    A I  )||(  +-->|-+  |   +-\/\/-+--o -   T
    C N  )||(        |  |   |      |        P
      E  )||(  +-->|-+--)---+--|(--+-o      U
         )||(  |        |          | GND    T
    o----)||(--+--|<----+----------+

    A power supply consisting of a full wave rectifier circuit
    feeding a capacitor input filter circuit
```

And here are some very silly examples:

```
  |\/\/\/|      ____/|                 ___      |\_/|     ___
  |      |      \ o.O|   ACK!        /   \_   |` '|   _/   \
  |      |       =(_)=  THPHTH!    /       \/     \/       \
  | (o)(o)         U              /                         \
  C       _)   (__)                \/\/\/\   _____   /\/\/\/
  | ,___|     (oo)                        \/     \/
  |   /        \/-------\          U                    (__)
 /____\         ||      | \     /---V   `v'-           oo )
/      \        ||---W||  *   * |--|    || |`.         |_/\

                //-o-\\
          ____------------____
    ====___\    /.. ..\    /___====      Klingons rule OK!
  //         ---\__O__/---         \\
  \_\                              /_/
```

There is an important subgenre of ASCII art that puns on the standard character names in the fashion of a rebus.

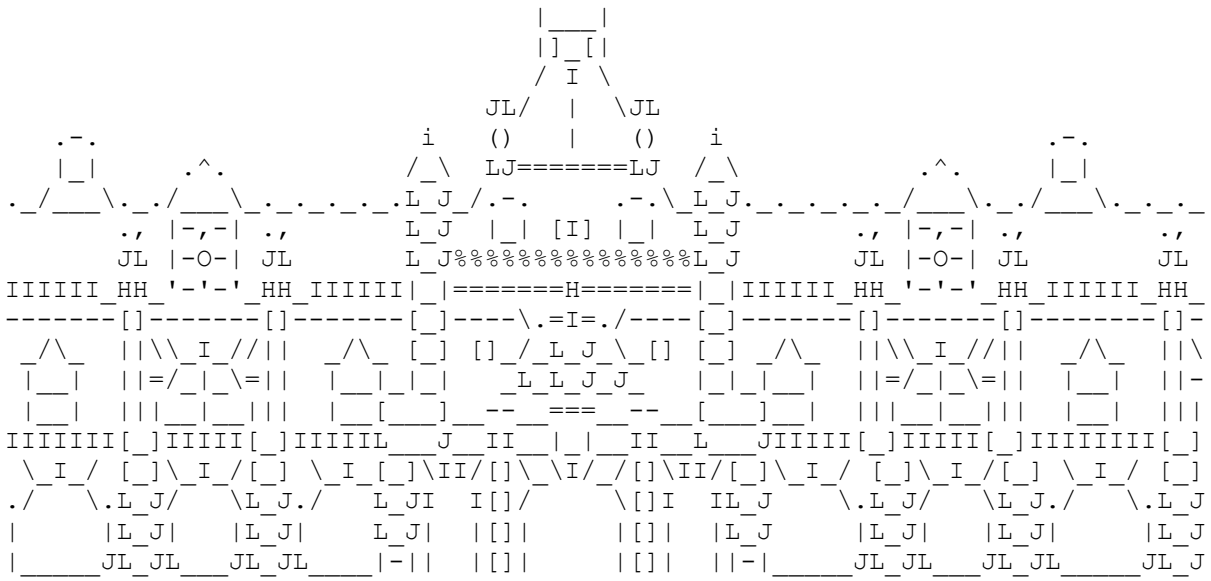
```
+-----------------------------------------------------------+
|       ^^^^^^^^^^^^                                       |
| ^^^^^^^^^^^             ^^^^^^^^^                         |
|                  ^^^^^^^^^^^^^            ^^^^^^^^^^^^^ |
|         ^^^^^^^          B       ^^^^^^^^^               |
|  ^^^^^^^^^           ^^^             ^^^^^^^^^^^^^^      |
+-----------------------------------------------------------+
             " A Bee in the Carrot Patch "
```

Within humorous ASCII art, there is for some reason an entire flourishing subgenre of pictures of silly cows. Four of these are reproduced in the silly examples above, here are three more:

```
         (__)               (__)               (__)
         (\/)               ($$)               (**)
  /-------\/         /-------\/         /-------\/
 / | 666 ||         / |=====||         / |     ||
*  ||----||        *  ||----||        *  ||----||
   ~~    ~~           ~~    ~~           ~~    ~~
Satanic cow    This cow is a Yuppie   Cow in love
```

Finally, here's a magnificent example of ASCII art depicting an Edwardian train station in Dunedin, New Zealand:

```
                                .-.
                               /___\
```



There is a newsgroup, *alt.ascii-art*, devoted to this genre; however, see also **warlording**.

Node:ASCIIbetical order, Next:astroturfing, Previous:ASCII art, Up:= A =

ASCIIbetical order /as'kee-be'-t*-kl or'dr/ adj.,n.

Used to indicate that data is sorted in ASCII collated order rather than alphabetical order. This lexicon is sorted in something close to ASCIIbetical order, but with case ignored and entries beginning with non-alphabetic characters moved to the end. "At my video store, they used their computer to sort the videos into ASCIIbetical order, so I couldn't find `"Crocodile" Dundee' until I thought to look before `2001' and `48 HRS.'!"

Node:astroturfing, Next:atomic, Previous:ASCIIbetical order, Up:= A =

astroturfing n.

The use of paid shills to create the impression of a popular movement, through means like letters to newspapers from soi-disant `concerned citizens', paid opinion pieces, and the formation of grass-roots lobbying groups that are actually funded by a PR group (astroturf is fake grass; hence the term). This term became common among hackers after it came to light in early 1998 that Microsoft had attempted to use such tactics to forestall the U.S. Department of Justice's antitrust action against the company.

This backfired horribly, angering a number of state attorneys-general enough to induce them to go public with plans to join the Federal suit. It also set anybody defending Microsoft on the net for the accusation "You're just astroturfing!".

Node:atomic, Next:attoparsec, Previous:astroturfing, Up:= A =

atomic adj.

[from Gk. `atomos', indivisible] 1. Indivisible; cannot be split up. For example, an instruction may be said to do several things `atomically', i.e., all the things are done immediately, and there is no chance of the instruction being half-completed or of another being interspersed. Used esp. to convey that an operation cannot be screwed up by interrupts. "This routine locks the file and increments the file's semaphore atomically." 2. [primarily techspeak] Guaranteed to complete successfully or not at all, usu. refers to

database transactions. If an error prevents a partially-performed transaction from proceeding to completion, it must be "backed out," as the database must not be left in an inconsistent state.

Computer usage, in either of the above senses, has none of the connotations that `atomic' has in mainstream English (i.e. of particles of matter, nuclear explosions etc.).

Node:attoparsec, Next:AUP, Previous:atomic, Up:= A =

attoparsec n.

About an inch. `atto-' is the standard SI prefix for multiplication by 10^(-18). A parsec (parallax-second) is 3.26 light-years; an attoparsec is thus 3.26 * 10^(-18) light years, or about 3.1 cm (thus, 1 attoparsec/**microfortnight** equals about 1 inch/sec). This unit is reported to be in use (though probably not very seriously) among hackers in the U.K. See **micro-**.

Node:AUP, Next:autobogotiphobia, Previous:attoparsec, Up:= A =

AUP /A-U-P/

Abbreviation, "Acceptable Use Policy". The policy of a given ISP which sets out what the ISP considers to be (un)acceptable uses of its Internet resources.

Node:autobogotiphobia, Next:automagically, Previous:AUP, Up:= A =

autobogotiphobia /aw'toh-boh-got`*-foh'bee-*/

n. See **bogotify**.

Node:automagically, Next:avatar, Previous:autobogotiphobia, Up:= A =

automagically /aw-toh-maj'i-klee/ adv.

Automatically, but in a way that, for some reason (typically because it is too complicated, or too ugly, or perhaps even too trivial), the speaker doesn't feel like explaining to you. See **magic**. "The C-INTERCAL compiler generates C, then automagically invokes `cc(1)` to produce an executable."

This term is quite old, going back at least to the mid-70s in jargon and probably much earlier. The word `automagic' occurred in advertising (for a shirt-ironing gadget) as far back as the late 1940s.

Node:avatar, Next:awk, Previous:automagically, Up:= A =

avatar n. Syn.

[in Hindu mythology, the incarnation of a god] 1. Among people working on virtual reality and **cyberspace** interfaces, an avatar is an icon or representation of a user in a shared virtual reality. The term is sometimes used on **MUD**s. 2. [CMU, Tektronix] **root**, **superuser**. There are quite a few Unix machines on which the name of the superuser account is `avatar' rather than `root'. This quirk was originated by a CMU hacker who found the terms `root' and `superuser' unimaginative, and thought `avatar' might better

impress people with the responsibility they were accepting.

Node:awk, Next:B5, Previous:avatar, Up:= A =

awk /awk/

1. n. [Unix techspeak] An interpreted language for massaging text data developed by Alfred Aho, Peter Weinberger, and Brian Kernighan (the name derives from their initials). It is characterized by C-like syntax, a declaration-free approach to variable typing and declarations, associative arrays, and field-oriented text processing. See also **Perl**. 2. n. Editing term for an expression awkward to manipulate through normal **regexp** facilities (for example, one containing a **newline**). 3. vt. To process data using `awk(1)`.

Node:= B =, Next:= C =, Previous:= A =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= B =

- B5:
- back door:
- backbone cabal:
- backbone site:
- backgammon:
- background:
- backreference:
- backronym:
- backspace and overstrike:
- backward combatability:
- BAD:
- Bad and Wrong:
- Bad Thing:
- bag on the side:
- bagbiter:
- bagbiting:
- baggy pantsing:
- balloonian variable:
- bamf:
- banana label:
- banana problem:
- banner ad:
- barn:
- batbelt:
- Befunge:
- BI:
- binary four:
- bandwidth:
- bang:
- bang on:
- bang path:
- banner:

- bar:
- bare metal:
- barf:
- barfmail:
- barfulation:
- barfulous:
- barney:
- baroque:
- BASIC:
- batch:
- bathtub curve:
- baud:
- baud barf:
- baz:
- bazaar:
- bboard:
- BBS:
- BCPL:
- beam:
- beanie key:
- beep:
- beige toaster:
- bells and whistles:
- bells whistles and gongs:
- benchmark:
- Berkeley Quality Software:
- berklix:
- Berzerkeley:
- beta:
- BFI:
- bible:
- BiCapitalization:
- B1FF:
- biff:
- Big Gray Wall:
- big iron:
- Big Red Switch:
- Big Room:
- big win:
- big-endian:
- bignum:
- bigot:
- bit:
- bit bang:
- bit bashing:
- bit bucket:
- bit decay:
- bit rot:
- bit twiddling:
- bit-paired keyboard:
- bitblt:
- BITNET:

- bits:
- bitty box:
- bixen:
- bixie:
- black art:
- black hole:
- black magic:
- Black Screen of Death:
- Black Thursday:
- blammo:
- blargh:
- blast:
- blat:
- bletch:
- bletcherous:
- blink:
- blinkenlights:
- blit:
- blitter:
- blivet:
- bloatware:
- BLOB:
- block:
- block transfer computations:
- Bloggs Family:
- blow an EPROM:
- blow away:
- blow out:
- blow past:
- blow up:
- BLT:
- Blue Book:
- blue box:
- Blue Glue:
- blue goo:
- Blue Screen of Death:
- blue wire:
- blurgle:
- BNF:
- boa:
- board:
- boat anchor:
- bob:
- bodysurf code:
- BOF:
- BOFH:
- bogo-sort:
- bogometer:
- BogoMIPS:
- bogon:
- bogon filter:
- bogon flux:

- bogosity:
- bogotify:
- bogue out:
- bogus:
- Bohr bug:
- boink:
- bomb:
- bondage-and-discipline language:
- bonk/oif:
- book titles:
- boot:
- Borg:
- borken:
- bot:
- bot spot:
- bottom feeder:
- bottom-up implementation:
- bounce:
- bounce message:
- boustrophedon:
- box:
- boxed comments:
- boxen:
- boxology:
- bozotic:
- BQS:
- brain dump:
- brain fart:
- brain-damaged:
- brain-dead:
- braino:
- branch to Fishkill:
- bread crumbs:
- break:
- break-even point:
- breath-of-life packet:
- breedle:
- Breidbart Index:
- bring X to its knees:
- brittle:
- broadcast storm:
- brochureware:
- broken:
- broken arrow:
- BrokenWindows:
- broket:
- Brooks's Law:
- brown-paper-bag bug:
- browser:
- BRS:
- brute force:
- brute force and ignorance:

- BSD:
- BSOD:
- BUAF:
- BUAG:
- bubble sort:
- bucky bits:
- buffer chuck:
- buffer overflow:
- bug:
- bug-compatible:
- bug-for-bug compatible:
- bug-of-the-month club:
- buglix:
- bulletproof:
- bum:
- bump:
- burble:
- buried treasure:
- burn-in period:
- burst page:
- busy-wait:
- buzz:
- BWQ:
- by hand:
- byte:
- byte sex:
- bytesexual:
- Bzzzt! Wrong.:

Node:B5, Next:back door, Previous:awk, Up:= B =

B5 //

[common] Abbreviation for "Babylon 5", a science-fiction TV series as revered among hackers as was the original Star Trek.

Node:back door, Next:backbone cabal, Previous:B5, Up:= B =

back door n.

[common] A hole in the security of a system deliberately left in place by designers or maintainers. The motivation for such holes is not always sinister; some operating systems, for example, come out of the box with privileged accounts intended for use by field service technicians or the vendor's maintenance programmers. Syn. **trap door**; may also be called a `wormhole'. See also **iron box**, **cracker**, **worm**, **logic bomb**.

Historically, back doors have often lurked in systems longer than anyone expected or planned, and a few have become widely known. Ken Thompson's 1983 Turing Award lecture to the ACM admitted the existence of a back door in early Unix versions that may have qualified as the most fiendishly clever security hack of all time. In this scheme, the C compiler contained code that would recognize when the `login' command was being recompiled and insert some code recognizing a password chosen by

Thompson, giving him entry to the system whether or not an account had been created for him.

Normally such a back door could be removed by removing it from the source code for the compiler and recompiling the compiler. But to recompile the compiler, you have to *use* the compiler -- so Thompson also arranged that the compiler would *recognize when it was compiling a version of itself*, and insert into the recompiled compiler the code to insert into the recompiled `login' the code to allow Thompson entry -- and, of course, the code to recognize itself and do the whole thing again the next time around! And having done this once, he was then able to recompile the compiler from the original sources; the hack perpetuated itself invisibly, leaving the back door in place and active but with no trace in the sources.

The talk that suggested this truly moby hack was published as "Reflections on Trusting Trust", "Communications of the ACM 27", 8 (August 1984), pp. 761-763 (text available at http://www.acm.org/classics). Ken Thompson has since confirmed that this hack was implemented and that the Trojan Horse code did appear in the login binary of a Unix Support group machine. Ken says the crocked compiler was never distributed. Your editor has heard two separate reports that suggest that the crocked login did make it out of Bell Labs, notably to BBN, and that it enabled at least one late-night login across the network by someone using the login name `kt'.

Node:backbone cabal, Next:backbone site, Previous:back door, Up:= B =

backbone cabal n.

A group of large-site administrators who pushed through the **Great Renaming** and reined in the chaos of **Usenet** during most of the 1980s. During most of its lifetime, the Cabal (as it was sometimes capitalized) steadfastly denied its own existence; it was almost obligatory for anyone privy to their secrets to respond "There is no Cabal" whenever the existence or activities of the group were speculated on in public.

The result of this policy was an attractive aura of mystery. Even a decade after the cabal **mailing list** disbanded in late 1988 following a bitter internal catfight, many people believed (or claimed to believe) that it had not actually disbanded but only gone deeper underground with its power intact.

This belief became a model for various paranoid theories about various Cabals with dark nefarious objectives beginning with taking over the Usenet or Internet. These paranoias were later satirized in ways that took on a life of their own. See **Eric Conspiracy** for one example.

See **NANA** for the subsequent history of "the Cabal".

Node:backbone site, Next:backgammon, Previous:backbone cabal, Up:= B =

backbone site n.,obs.

Formerly, a key Usenet and email site, one that processes a large amount of third-party traffic, especially if it is the home site of any of the regional coordinators for the Usenet maps. Notable backbone sites as of early 1993, when this sense of the term was beginning to pass out of general use due to wide availability of cheap Internet connections, included *uunet* and the mail machines at Rutgers University, UC Berkeley, **DEC**'s Western Research Laboratories, Ohio State University, and the University of Texas. Compare **rib site**, **leaf site**.

[1996 update: This term is seldom heard any more. The UUCP network world that gave it meaning has nearly disappeared; everyone is on the Internet now and network traffic is distributed in very different patterns. Today one might see references to a `backbone router' instead --ESR]

Node:backgammon, Next:background, Previous:backbone site, Up:= B =

backgammon

See **bignum** (sense 3), **moby** (sense 4), and **pseudoprime**.

Node:background, Next:backreference, Previous:backgammon, Up:= B =

background n.,adj.,vt.

[common] To do a task `in background' is to do it whenever **foreground** matters are not claiming your undivided attention, and `to background' something means to relegate it to a lower priority. "For now, we'll just print a list of nodes and links; I'm working on the graph-printing problem in background." Note that this implies ongoing activity but at a reduced level or in spare time, in contrast to mainstream `back burner' (which connotes benign neglect until some future resumption of activity). Some people prefer to use the term for processing that they have queued up for their unconscious minds (a tack that one can often fruitfully take upon encountering an obstacle in creative work). Compare **amp off**, **slopsucker**.

Technically, a task running in background is detached from the terminal where it was started (and often running at a lower priority); oppose **foreground**. Nowadays this term is primarily associated with **Unix**, but it appears to have been first used in this sense on OS/360.

Node:backreference, Next:backronym, Previous:background, Up:= B =

backreference n.

1. In a regular expression or pattern match, the text which was matched within grouping parentheses parentheses. 2. The part of the pattern which refers back to the matched text. 3. By extension, anything which refers back to something which has been seen or discussed before. "When you said `she' just now, who were you backreferencing?"

Node:backronym, Next:backspace and overstrike, Previous:backreference, Up:= B =

backronym n.

[portmanteau of back + acronym] A word interpreted as an acronym that was not originally so intended. This is a special case of what linguists call `back formation'. Examples are given under **BASIC**, **recursive acronym** (Cygnus), **Acme**, and **mung**. Discovering backronyms is a common form of wordplay among hackers. Compare **retcon**.

Node:backspace and overstrike, Next:backward combatability, Previous:backronym, Up:= B =

backspace and overstrike interj.

[rare] Whoa! Back up. Used to suggest that someone just said or did something wrong. Once common among APL programmers; may now be obsolete.

Node:backward combatability, Next:BAD, Previous:backspace and overstrike, Up:= B =

backward combatability /bak'w*rd k*m-bat'*-bil'*-tee/ n.

[CMU, Tektronix: from `backward compatibility'] A property of hardware or software revisions in which previous protocols, formats, layouts, etc. are irrevocably discarded in favor of `new and improved' protocols, formats, and layouts, leaving the previous ones not merely deprecated but actively defeated. (Too often, the old and new versions cannot definitively be distinguished, such that lingering instances of the previous ones yield crashes or other infelicitous effects, as opposed to a simple "version mismatch" message.) A backwards compatible change, on the other hand, allows old versions to coexist without crashes or error messages, but too many major changes incorporating elaborate backwards compatibility processing can lead to extreme **software bloat**. See also **flag day**.

Node:BAD, Next:Bad and Wrong, Previous:backward combatability, Up:= B =

BAD /B-A-D/ adj.

[IBM: acronym, `Broken As Designed'] Said of a program that is **bogus** because of bad design and misfeatures rather than because of bugginess. See **working as designed**.

Node:Bad and Wrong, Next:Bad Thing, Previous:BAD, Up:= B =

Bad and Wrong adj.

[Durham, UK] Said of something that is both badly designed and wrongly executed. This common term is the prototype of, and is used by contrast with, three less common terms - Bad and Right (a kludge, something ugly but functional); Good and Wrong (an overblown GUI or other attractive nuisance); and (rare praise) Good and Right. These terms entered common use at Durham c.1994 and may have been imported from elsewhere. There are standard abbreviations: they start with B&R, a typo for "Bad and Wrong". Consequently, B&W is actually "Bad and Right", G&R = "Good and Wrong", and G&W = "Good and Right". Compare **evil and rude**, **Good Thing**, **Bad Thing**.

Node:Bad Thing, Next:bag on the side, Previous:Bad and Wrong, Up:= B =

Bad Thing n.

[very common; from the 1930 Sellar & Yeatman parody "1066 And All That"] Something that can't possibly result in improvement of the subject. This term is always capitalized, as in "Replacing all of the 9600-baud modems with bicycle couriers would be a Bad Thing". Oppose **Good Thing**. British correspondents confirm that **Bad Thing** and **Good Thing** (and prob. therefore **Right Thing** and **Wrong Thing**) come from the book referenced in the etymology, which discusses rulers who were Good Kings but Bad Things. This has apparently created a mainstream idiom on the British side of the pond. It is very common among American hackers, but not in mainstream usage here. Compare **Bad and Wrong**.

Node:bag on the side, Next:bagbiter, Previous:Bad Thing, Up:= B =

bag on the side n.

[prob. originally related to a colostomy bag] An extension to an established hack that is supposed to add some functionality to the original. Usually derogatory, implying that the original was being overextended and should have been thrown away, and the new product is ugly, inelegant, or bloated. Also v. phrase, `to hang a bag on the side [of]'. "C++? That's just a bag on the side of C ...." "They want me to hang a bag on

the side of the accounting system."

Node:bagbiter, Next:bagbiting, Previous:bag on the side, Up:= B =

bagbiter /bag'bi:t-*r/ n.

1. Something, such as a program or a computer, that fails to work, or works in a remarkably clumsy manner. "This text editor won't let me make a file with a line longer than 80 characters! What a bagbiter!" 2. A person who has caused you some trouble, inadvertently or otherwise, typically by failing to program the computer properly. Synonyms: **loser**, **cretin**, **chomper**. 3. `bite the bag' vi. To fail in some manner. "The computer keeps crashing every five minutes." "Yes, the disk controller is really biting the bag."

The original loading of these terms was almost undoubtedly obscene, possibly referring to a douche bag or the scrotum (we have reports of "Bite the douche bag!" being used as an insult at MIT 1970-1976), but in their current usage they have become almost completely sanitized.

ITS's **lexiphage** program was the first and to date only known example of a program *intended* to be a bagbiter.

Node:bagbiting, Next:baggy pantsing, Previous:bagbiter, Up:= B =

bagbiting adj.

Having the quality of a **bagbiter**. "This bagbiting system won't let me compute the factorial of a negative number." Compare **losing**, **cretinous**, **bletcherous**, `barfucious' (under **barfulous**) and `chomping' (under **chomp**).

Node:baggy pantsing, Next:balloonian variable, Previous:bagbiting, Up:= B =

baggy pantsing v.

[Georgia Tech] A "baggy pantsing" is used to reprimand hackers who incautiously leave their terminals unlocked. The affected user will come back to find a post from them on internal newsgroups discussing exactly how baggy their pants are, an accepted stand-in for "unattentive user who left their work unprotected in the clusters". A properly-done baggy pantsing is highly mocking and humorous (see examples below). It is considered bad form to post a baggy pantsing to off-campus newsgroups or the more technical, serious groups. A particularly nice baggy pantsing may be "claimed" by immediately quoting the message in full, followed by your sig; this has the added benefit of keeping the embarassed victim from being able to delete the post. Interesting baggy-pantsings have been done involving adding commands to login scripts to repost the message every time the unlucky user logs in; Unix boxes on the residential network, when cracked, oftentimes have their homepages replaced (after being politely backedup to another file) with a baggy-pants message; .plan files are also occasionally targeted. Usage: "Prof. Greenlee fell asleep in the Solaris cluster again; we baggy-pantsed him to git.cc.class.2430.flame."

Node:balloonian variable, Next:bamf, Previous:baggy pantsing, Up:= B =

balloonian variable n.

[Commodore users; perh. a deliberate phonetic mangling of `boolean variable'?] Any variable that doesn't actually hold or control state, but must nevertheless be declared, checked, or set. A typical balloonian

variable started out as a flag attached to some environment feature that either became obsolete or was planned but never implemented. Compatibility concerns (or politics attached to same) may require that such a flag be treated as though it were **live**.

Node:bamf, Next:banana label, Previous:balloonian variable, Up:= B =

bamf /bamf/

1. [from X-Men comics; originally "bampf"] interj. Notional sound made by a person or object teleporting in or out of the hearer's vicinity. Often used in **virtual reality** (esp. **MUD**) electronic **fora** when a character wishes to make a dramatic entrance or exit. 2. The sound of magical transformation, used in virtual reality **fora** like MUDs. 3. In MUD circles, "bamf" is also used to refer to the act by which a MUD server sends a special notification to the MUD client to switch its connection to another server ("I'll set up the old site to just bamf people over to our new location."). 4. Used by MUDders on occasion in a more general sense related to sense 3, to refer to directing someone to another location or resource ("A user was asking about some technobabble so I bamfed them to http://www.tuxedo.org/jargon/".)

Node:banana label, Next:banana problem, Previous:bamf, Up:= B =

banana label n.

The labels often used on the sides of **macrotape** reels, so called because they are shaped roughly like blunt-ended bananas. This term, like macrotapes themselves, is still current but visibly headed for obsolescence.

Node:banana problem, Next:binary four, Previous:banana label, Up:= B =

banana problem n.

[from the story of the little girl who said "I know how to spell `banana', but I don't know when to stop"]. Not knowing where or when to bring a production to a close (compare **fencepost error**). One may say `there is a banana problem' of an algorithm with poorly defined or incorrect termination conditions, or in discussing the evolution of a design that may be succumbing to featuritis (see also **creeping elegance**, **creeping featuritis**). See item 176 under **HAKMEM**, which describes a banana problem in a **Dissociated Press** implementation. Also, see **one-banana problem** for a superficially similar but unrelated usage.

Node:binary four, Next:bandwidth, Previous:banana problem, Up:= B =

binary four n.

[Usenet] The finger, in the sense of `digitus impudicus'. This comes from an analogy between binary and the hand, i.e. 1=00001=thumb, 2=00010=index finger, 3=00011=index and thumb, 4=00100. Considered silly. Prob. from humorous derivative of **finger**, sense 4.

Node:bandwidth, Next:bang, Previous:binary four, Up:= B =

bandwidth n.

1. [common] Used by hackers (in a generalization of its technical meaning) as the volume of information per unit time that a computer, person, or transmission medium can handle. "Those are amazing graphics, but I missed some of the detail -- not enough bandwidth, I guess." Compare **low-bandwidth**. This generalized usage began to go mainstream after the Internet population explosion of 1993-1994. 2. Attention span. 3. On **Usenet**, a measure of network capacity that is often wasted by people complaining about how items posted by others are a waste of bandwidth.

Node:bang, Next:bang on, Previous:bandwidth, Up:= B =

bang

1. n. Common spoken name for ! (ASCII 0100001), especially when used in pronouncing a **bang path** in spoken hackish. In **elder days** this was considered a CMUish usage, with MIT and Stanford hackers preferring **excl** or **shriek**; but the spread of Unix has carried `bang' with it (esp. via the term **bang path**) and it is now certainly the most common spoken name for !. Note that it is used exclusively for non-emphatic written !; one would not say "Congratulations bang" (except possibly for humorous purposes), but if one wanted to specify the exact characters `foo!' one would speak "Eff oh oh bang". See **shriek**, **ASCII**. 2. interj. An exclamation signifying roughly "I have achieved enlightenment!", or "The dynamite has cleared out my brain!" Often used to acknowledge that one has perpetrated a **thinko** immediately after one has been called on it.

Node:bang on, Next:bang path, Previous:bang, Up:= B =

bang on vt.

To stress-test a piece of hardware or software: "I banged on the new version of the simulator all day yesterday and it didn't crash once. I guess it is ready for release." The term **pound on** is synonymous.

Node:bang path, Next:banner, Previous:bang on, Up:= B =

bang path n.

[now historical] An old-style UUCP electronic-mail address specifying hops to get from some assumed-reachable location to the addressee, so called because each **hop** is signified by a **bang** sign. Thus, for example, the path *...!bigsite!foovax!barbox!me* directs people to route their mail to machine *bigsite* (presumably a well-known location accessible to everybody) and from there through the machine *foovax* to the account of user *me* on *barbox*.

In the bad old days of not so long ago, before autorouting mailers became commonplace, people often published compound bang addresses using the { } convention (see **glob**) to give paths from *several* big machines, in the hopes that one's correspondent might be able to get mail to one of them reliably (example: *...!{seismo, ut-sally, ihnp4}!rice!beta!gamma!me*). Bang paths of 8 to 10 hops were not uncommon in 1981. Late-night dial-up UUCP links would cause week-long transmission times. Bang paths were often selected by both transmission time and reliability, as messages would often get lost. See **Internet address**, **the network**, and **sitename**.

Node:banner, Next:banner ad, Previous:bang path, Up:= B =

banner n.

1. The title page added to printouts by most print spoolers (see **spool**). Typically includes user or account ID information in very large character-graphics capitals. Also called a `burst page', because it indicates where to burst (tear apart) fanfold paper to separate one user's printout from the next. 2. A similar printout generated (typically on multiple pages of fan-fold paper) from user-specified text, e.g., by a program such as Unix's `banner({1,6})`. 3. On interactive software, a first screen containing a logo and/or author credits and/or a copyright notice. This is probably now the commonest sense.

Node:banner ad, Next:bar, Previous:banner, Up:= B =

banner ad n.

Any of the annoying graphical advertisements that span the tops of way too many Web pages.

Node:bar, Next:bare metal, Previous:banner ad, Up:= B =

bar /bar/ n.

1. [very common] The second **metasyntactic variable**, after **foo** and before **baz**. "Suppose we have two functions: FOO and BAR. FOO calls BAR...." 2. Often appended to **foo** to produce **foobar**.

Node:bare metal, Next:barf, Previous:bar, Up:= B =

bare metal n.

1. [common] New computer hardware, unadorned with such snares and delusions as an **operating system**, an **HLL**, or even assembler. Commonly used in the phrase `programming on the bare metal', which refers to the arduous work of **bit bashing** needed to create these basic tools for a new machine. Real bare-metal programming involves things like building boot proms and BIOS chips, implementing basic monitors used to test device drivers, and writing the assemblers that will be used to write the compiler back ends that will give the new machine a real development environment. 2. `Programming on the bare metal' is also used to describe a style of **hand-hacking** that relies on bit-level peculiarities of a particular hardware design, esp. tricks for speed and space optimization that rely on crocks such as overlapping instructions (or, as in the famous case described in **The Story of Mel** (in Appendix A), interleaving of opcodes on a magnetic drum to minimize fetch delays due to the device's rotational latency). This sort of thing has become less common as the relative costs of programming time and machine resources have changed, but is still found in heavily constrained environments such as industrial embedded systems, and in the code of hackers who just can't let go of that low-level control. See **Real Programmer**.

In the world of personal computing, bare metal programming (especially in sense 1 but sometimes also in sense 2) is often considered a **Good Thing**, or at least a necessary evil (because these machines have often been sufficiently slow and poorly designed to make it necessary; see **ill-behaved**). There, the term usually refers to bypassing the BIOS or OS interface and writing the application to directly access device registers and machine addresses. "To get 19.2 kilobaud on the serial port, you need to get down to the bare metal." People who can do this sort of thing well are held in high regard.

Node:barf, Next:barfmail, Previous:bare metal, Up:= B =

barf /barf/ n.,v.

[common; from mainstream slang meaning `vomit'] 1. interj. Term of disgust. This is the closest hackish equivalent of the Valspeak "gag me with a spoon". (Like, euwww!) See **bletch**. 2. vi. To say "Barf!" or emit some similar expression of disgust. "I showed him my latest hack and he barfed" means only that he complained about it, not that he literally vomited. 3. vi. To fail to work because of unacceptable input, perhaps with a suitable error message, perhaps not. Examples: "The division operation barfs if you try to divide by 0." (That is, the division operation checks for an attempt to divide by zero, and if one is encountered it causes the operation to fail in some unspecified, but generally obvious, manner.) "The text editor barfs if you try to read in a new file before writing out the old one." See **choke**, **gag**. In Commonwealth Hackish, `barf' is generally replaced by `puke' or `vom'. **barf** is sometimes also used as a **metasyntactic variable**, like **foo** or **bar**.

Node:barfmail, Next:barfulation, Previous:barf, Up:= B =

barfmail n.

Multiple **bounce message**s accumulating to the level of serious annoyance, or worse. The sort of thing that happens when an inter-network mail gateway goes down or wonky.

Node:barfulation, Next:barfulous, Previous:barfmail, Up:= B =

barfulation /bar`fyoo-lay'sh*n/ interj.

Variation of **barf** used around the Stanford area. An exclamation, expressing disgust. On seeing some particularly bad code one might exclaim, "Barfulation! Who wrote this, Quux?"

Node:barfulous, Next:barn, Previous:barfulation, Up:= B =

barfulous /bar'fyoo-l*s/ adj.

(alt. `barfucious', /bar-fyoo-sh*s/) Said of something that would make anyone barf, if only for esthetic reasons.

Node:barn, Next:barney, Previous:barfulous, Up:= B =

barn n.

[uncommon; prob. from the nuclear military] An unexpectedly large quantity of something: a unit of measurement. "Why is /var/adm taking up so much space?" "The logs have grown to several barns." The source of this is clear: when physicists were first studying nuclear interactions, the probability was thought to be proportional to the cross-sectional area of the nucleus (this probability is still called the cross-section). Upon experimenting, they discovered the interactions were far more probable than expected; the nuclei were `as big as a barn'. The units for cross-sections were christened Barns, (10^-24 cm^2) and the book containing cross-sections has a picture of a barn on the cover.

Node:barney, Next:baroque, Previous:barn, Up:= B =

barney n.

In Commonwealth hackish, `barney' is to **fred** (sense #1) as **bar** is to **foo**. That is, people who commonly use `fred' as their first metasyntactic variable will often use `barney' second. The reference is, of course, to Fred Flintstone and Barney Rubble in the Flintstones cartoons.

Node:baroque, Next:BASIC, Previous:barney, Up:= B =

baroque adj.

[common] Feature-encrusted; complex; gaudy; verging on excessive. Said of hardware or (esp.) software designs, this has many of the connotations of **elephantine** or **monstrosity** but is less extreme and not pejorative in itself. "Metafont even has features to introduce random variations to its letterform output. Now *that* is baroque!" See also **rococo**.

Node:BASIC, Next:batbelt, Previous:baroque, Up:= B =

BASIC /bay'-sic/ n.

A programming language, originally designed for Dartmouth's experimental timesharing system in the early 1960s, which for many years was the leading cause of brain damage in proto-hackers. Edsger W. Dijkstra observed in "Selected Writings on Computing: A Personal Perspective" that "It is practically impossible to teach good programming style to students that have had prior exposure to BASIC: as potential programmers they are mentally mutilated beyond hope of regeneration." This is another case (like **Pascal**) of the cascading **lossage** that happens when a language deliberately designed as an educational toy gets taken too seriously. A novice can write short BASIC programs (on the order of 10-20 lines) very easily; writing anything longer (a) is very painful, and (b) encourages bad habits that will make it harder to use more powerful languages well. This wouldn't be so bad if historical accidents hadn't made BASIC so common on low-end micros in the 1980s. As it is, it probably ruined tens of thousands of potential wizards.

[1995: Some languages called `BASIC' aren't quite this nasty any more, having acquired Pascal- and C-like procedures and control structures and shed their line numbers. --ESR]

Note: the name is commonly parsed as Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code, but this is a **backronym**. BASIC was originally named Basic, simply because it was a simple and basic programming language. Because most programming language names were in fact acronyms, BASIC was often capitalized just out of habit or to be silly. No acronym for BASIC originally existed or was intended (as one can verify by reading texts through the early 1970s). Later, around the mid-1970s, people began to make up backronyms for BASIC because they weren't sure. Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instruction Code is the one that caught on.

Node:batbelt, Next:batch, Previous:BASIC, Up:= B =

batbelt n.

Many hackers routinely hang numerous devices such as pagers, cell-phones, personal organizers, leatherman multitools, pocket knives, flashlights, walkie-talkies, even miniature computers from their belts. When many of these devices are worn at once, the hacker's belt somewhat resembles Batman's utility belt; hence it is referred to as a batbelt.

Node:batch, Next:bathtub curve, Previous:batbelt, Up:= B =

batch adj.

1. Non-interactive. Hackers use this somewhat more loosely than the traditional technical definitions justify; in particular, switches on a normally interactive program that prepare it to receive non-interactive command input are often referred to as `batch mode' switches. A `batch file' is a series of instructions written to be handed to an interactive program running in batch mode. 2. Performance of dreary tasks all at one sitting. "I finally sat down in batch mode and wrote out checks for all those bills; I guess they'll turn the electricity back on next week..." 3. `batching up': Accumulation of a number of small tasks that can be lumped together for greater efficiency. "I'm batching up those letters to send sometime" "I'm batching up bottles to take to the recycling center."

Node:bathtub curve, Next:baud, Previous:batch, Up:= B =

bathtub curve n.

Common term for the curve (resembling an end-to-end section of one of those claw-footed antique bathtubs) that describes the expected failure rate of electronics with time: initially high, dropping to near 0 for most of the system's lifetime, then rising again as it `tires out'. See also **burn-in period**, **infant mortality**.

Node:baud, Next:baud barf, Previous:bathtub curve, Up:= B =

baud /bawd/ n.

[simplified from its technical meaning] n. Bits per second. Hence kilobaud or Kbaud, thousands of bits per second. The technical meaning is `level transitions per second'; this coincides with bps only for two-level modulation with no framing or stop bits. Most hackers are aware of these nuances but blithely ignore them.

Historical note: `baud' was originally a unit of telegraph signalling speed, set at one pulse per second. It was proposed at the November, 1926 conference of the Comité Consultatif International Des Communications Télégraphiques as an improvement on the then standard practice of referring to line speeds in terms of words per minute, and named for Jean Maurice Emile Baudot (1845-1903), a French engineer who did a lot of pioneering work in early teleprinters.

Node:baud barf, Next:baz, Previous:baud, Up:= B =

baud barf /bawd barf/ n.

The garbage one gets a terminal (or terminal emulator) when using a modem connection with some protocol setting (esp. line speed) incorrect, or when someone picks up a voice extension on the same line, or when really bad line noise disrupts the connection. Baud barf is not completely **random**, by the way; hackers with a lot of serial-line experience can usually tell whether the device at the other end is expecting a higher or lower speed than the terminal is set to. *Really* experienced ones can identify particular speeds.

Node:baz, Next:bazaar, Previous:baud barf, Up:= B =

baz /baz/ n.

1. [common] The third **metasyntactic variable** "Suppose we have three functions: FOO, BAR, and BAZ. FOO calls BAR, which calls BAZ...." (See also **fum**) 2. interj. A term of mild annoyance. In this usage the term is often drawn out for 2 or 3 seconds, producing an effect not unlike the bleating of a sheep; /baaaaaaz/. 3. Occasionally appended to **foo** to produce `foobaz'.

Earlier versions of this lexicon derived `baz' as a Stanford corruption of **bar**. However, Pete Samson (compiler of the **TMRC** lexicon) reports it was already current when he joined TMRC in 1958. He says "It came from "Pogo". Albert the Alligator, when vexed or outraged, would shout `Bazz Fazz!' or `Rowrbazzle!' The club layout was said to model the (mythical) New England counties of Rowrfolk and Bassex (Rowrbazzle mingled with (Norfolk/Suffolk/Middlesex/Essex)."

Node:bazaar, Next:bboard, Previous:baz, Up:= B =

bazaar n.,adj.

In 1997, after meditatating on the success of **Linux** for three years, the Jargon File's own editor ESR wrote an analytical paper on hacker culture and development models titled The Cathedral and the Bazaar. The main argument of the paper was that **Brooks's Law** is not the whole story; given the right social machinery, debugging can be efficiently parallelized across large numbers of programmers. The title metaphor caught on (see also **cathedral**), and the style of development typical in the Linux community is now often referred to as the bazaar mode. Its characteristics include releasing code early and often, and actively seeking the largest possible pool of peer reviewers.

Node:bboard, Next:BBS, Previous:bazaar, Up:= B =

bboard /bee'bord/ n.

[contraction of `bulletin board'] 1. Any electronic bulletin board; esp. used of **BBS** systems running on personal micros, less frequently of a Usenet **newsgroup** (in fact, use of this term for a newsgroup generally marks one either as a **newbie** fresh in from the BBS world or as a real old-timer predating Usenet). 2. At CMU and other colleges with similar facilities, refers to campus-wide electronic bulletin boards. 3. The term `physical bboard' is sometimes used to refer to an old-fashioned, non-electronic cork-and-thumbtack memo board. At CMU, it refers to a particular one outside the CS Lounge.

In either of senses 1 or 2, the term is usually prefixed by the name of the intended board (`the Moonlight Casino bboard' or `market bboard'); however, if the context is clear, the better-read bboards may be referred to by name alone, as in (at CMU) "Don't post for-sale ads on general".

Node:BBS, Next:BCPL, Previous:bboard, Up:= B =

BBS /B-B-S/ n.

[common; abbreviation, `Bulletin Board System'] An electronic bulletin board system; that is, a message database where people can log in and leave broadcast messages for others grouped (typically) into **topic group**s. The term was especially applied to the thousands of local BBS systems that operated during the pre-Internet microcomputer era of roughly 1980 to 1995., typically run by amateurs for fun out of their homes on MS-DOS boxes with a single modem line each. Fans of Usenet and Internet or the big commercial timesharing bboards such as CompuServe and GEnie tended to consider local BBSes the low-rent district of the hacker culture, but they served a valuable function by knitting together lots of hackers and users in the personal-micro world who would otherwise have been unable to exchange code at all. Post-Internet, BBSs are likely to be local newsgroups on an ISP; efficiency has increased but a

certain flavor has been lost. See also **bboard**.

Node:BCPL, Next:beam, Previous:BBS, Up:= B =

BCPL // n.

[abbreviation, `Basic Combined Programming Language') A programming language developed by Martin Richards in Cambridge in 1967. It is remarkable for its rich syntax, small size of compiler (it can be run in 16k) and extreme portability. It reached break-even point at a very early stage, and was the language in which the original **hello world** program was written. It has been ported to so many different systems that its creator confesses to having lost count. It has only one data type (a machine word) which can be used as an integer, a character, a floating point number, a pointer, or almost anything else, depending on context. BCPL was a precursor of C, which inherited some of its features.

Node:beam, Next:beanie key, Previous:BCPL, Up:= B =

beam vt.

[from Star Trek Classic's "Beam me up, Scotty!"] 1. To transfer **softcopy** of a file electronically; most often in combining forms such as `beam me a copy' or `beam that over to his site'. 2. Palm Pilot users very commonly use this term for the act of exchanging bits via the infrared links on their machines (this term seams to have originated with the ill-fated Newton Message Pad). Compare **blast**, **snarf**, **BLT**.

Node:beanie key, Next:beep, Previous:beam, Up:= B =

beanie key n.

[Mac users] See **command key**.

Node:beep, Next:Befunge, Previous:beanie key, Up:= B =

beep n.,v.

Syn. **feep**. This term is techspeak under MS-DOS and OS/2, and seems to be generally preferred among micro hobbyists.

Node:Befunge, Next:beige toaster, Previous:beep, Up:= B =

Befunge n.

A worthy companion to **INTERCAL**; a computer language family which escapes the quotidian limitation of linear control flow and embraces program counters flying through multiple dimensions with exotic topologies. Sadly, the Befunge home page has vanished, but a Befunge version of the **hello world** program is at http://www.latech.edu/~acm/helloworld/befunge.html.

Node:beige toaster, Next:bells and whistles, Previous:Befunge, Up:= B =

beige toaster n.

A Macintosh. See **toaster**; compare **Macintrash**, **maggotbox**.

Node:bells and whistles, Next:bells whistles and gongs, Previous:beige toaster, Up:= B =

bells and whistles n.

[common] Features added to a program or system to make it more **flavorful** from a hacker's point of view, without necessarily adding to its utility for its primary function. Distinguished from **chrome**, which is intended to attract users. "Now that we've got the basic program working, let's go back and add some bells and whistles." No one seems to know what distinguishes a bell from a whistle. The recognized emphatic form is "bells, whistles, and gongs".

It used to be thought that this term derived from the toyboxes on theater organs. However, the "and gongs" strongly suggests a different origin, at sea. Before powered horns, ships routinely used bells, whistles, and gongs to signal each other over longer distances than voice can carry.

Node:bells whistles and gongs, Next:benchmark, Previous:bells and whistles, Up:= B =

bells whistles and gongs n.

A standard elaborated form of **bells and whistles**; typically said with a pronounced and ironic accent on the `gongs'.

Node:benchmark, Next:Berkeley Quality Software, Previous:bells whistles and gongs, Up:= B =

benchmark n.

[techspeak] An inaccurate measure of computer performance. "In the computer industry, there are three kinds of lies: lies, damn lies, and benchmarks." Well-known ones include Whetstone, Dhrystone, Rhealstone (see **h**), the Gabriel LISP benchmarks (see **gabriel**), the SPECmark suite, and LINPACK. See also **machoflops**, **MIPS**, **smoke and mirrors**.

Node:Berkeley Quality Software, Next:berklix, Previous:benchmark, Up:= B =

Berkeley Quality Software adj.

(often abbreviated `BQS') Term used in a pejorative sense to refer to software that was apparently created by rather spaced-out hackers late at night to solve some unique problem. It usually has nonexistent, incomplete, or incorrect documentation, has been tested on at least two examples, and core dumps when anyone else attempts to use it. This term was frequently applied to early versions of the `dbx(1)` debugger. See also **Berzerkeley**.

Note to British and Commonwealth readers: that's /berk'lee/, not /bark'lee/ as in British Received Pronunciation.

Node:berklix, Next:Berzerkeley, Previous:Berkeley Quality Software, Up:= B =

berklix /berk'liks/ n.,adj.

[contraction of `Berkeley Unix'] See **BSD**. Not used at Berkeley itself. May be more common among **suit**s attempting to sound like cognoscenti than among hackers, who usually just say `BSD'.

Node:Berzerkeley, Next:beta, Previous:berklix, Up:= B =

Berzerkeley /b*r-zer'klee/ n.

[from `berserk', via the name of a now-deceased record label; poss. originated by famed columnist Herb Caen] Humorous distortion of `Berkeley' used esp. to refer to the practices or products of the **BSD** Unix hackers. See **software bloat**, **Missed'em-five**, **Berkeley Quality Software**.

Mainstream use of this term in reference to the cultural and political peculiarities of UC Berkeley as a whole has been reported from as far back as the 1960s.

Node:beta, Next:BFI, Previous:Berzerkeley, Up:= B =

beta /bay't*/, /be't*/ or (Commonwealth) /bee't*/ n.

1. Mostly working, but still under test; usu. used with `in': `in beta'. In the **Real World**, systems (hardware or software) software often go through two stages of release testing: Alpha (in-house) and Beta (out-house?). Beta releases are generally made to a group of lucky (or unlucky) trusted customers. 2. Anything that is new and experimental. "His girlfriend is in beta" means that he is still testing for compatibility and reserving judgment. 3. Flaky; dubious; suspect (since beta software is notoriously buggy).

Historical note: More formally, to beta-test is to test a pre-release (potentially unreliable) version of a piece of software by making it available to selected (or self-selected) customers and users. This term derives from early 1960s terminology for product cycle checkpoints, first used at IBM but later standard throughout the industry. `Alpha Test' was the unit, module, or component test phase; `Beta Test' was initial system test. These themselves came from earlier A- and B-tests for hardware. The A-test was a feasibility and manufacturability evaluation done before any commitment to design and development. The B-test was a demonstration that the engineering model functioned as specified. The C-test (corresponding to today's beta) was the B-test performed on early samples of the production design, and the D test was the C test repeated after the model had been in production a while.

Node:BFI, Next:bible, Previous:beta, Up:= B =

BFI /B-F-I/ n.

See **brute force and ignorance**. Also encountered in the variants `BFMI', `brute force and *massive* ignorance' and `BFBI' `brute force and bloody ignorance'.

Node:bible, Next:BiCapitalization, Previous:BFI, Up:= B =

bible n.

1. One of a small number of fundamental source books such as **Knuth**, **K&R**, or the **Camel Book**. 2. The most detailed and authoritative reference for a particular language, operating system, or other complex

software system.

Node:BiCapitalization, Next:B1FF, Previous:bible, Up:= B =

BiCapitalization n.

The act said to have been performed on trademarks (such as **PostScript**, NeXT, **NeWS**, VisiCalc, FrameMaker, TK!solver, EasyWriter) that have been raised above the ruck of common coinage by nonstandard capitalization. Too many **marketroid** types think this sort of thing is really cute, even the 2,317th time they do it. Compare **studlycaps**.

Node:B1FF, Next:BI, Previous:BiCapitalization, Up:= B =

B1FF /bif/ [Usenet] (alt. `BIFF') n.

The most famous **pseudo**, and the prototypical **newbie**. Articles from B1FF feature all uppercase letters sprinkled liberally with bangs, typos, `cute' misspellings (EVRY BUDY LUVS GOOD OLD BIFF CUZ HE"S A K00L DOOD AN HE RITES REEL AWESUM THINGZ IN CAPITULL LETTRS LIKE THIS!!!), use (and often misuse) of fragments of **talk mode** abbreviations, a long **sig block** (sometimes even a **doubled sig**), and unbounded naivete. B1FF posts articles using his elder brother's VIC-20. B1FF's location is a mystery, as his articles appear to come from a variety of sites. However, **BITNET** seems to be the most frequent origin. The theory that B1FF is a denizen of BITNET is supported by B1FF's (unfortunately invalid) electronic mail address: B1FF@BIT.NET.

[1993: Now It Can Be Told! My spies inform me that B1FF was originally created by Joe Talmadge <jat@cup.hp.com>, also the author of the infamous and much-plagiarized "Flamer's Bible". The BIFF filter he wrote was later passed to Richard Sexton, who posted BIFFisms much more widely. Versions have since been posted for the amusement of the net at large. --ESR]

Node:BI, Next:biff, Previous:B1FF, Up:= B =

BI //

Common written abbreviation for **Breidbart Index**.

Node:biff, Next:Big Gray Wall, Previous:BI, Up:= B =

biff /bif/ vt.

To notify someone of incoming mail. From the BSD utility `biff(1)`, which was in turn named after a friendly dog who used to chase frisbees in the halls at UCB while 4.2BSD was in development. There was a legend that it had a habit of barking whenever the mailman came, but the author of `biff` says this is not true. No relation to **B1FF**.

Node:Big Gray Wall, Next:big iron, Previous:biff, Up:= B =

Big Gray Wall n.

What faces a **VMS** user searching for documentation. A full VMS kit comes on a pallet, the documentation taking up around 15 feet of shelf space before the addition of layered products such as compilers, databases, multivendor networking, and programming tools. Recent (since VMS version 5) documentation comes with gray binders; under VMS version 4 the binders were orange (`big orange wall'), and under version 3 they were blue. See **VMS**. Often contracted to `Gray Wall'.

Node:big iron, Next:Big Red Switch, Previous:Big Gray Wall, Up:= B =

big iron n.

[common] Large, expensive, ultra-fast computers. Used generally of **number-crunching** supercomputers such as Crays, but can include more conventional big commercial IBMish mainframes. Term of approval; compare **heavy metal**, oppose **dinosaur**.

Node:Big Red Switch, Next:Big Room, Previous:big iron, Up:= B =

Big Red Switch n.

[IBM] The power switch on a computer, esp. the `Emergency Pull' switch on an IBM **mainframe** or the power switch on an IBM PC where it really is large and red. "This !@%$% **bitty box** is hung again; time to hit the Big Red Switch." Sources at IBM report that, in tune with the company's passion for **TLA**s, this is often abbreviated as `BRS' (this has also become established on FidoNet and in the PC **clone** world). It is alleged that the emergency pull switch on an IBM 360/91 actually fired a non-conducting bolt into the main power feed; the BRSes on more recent mainframes physically drop a block into place so that they can't be pushed back in. People get fired for pulling them, especially inappropriately (see also **molly-guard**). Compare **power cycle**, **three-finger salute**, **120 reset**; see also **scram switch**.

Node:Big Room, Next:big win, Previous:Big Red Switch, Up:= B =

Big Room n.

(Also `Big Blue Room') The extremely large room with the blue ceiling and intensely bright light (during the day) or black ceiling with lots of tiny night-lights (during the night) found outside all computer installations. "He can't come to the phone right now, he's somewhere out in the Big Room."

Node:big win, Next:big-endian, Previous:Big Room, Up:= B =

big win n.

1. [common] Major success. 2. [MIT] Serendipity. "Yes, those two physicists discovered high-temperature superconductivity in a batch of ceramic that had been prepared incorrectly according to their experimental schedule. Small mistake; big win!" See **win big**.

Node:big-endian, Next:bignum, Previous:big win, Up:= B =

big-endian adj.

[common; From Swift's "Gulliver's Travels" via the famous paper "On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace"

by Danny Cohen, USC/ISI IEN 137, dated April 1, 1980] 1. Describes a computer architecture in which, within a given multi-byte numeric representation, the most significant byte has the lowest address (the word is stored `big-end-first'). Most processors, including the IBM 370 family, the **PDP-10**, the Motorola microprocessor families, and most of the various RISC designs are big-endian. Big-endian byte order is also sometimes called `network order'. See **little-endian**, **middle-endian**, **NUXI problem**, **swab**. 2. An **Internet address** the wrong way round. Most of the world follows the Internet standard and writes email addresses starting with the name of the computer and ending up with the name of the country. In the U.K. the Joint Networking Team had decided to do it the other way round before the Internet domain standard was established. Most gateway sites have **ad-hockery** in their mailers to handle this, but can still be confused. In particular, the address *me@uk.ac.bris.pys.as* could be interpreted in JANET's big-endian way as one in the U.K. (domain *uk*) or in the standard little-endian way as one in the domain *as* (American Samoa) on the opposite side of the world.

Node:bignum, Next:bigot, Previous:big-endian, Up:= B =

bignum /big'nuhm/ n.

[common; orig. from MIT MacLISP] 1. [techspeak] A multiple-precision computer representation for very large integers. 2. More generally, any very large number. "Have you ever looked at the United States Budget? There's bignums for you!" 3. [Stanford] In backgammon, large numbers on the dice especially a roll of double fives or double sixes (compare **moby**, sense 4). See also **El Camino Bignum**.

Sense 1 may require some explanation. Most computer languages provide a kind of data called `integer', but such computer integers are usually very limited in size; usually they must be smaller than 2^(31) (2,147,483,648) or (on a **bitty box**) 2^(15) (32,768). If you want to work with numbers larger than that, you have to use floating-point numbers, which are usually accurate to only six or seven decimal places. Computer languages that provide bignums can perform exact calculations on very large numbers, such as 1000! (the factorial of 1000, which is 1000 times 999 times 998 times ... times 2 times 1). For example, this value for 1000! was computed by the MacLISP system using bignums:

```
402387260077093773543702433923003985719374864210714632543799910429938512398629020592044208486969404800479988610197196058631666872994808558901323829669944590997424504087073759918823627727188732519779505950995276120874975462497043601418278094646496291056393887437886487337119181045825783647849977012476632889835955735432513185323958463075557409114262417474349347553428646576611667797396668820291207379143853719588249808126867838374559731746136085379534524221586593201928090878297308431392844403281231558611036976801357304216168747609675871348312025478589320767169132448426236131412508780208000261683151027341827977704784635868170164365024153691398281264810213092761244896359928705114964975419909342221566832572080821333186116811553615836546984046708975602900950537616475847728421889679646244945160765353408198901385442487984959953319101723355556602139450399736280750137837615307127761926849034352625200015888535147331611702103968175921510907788019393178114194545257223865541461062892187960223838971476088506276862967146674697562911234082439208160153780889893964518263243671616762179168909779911903754031274622289988005195444414282012187361745992642956581746628302955570299024324153181617210465832036786906117260158783520751516284225540265170483304226143974286933061690897968482590125458327168226458066526765995865268227280707578139185817888965220816434834482599326604336766017699961283186078838615027946595513115655203609398818061213855860030143569452722420634463179746059468257310379008402443243846565
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24501440282188525247093519062092902313649327349756
55139587205596542287497740114133469627154228458623
77387538230483865688976461927383814900140767310446
64025989949022222176590433990188601856652648506179
97023561938970178600408118897299183110211712298459
01641921068884387121855646124960798722908519296819
37238864261483965738229112312502418664935314397013
74285319266498753372189406942814341185201580141233
44828015051399694290153483077644569099073152433278
28826986460278986432113908350621709500259738986355
42771967428222487575867657523442202075736305694988
25087968928162753848863396909959826280956121450994
87170124451646126037902930912088908694202851064018
21543994571568059418727489980942547421735824010636
77404595741785160829230135358081840096996372524230
56085590370062427124341690900415369010593398383577
79394109700277534720000000000000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
00000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000000
00000000000000000.
```

Node:bigot, Next:bit, Previous:bignum, Up:= B =

bigot n.

[common] A person who is religiously attached to a particular computer, language, operating system, editor, or other tool (see **religious issues**). Usually found with a specifier; thus, `cray bigot', `ITS bigot', `APL bigot', `VMS bigot', `Berkeley bigot'. Real bigots can be distinguished from mere partisans or zealots by the fact that they refuse to learn alternatives even when the march of time and/or technology is threatening to obsolete the favored tool. It is truly said "You can tell a bigot, but you can't tell him much." Compare **weenie**, **Amiga Persecution Complex**.

Node:bit, Next:bit bang, Previous:bigot, Up:= B =

bit n.

[from the mainstream meaning and `Binary digIT'] 1. [techspeak] The unit of information; the amount of information obtained by asking a yes-or-no question for which the two outcomes are equally probable. 2. [techspeak] A computational quantity that can take on one of two values, such as true and false or 0 and 1. 3. A mental flag: a reminder that something should be done eventually. "I have a bit set for you." (I haven't seen you for a while, and I'm supposed to tell or ask you something.) 4. More generally, a (possibly incorrect) mental state of belief. "I have a bit set that says that you were the last guy to hack on EMACS." (Meaning "I think you were the last guy to hack on EMACS, and what I am about to say is predicated on this, so please stop me if this isn't true.")

"I just need one bit from you" is a polite way of indicating that you intend only a short interruption for a question that can presumably be answered yes or no.

A bit is said to be `set' if its value is true or 1, and `reset' or `clear' if its value is false or 0. One speaks of setting and clearing bits. To **toggle** or `invert' a bit is to change it, either from 0 to 1 or from 1 to 0. See also **flag**, **trit**, **mode bit**.

The term `bit' first appeared in print in the computer-science sense in 1949, and seems to have been coined by early statistician and computer scientist John Tukey. Tukey records that it evolved over a lunch table as a handier alternative to `bigit' or `binit'.

Node:bit bang, Next:bit bashing, Previous:bit, Up:= B =

bit bang n.

Transmission of data on a serial line, when accomplished by rapidly tweaking a single output bit, in software, at the appropriate times. The technique is a simple loop with eight OUT and SHIFT instruction pairs for each byte. Input is more interesting. And full duplex (doing input and output at the same time) is one way to separate the real hackers from the **wannabee**s.

Bit bang was used on certain early models of Prime computers, presumably when UARTs were too expensive, and on archaic Z80 micros with a Zilog PIO but no SIO. In an interesting instance of the **cycle of reincarnation**, this technique returned to use in the early 1990s on some RISC architectures because it consumes such an infinitesimal part of the processor that it actually makes sense not to have a UART. Compare **cycle of reincarnation**.

Node:bit bashing, Next:bit bucket, Previous:bit bang, Up:= B =

bit bashing n.

(alt. `bit diddling' or **bit twiddling**) Term used to describe any of several kinds of low-level programming characterized by manipulation of **bit**, **flag**, **nybble**, and other smaller-than-character-sized pieces of data; these include low-level device control, encryption algorithms, checksum and error-correcting codes, hash functions, some flavors of graphics programming (see **bitblt**), and assembler/compiler code generation. May connote either tedium or a real technical challenge (more usually the former). "The command decoding for the new tape driver looks pretty solid but the bit-bashing for the control registers still has bugs." See also **bit bang**, **mode bit**.

Node:bit bucket, Next:bit decay, Previous:bit bashing, Up:= B =

bit bucket n.

[very common] 1. The universal data sink (originally, the mythical receptacle used to catch bits when they fall off the end of a register during a shift instruction). Discarded, lost, or destroyed data is said to have `gone to the bit bucket'. On **Unix**, often used for **/dev/null**. Sometimes amplified as `the Great Bit Bucket in the Sky'. 2. The place where all lost mail and news messages eventually go. The selection is performed according to **Finagle's Law**; important mail is much more likely to end up in the bit bucket than junk mail, which has an almost 100% probability of getting delivered. Routing to the bit bucket is automatically performed by mail-transfer agents, news systems, and the lower layers of the network. 3. The ideal location for all unwanted mail responses: "Flames about this article to the bit bucket." Such a request is guaranteed to overflow one's mailbox with flames. 4. Excuse for all mail that has not been sent. "I mailed you those figures last week; they must have landed in the bit bucket." Compare **black hole**.

This term is used purely in jest. It is based on the fanciful notion that bits are objects that are not destroyed but only misplaced. This appears to have been a mutation of an earlier term `bit box', about which the same legend was current; old-time hackers also report that trainees used to be told that when the CPU stored bits into memory it was actually pulling them `out of the bit box'. See also **chad box**.

Another variant of this legend has it that, as a consequence of the `parity preservation law', the number of 1 bits that go to the bit bucket must equal the number of 0 bits. Any imbalance results in bits filling up the bit bucket. A qualified computer technician can empty a full bit bucket as part of scheduled maintenance.

Node:bit decay, Next:bit rot, Previous:bit bucket, Up:= B =

bit decay n.

See **bit rot**. People with a physics background tend to prefer this variant for the analogy with particle decay. See also **computron**, **quantum bogodynamics**.

Node:bit rot, Next:bit twiddling, Previous:bit decay, Up:= B =

bit rot n.

[common] Also **bit decay**. Hypothetical disease the existence of which has been deduced from the observation that unused programs or features will often stop working after sufficient time has passed, even if `nothing has changed'. The theory explains that bits decay as if they were radioactive. As time passes, the contents of a file or the code in a program will become increasingly garbled.

There actually are physical processes that produce such effects (alpha particles generated by trace radionuclides in ceramic chip packages, for example, can change the contents of a computer memory unpredictably, and various kinds of subtle media failures can corrupt files in mass storage), but they are quite rare (and computers are built with error-detecting circuitry to compensate for them). The notion long favored among hackers that cosmic rays are among the causes of such events turns out to be a myth; see the **cosmic rays** entry for details.

The term **software rot** is almost synonymous. Software rot is the effect, bit rot the notional cause.

Node:bit twiddling, Next:bit-paired keyboard, Previous:bit rot, Up:= B =

bit twiddling n.

[very common] 1. (pejorative) An exercise in tuning (see **tune**) in which incredible amounts of time and effort go to produce little noticeable improvement, often with the result that the code becomes incomprehensible. 2. Aimless small modification to a program, esp. for some pointless goal. 3. Approx. syn. for **bit bashing**; esp. used for the act of frobbing the device control register of a peripheral in an attempt to get it back to a known state.

Node:bit-paired keyboard, Next:bitblt, Previous:bit twiddling, Up:= B =

bit-paired keyboard n.,obs.

(alt. `bit-shift keyboard') A non-standard keyboard layout that seems to have originated with the Teletype ASR-33 and remained common for several years on early computer equipment. The ASR-33 was a mechanical device (see **EOU**), so the only way to generate the character codes from keystrokes was by some physical linkage. The design of the ASR-33 assigned each character key a basic pattern that could be modified by flipping bits if the SHIFT or the CTRL key was pressed. In order to avoid making the thing even more of a kluge than it already was, the design had to group characters that shared the same basic bit pattern on one key.

Looking at the ASCII chart, we find:

```
high  low bits
bits  0000 0001 0010 0011 0100 0101 0110 0111 1000 1001
 010        !    "    #    $    %    &    '    (    )
```

```
 011   0    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9
```

This is why the characters !"#$%&'() appear where they do on a Teletype (thankfully, they didn't use shift-0 for space). The Teletype Model 33 was actually designed before ASCII existed, and was originally intended to use a code that contained these two rows:

```
      low bits
high  0000  0010  0100  0110  1000  1010  1100  1110
bits     0001  0011  0101  0111  1001  1011  1101  1111
  10   )  ! bel #  $  % wru &  *  (  "  :  ?  _  ,  .
  11   0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  '  ;  /  - esc del
```

The result would have been something closer to a normal keyboard. But as it happened, Teletype had to use a lot of persuasion just to keep ASCII, and the Model 33 keyboard, from looking like this instead:

```
         !  "  ?  $  '  &  -  (  )  ;  :  *  /  ,  .
      0  1  2  3  4  5  6  7  8  9  +  ~  <  >  ×  |
```

Teletype's was *not* the weirdest variant of the **QWERTY** layout widely seen, by the way; that prize should probably go to one of several (differing) arrangements on IBM's even clunkier 026 and 029 card punches.

When electronic terminals became popular, in the early 1970s, there was no agreement in the industry over how the keyboards should be laid out. Some vendors opted to emulate the Teletype keyboard, while others used the flexibility of electronic circuitry to make their product look like an office typewriter. Either choice was supported by the ANSI computer keyboard standard, X4.14-1971, which referred to the alternatives as `logical bit pairing' and `typewriter pairing'. These alternatives became known as `bit-paired' and `typewriter-paired' keyboards. To a hacker, the bit-paired keyboard seemed far more logical -- and because most hackers in those days had never learned to touch-type, there was little pressure from the pioneering users to adapt keyboards to the typewriter standard.

The doom of the bit-paired keyboard was the large-scale introduction of the computer terminal into the normal office environment, where out-and-out technophobes were expected to use the equipment. The `typewriter-paired' standard became universal, X4.14 was superseded by X4.23-1982, `bit-paired' hardware was quickly junked or relegated to dusty corners, and both terms passed into disuse.

However, in countries without a long history of touch typing, the argument against the bit-paired keyboard layout was weak or nonexistent. As a result, the standard Japanese keyboard, used on PCs, Unix boxen etc. still has all of the !"#$%&'() characters above the numbers in the ASR-33 layout.

Node:bitblt, Next:BITNET, Previous:bit-paired keyboard, Up:= B =

bitblt /bit'blit/ n.

[from **BLT**, q.v.] 1. [common] Any of a family of closely related algorithms for moving and copying rectangles of bits between main and display memory on a bit-mapped device, or between two areas of either main or display memory (the requirement to do the **Right Thing** in the case of overlapping source and destination rectangles is what makes BitBlt tricky). 2. Synonym for **blit** or **BLT**. Both uses are borderline techspeak.

Node:BITNET, Next:bits, Previous:bitblt, Up:= B =

BITNET /bit'net/ n., obs.

[acronym: Because It's Time NETwork] Everybody's least favorite piece of the network (see **the network**) - until AOL happened. The BITNET hosts were a collection of IBM dinosaurs and VAXen (the latter with lobotomized comm hardware) that communicate using 80-character **EBCDIC** card images (see **eighty-column mind**); thus, they tend to mangle the headers and text of third-party traffic from the rest of the ASCII/**RFC**-822 world with annoying regularity. BITNET was also notorious as the apparent home of **B1FF**. By 1995 it had, much to everyone's relief, been obsolesced and absorbed into the Internet. Unfortunately, around this time we also got AOL.

Node:bits, Next:bitty box, Previous:BITNET, Up:= B =

bits pl.n.

1. Information. Examples: "I need some bits about file formats." ("I need to know about file formats.") Compare **core dump**, sense 4. 2. Machine-readable representation of a document, specifically as contrasted with paper: "I have only a photocopy of the Jargon File; does anyone know where I can get the bits?". See **softcopy**, **source of all good bits** See also **bit**.

Node:bitty box, Next:bixen, Previous:bits, Up:= B =

bitty box /bit'ee boks/ n.

1. A computer sufficiently small, primitive, or incapable as to cause a hacker acute claustrophobia at the thought of developing software on or for it. Especially used of small, obsolescent, single-tasking-only personal machines such as the Atari 800, Osborne, Sinclair, VIC-20, TRS-80, or IBM PC. 2. [Pejorative] More generally, the opposite of `real computer' (see **Get a real computer!**). See also **mess-dos**, **toaster**, and **toy**.

Node:bixen, Next:bixie, Previous:bitty box, Up:= B =

bixen pl.n.

Users of BIX (the BIX Information eXchange, formerly the Byte Information eXchange). Parallels other plurals like boxen, **VAXen**, oxen.

Node:bixie, Next:black art, Previous:bixen, Up:= B =

bixie /bik'see/ n.

Variant **emoticon**s used on BIX (the BIX Information eXchange). The most common (**smiley**) bixie is <@_@>, representing two cartoon eyes and a mouth. These were originally invented in an SF fanzine called APA-L and imported to BIX by one of the earliest users.

Node:black art, Next:black hole, Previous:bixie, Up:= B =

black art n.

[common] A collection of arcane, unpublished, and (by implication) mostly ad-hoc techniques developed for a particular application or systems area (compare **black magic**). VLSI design and compiler code

optimization were (in their beginnings) considered classic examples of black art; as theory developed they became **deep magic**, and once standard textbooks had been written, became merely **heavy wizardry**. The huge proliferation of formal and informal channels for spreading around new computer-related technologies during the last twenty years has made both the term `black art' and what it describes less common than formerly. See also **voodoo programming**.

Node:black hole, Next:black magic, Previous:black art, Up:= B =

black hole n.,vt.

[common] What data (a piece of email or netnews, or a stream of TCP/IP packets) has fallen into if it disappears mysteriously between its origin and destination sites (that is, without returning a **bounce message**). "I think there's a black hole at *foovax*!" conveys suspicion that site *foovax* has been dropping a lot of stuff on the floor lately (see **drop on the floor**). The implied metaphor of email as interstellar travel is interesting in itself. Readily verbed as `blackhole': "That router is blackholing IDP packets." Compare **bit bucket** aand see **RBL**.

Node:black magic, Next:Black Screen of Death, Previous:black hole, Up:= B =

black magic n.

[common] A technique that works, though nobody really understands why. More obscure than **voodoo programming**, which may be done by cookbook. Compare also **black art**, **deep magic**, and **magic number** (sense 2).

Node:Black Screen of Death, Next:Black Thursday, Previous:black magic, Up:= B =

Black Screen of Death n.

[prob. related to the Floating Head of Death in a famous "Far Side" cartoon.] A failure mode of **Microsloth Windows**. On an attempt to launch a DOS box, a networked Windows system not uncommonly blanks the screen and locks up the PC so hard that it requires a cold **boot** to recover. This unhappy phenomenon is known as The Black Screen of Death. See also **Blue Screen of Death**, which has become rather more common.

Node:Black Thursday, Next:blammo, Previous:Black Screen of Death, Up:= B =

Black Thursday n.

February 8th, 1996 - the day of the signing into law of the **CDA**, so called by analogy with the catastrophic "Black Friday" in 1929 that began the Great Depression.

Node:blammo, Next:blargh, Previous:Black Thursday, Up:= B =

blammo v.

[Oxford Brookes University and alumni, UK] To forcibly remove someone from any interactive system, especially talker systems. The operators, who may remain hidden, may `blammo' a user who is

misbehaving. Very similar to MIT **gun**; in fact, the `blammo-gun' is a notional device used to `blammo' someone. While in actual fact the only incarnation of the blammo-gun is the command used to forcibly eject a user, operators speak of different levels of blammo-gun fire; e.g., a blammo-gun to `stun' will temporarily remove someone, but a blammo-gun set to `maim' will stop someone coming back on for a while.

Node:blargh, Next:blast, Previous:blammo, Up:= B =

blargh /blarg/ n.

[MIT; now common] The opposite of **ping**, sense 5; an exclamation indicating that one has absorbed or is emitting a quantum of unhappiness. Less common than **ping**.

Node:blast, Next:blat, Previous:blargh, Up:= B =

blast 1. v.,n.

Synonym for **BLT**, used esp. for large data sends over a network or comm line. Opposite of **snarf**. Usage: uncommon. The variant `blat' has been reported. 2. vt. [HP/Apollo] Synonymous with **nuke** (sense 3). Sometimes the message `Unable to kill all processes. Blast them (y/n)?` would appear in the command window upon logout.

Node:blat, Next:bletch, Previous:blast, Up:= B =

blat n.

1. Syn. **blast**, sense 1. 2. See **thud**.

Node:bletch, Next:bletcherous, Previous:blat, Up:= B =

bletch /blech/ interj.

[very common; from Yiddish/German `brechen', to vomit, poss. via comic-strip exclamation `blech'] Term of disgust. Often used in "Ugh, bletch". Compare **barf**.

Node:bletcherous, Next:blink, Previous:bletch, Up:= B =

bletcherous /blech'*-r*s/ adj.

Disgusting in design or function; esthetically unappealing. This word is seldom used of people. "This keyboard is bletcherous!" (Perhaps the keys don't work very well, or are misplaced.) See **losing**, **cretinous**, **bagbiting**, **bogus**, and **random**. The term **bletcherous** applies to the esthetics of the thing so described; similarly for **cretinous**. By contrast, something that is `losing' or `bagbiting' may be failing to meet objective criteria. See also **bogus** and **random**, which have richer and wider shades of meaning than any of the above.

Node:blink, Next:blinkenlights, Previous:bletcherous, Up:= B =

blink vi.,n.

[now rare] To use a navigator or off-line message reader to minimize time spent on-line to a commercial network service (a necessity in many places outside the U.S. where the telecoms monopolies charge per-minute for local calls). As of late 1994, this term was said to be in wide use in the UK, but is rare or unknown in the US. In early 2000 it was reported that the term had apparently passed out of use in the U.K.

Node:blinkenlights, Next:blit, Previous:blink, Up:= B =

blinkenlights /blink'*n-li:tz/ n.

[common] Front-panel diagnostic lights on a computer, esp. a **dinosaur**. Now that dinosaurs are rare, this term usually refers to status lights on a modem, network hub, or the like.

This term derives from the last word of the famous blackletter-Gothic sign in mangled pseudo-German that once graced about half the computer rooms in the English-speaking world. One version ran in its entirety as follows:

ACHTUNG! ALLES LOOKENSPEEPERS!

> Das computermachine ist nicht fuer gefingerpoken und mittengrabben. Ist easy schnappen der springenwerk, blowenfusen und poppencorken mit spitzensparken. Ist nicht fuer gewerken bei das dumpkopfen. Das rubbernecken sichtseeren keepen das cotten-pickenen hans in das pockets muss; relaxen und watchen das blinkenlichten.

This silliness dates back at least as far as 1959 at Stanford University and had already gone international by the early 1960s, when it was reported at London University's ATLAS computing site. There are several variants of it in circulation, some of which actually do end with the word `blinkenlights'.

In an amusing example of turnabout-is-fair-play, German hackers have developed their own versions of the blinkenlights poster in fractured English, one of which is reproduced here:

ATTENTION

> This room is fullfilled mit special electronische equippment. Fingergrabbing and pressing the cnoeppkes from the computers is allowed for die experts only! So all the "lefthanders" stay away and do not disturben the brainstorming von here working intelligencies. Otherwise you will be out thrown and kicked anderswhere! Also: please keep still and only watchen astaunished the blinkenlights.

See also **geef**.

Old-time hackers sometimes get nostalgic for blinkenlights because they were so much more fun to look at than a blank panel. Sadly, very few computers still have them (the three LEDs on a PC keyboard certainly don't count). The obvious reasons (cost of wiring, cost of front-panel cutouts, almost nobody needs or wants to interpret machine-register states on the fly anymore) are only part of the story. Another part of it is that radio-frequency leakage from the lamp wiring was beginning to be a problem as far back

as transistor machines. But the most fundamental fact is that there are very few signals slow enough to blink an LED these days! With slow CPUs, you could watch the bus register or instruction counter tick, but at 33/66/150MHz it's all a blur.

Finally, a version updated for the Internet has been seen on *news.admin.net-abuse.email*:

ACHTUNG! ALLES LOOKENSPEEPERS!

> Das Internet is nicht fuer gefingerclicken und giffengrabben. Ist easy droppenpacket der routers und overloaden der backbone mit der spammen und der me-tooen. Ist nicht fuer gewerken bei das dumpkopfen. Das mausklicken sichtseeren keepen das bandwit-spewin hans in das pockets muss; relaxen und watchen das cursorblinken.

This newest version partly reflects reports that the word `blinkenlights' is (in 1999) undergoing something of a revival in usage, but applied to networking equipment. The transmit and receive lights on routers, activity lights on switches and hubs, and other network equipment often blink in visually pleasing and seemingly coordinated ways. Although this is different in some ways from register readings, a tall stack of Cisco equipment or a 19-inch rack of ISDN terminals can provoke a similar feeling of hypnotic awe, especially in a darkened network operations center or server room.

Node:blit, Next:blitter, Previous:blinkenlights, Up:= B =

blit /blit/ vt.

1. [common] To copy a large array of bits from one part of a computer's memory to another part, particularly when the memory is being used to determine what is shown on a display screen. "The storage allocator picks through the table and copies the good parts up into high memory, and then blits it all back down again." See **bitblt**, **BLT**, **dd**, **cat**, **blast**, **snarf**. More generally, to perform some operation (such as toggling) on a large array of bits while moving them. 2. [historical, rare] Sometimes all-capitalized as `BLIT': an early experimental bit-mapped terminal designed by Rob Pike at Bell Labs, later commercialized as the AT&T 5620. (The folk etymology from `Bell Labs Intelligent Terminal' is incorrect. Its creators liked to claim that "Blit" stood for the Bacon, Lettuce, and Interactive Tomato.)

Node:blitter, Next:blivet, Previous:blit, Up:= B =

blitter /blit'r/ n.

[common] A special-purpose chip or hardware system built to perform **blit** operations, esp. used for fast implementation of bit-mapped graphics. The Commodore Amiga and a few other micros have these, but since 1990 the trend has been away from them (however, see **cycle of reincarnation**). Syn. **raster blaster**.

Node:blivet, Next:bloatware, Previous:blitter, Up:= B =

blivet /bliv'*t/ n.

[allegedly from a World War II military term meaning "ten pounds of manure in a five-pound bag"] 1. An intractable problem. 2. A crucial piece of hardware that can't be fixed or replaced if it breaks. 3. A tool that has been hacked over by so many incompetent programmers that it has become an unmaintainable tissue of hacks. 4. An out-of-control but unkillable development effort. 5. An embarrassing bug that pops up during a customer demo. 6. In the subjargon of computer security specialists, a denial-of-service attack

performed by hogging limited resources that have no access controls (for example, shared spool space on a multi-user system).

This term has other meanings in other technical cultures; among experimental physicists and hardware engineers of various kinds it seems to mean any random object of unknown purpose (similar to hackish use of **frob**). It has also been used to describe an amusing trick-the-eye drawing resembling a three-pronged fork that appears to depict a three-dimensional object until one realizes that the parts fit together in an impossible way.

Node:bloatware, Next:BLOB, Previous:blivet, Up:= B =

bloatware n.

[common] Software that provides minimal functionality while requiring a disproportionate amount of diskspace and memory. Especially used for application and OS upgrades. This term is very common in the Windows/NT world. So is its cause.

Node:BLOB, Next:block, Previous:bloatware, Up:= B =

BLOB

1. n. [acronym: Binary Large OBject] Used by database people to refer to any random large block of bits that needs to be stored in a database, such as a picture or sound file. The essential point about a BLOB is that it's an object that cannot be interpreted within the database itself. 2. v. To **mailbomb** someone by sending a BLOB to him/her; esp. used as a mild threat. "If that program crashes again, I'm going to BLOB the core dump to you."

Node:block, Next:block transfer computations, Previous:BLOB, Up:= B =

block v.

[common; from process scheduling terminology in OS theory] 1. vi. To delay or sit idle while waiting for something. "We're blocking until everyone gets here." Compare **busy-wait**. 2. `block on' vt. To block, waiting for (something). "Lunch is blocked on Phil's arrival."

Node:block transfer computations, Next:Bloggs Family, Previous:block, Up:= B =

block transfer computations n.

[from the television series "Dr. Who"] Computations so fiendishly subtle and complex that they could not be performed by machines. Used to refer to any task that should be expressible as an algorithm in theory, but isn't. (The Z80's LDIR instruction, "Computed Block Transfer with increment", may also be relevant.)

Node:Bloggs Family, Next:blow an EPROM, Previous:block transfer computations, Up:= B =

Bloggs Family n.

An imaginary family consisting of Fred and Mary Bloggs and their children. Used as a standard example

in knowledge representation to show the difference between extensional and intensional objects. For example, every occurrence of "Fred Bloggs" is the same unique person, whereas occurrences of "person" may refer to different people. Members of the Bloggs family have been known to pop up in bizarre places such as the old **DEC** Telephone Directory. Compare **Dr. Fred Mbogo**; **J. Random Hacker**; **Fred Foobar**.

Node:blow an EPROM, Next:blow away, Previous:Bloggs Family, Up:= B =

blow an EPROM /bloh *n ee'prom/ v.

(alt. `blast an EPROM', `burn an EPROM') To program a read-only memory, e.g. for use with an embedded system. This term arose because the programming process for the Programmable Read-Only Memories (PROMs) that preceded present-day Erasable Programmable Read-Only Memories (EPROMs) involved intentionally blowing tiny electrical fuses on the chip. The usage lives on (it's too vivid and expressive to discard) even though the write process on EPROMs is nondestructive.

Node:blow away, Next:blow out, Previous:blow an EPROM, Up:= B =

blow away vt.

To remove (files and directories) from permanent storage, generally by accident. "He reformatted the wrong partition and blew away last night's netnews." Oppose **nuke**.

Node:blow out, Next:blow past, Previous:blow away, Up:= B =

blow out vi.

[prob. from mining and tunneling jargon] Of software, to fail spectacularly; almost as serious as **crash and burn**. See **blow past**, **blow up**, **die horribly**.

Node:blow past, Next:blow up, Previous:blow out, Up:= B =

blow past vt.

To **blow out** despite a safeguard. "The server blew past the 5K reserve buffer."

Node:blow up, Next:BLT, Previous:blow past, Up:= B =

blow up vi.

1. [scientific computation] To become unstable. Suggests that the computation is diverging so rapidly that it will soon overflow or at least go **nonlinear**. 2. Syn. **blow out**.

Node:BLT, Next:Blue Book, Previous:blow up, Up:= B =

BLT /B-L-T/, /bl*t/ or (rarely) /belt/ n.,vt.

Synonym for **blit**. This is the original form of **blit** and the ancestor of **bitblt**. It referred to any large bit-field copy or move operation (one resource-intensive memory-shuffling operation done on pre-paged versions of ITS, WAITS, and TOPS-10 was sardonically referred to as `The Big BLT'). The jargon usage has outlasted the **PDP-10** BLock Transfer instruction from which **BLT** derives; nowadays, the assembler mnemonic **BLT** almost always means `Branch if Less Than zero'.

Node:Blue Book, Next:blue box, Previous:BLT, Up:= B =

Blue Book n.

1. Informal name for one of the four standard references on the page-layout and graphics-control language **PostScript** ("PostScript Language Tutorial and Cookbook", Adobe Systems, Addison-Wesley 1985, QA76.73.P67P68, ISBN 0-201-10179-3); the other three official guides are known as the **Green Book**, the **Red Book**, and the **White Book** (sense 2). 2. Informal name for one of the three standard references on Smalltalk: "Smalltalk-80: The Language and its Implementation", David Robson, Addison-Wesley 1983, QA76.8.S635G64, ISBN 0-201-11371-63 (this book also has green and red siblings). 3. Any of the 1988 standards issued by the CCITT's ninth plenary assembly. These include, among other things, the X.400 email spec and the Group 1 through 4 fax standards. See also **book titles**.

Node:blue box, Next:Blue Glue, Previous:Blue Book, Up:= B =

blue box

n. 1. obs. Once upon a time, before all-digital switches made it possible for the phone companies to move them out of band, one could actually hear the switching tones used to route long-distance calls. Early **phreaker**s built devices called `blue boxes' that could reproduce these tones, which could be used to commandeer portions of the phone network. (This was not as hard as it may sound; one early phreak acquired the sobriquet `Captain Crunch' after he proved that he could generate switching tones with a plastic whistle pulled out of a box of Captain Crunch cereal!) There were other colors of box with more specialized phreaking uses; red boxes, black boxes, silver boxes, etc. 2. n. An **IBM** machine, especially a large (non-PC) one.

Node:Blue Glue, Next:blue goo, Previous:blue box, Up:= B =

Blue Glue n.

[IBM] IBM's SNA (Systems Network Architecture), an incredibly **losing** and **bletcherous** communications protocol widely favored at commercial shops that don't know any better. The official IBM definition is "that which binds blue boxes together." See **fear and loathing**. It may not be irrelevant that Blue Glue is the trade name of a 3M product that is commonly used to hold down the carpet squares to the removable panel floors common in **dinosaur pen**s. A correspondent at U. Minn. reports that the CS department there has about 80 bottles of the stuff hanging about, so they often refer to any messy work to be done as `using the blue glue'.

Node:blue goo, Next:Blue Screen of Death, Previous:Blue Glue, Up:= B =

blue goo n.

Term for `police' **nanobot**s intended to prevent **gray goo**, denature hazardous waste, destroy pollution, put ozone back into the stratosphere, prevent halitosis, and promote truth, justice, and the American way,

etc. The term `Blue Goo' can be found in Dr. Seuss's "Fox In Socks" to refer to a substance much like bubblegum. `Would you like to chew blue goo, sir?'. See **nanotechnology**.

Node:Blue Screen of Death, Next:blue wire, Previous:blue goo, Up:= B =

Blue Screen of Death n.

[common] This term is closely related to the older **Black Screen of Death** but much more common (many non-hackers have picked it up). Due to the extreme fragility and bugginess of Microsoft Windows (3.1/95/NT versions), misbehaving applications can crash the OS. The Blue Screen of Death, sometimes decorated with hex error codes, is what you get when this happens. (Commonly abbreviated **BSOD**.) This event is sufficiently common to have inspired the following haiku from Alan Tuplin:

```
Your system which soared
So freely on gliding wings
now hangs, frozen and blue
```

The following entry from the Salon Haiku Contest, seems to have predated popular use of the term (and may indeed have inspired it):

```
Windows NT crashed.
I am the Blue Screen of Death
No one hears your screams.
```

Node:blue wire, Next:blurgle, Previous:Blue Screen of Death, Up:= B =

blue wire n.

[IBM] Patch wires (esp. 30 AWG gauge) added to circuit boards at the factory to correct design or fabrication problems. Blue wire is not necessarily blue, the term describes function rather than color. These may be necessary if there hasn't been time to design and qualify another board version. Compare **purple wire**, **red wire**, **yellow wire**, **pink wire**.

Node:blurgle, Next:BNF, Previous:blue wire, Up:= B =

blurgle /bler'gl/ n.

[UK] Spoken **metasyntactic variable**, to indicate some text that is obvious from context, or which is already known. If several words are to be replaced, blurgle may well be doubled or tripled. "To look for something in several files use `grep string blurgle blurgle'." In each case, "blurgle blurgle" would be understood to be replaced by the file you wished to search. Compare **mumble**, sense 7.

Node:BNF, Next:boa, Previous:blurgle, Up:= B =

BNF /B-N-F/ n.

1. [techspeak] Acronym for `Backus Normal Form' (often incorrectly expanded as `Backus-Naur Form'), a metasyntactic notation used to specify the syntax of programming languages, command sets, and the like. Widely used for language descriptions but seldom documented anywhere, so that it must usually be learned by osmosis from other hackers. Consider this BNF for a U.S. postal address:

```
<postal-address> ::= <name-part> <street-address> <zip-part>

<personal-part> ::= <name> | <initial> "."

<name-part> ::= <personal-part> <last-name> [<jr-part>] <EOL>
              | <personal-part> <name-part>

<street-address> ::= [<apt>] <house-num> <street-name> <EOL>

<zip-part> ::= <town-name> "," <state-code> <ZIP-code> <EOL>
```

This translates into English as: "A postal-address consists of a name-part, followed by a street-address part, followed by a zip-code part. A personal-part consists of either a first name or an initial followed by a dot. A name-part consists of either: a personal-part followed by a last name followed by an optional `jr-part' (Jr., Sr., or dynastic number) and end-of-line, or a personal part followed by a name part (this rule illustrates the use of recursion in BNFs, covering the case of people who use multiple first and middle names and/or initials). A street address consists of an optional apartment specifier, followed by a street number, followed by a street name. A zip-part consists of a town-name, followed by a comma, followed by a state code, followed by a ZIP-code followed by an end-of-line." Note that many things (such as the format of a personal-part, apartment specifier, or ZIP-code) are left unspecified. These are presumed to be obvious from context or detailed somewhere nearby. See also **parse**. 2. Any of a number of variants and extensions of BNF proper, possibly containing some or all of the **regexp** wildcards such as * or +. In fact the example above isn't the pure form invented for the Algol-60 report; it uses [], which was introduced a few years later in IBM's PL/I definition but is now universally recognized. 3. In **science-fiction fandom**, a `Big-Name Fan' (someone famous or notorious). Years ago a fan started handing out black-on-green BNF buttons at SF conventions; this confused the hacker contingent terribly.

Node:boa, Next:board, Previous:BNF, Up:= B =

boa [IBM] n.

Any one of the fat cables that lurk under the floor in a **dinosaur pen**. Possibly so called because they display a ferocious life of their own when you try to lay them straight and flat after they have been coiled for some time. It is rumored within IBM that channel cables for the 370 are limited to 200 feet because beyond that length the boas get dangerous -- and it is worth noting that one of the major cable makers uses the trademark `Anaconda'.

Node:board, Next:boat anchor, Previous:boa, Up:= B =

board n.

1. In-context synonym for **bboard**; sometimes used even for Usenet newsgroups (but see usage note under **bboard**, sense 1). 2. An electronic circuit board.

Node:boat anchor, Next:bob, Previous:board, Up:= B =

boat anchor n.

[common; from ham radio] 1. Like **doorstop** but more severe; implies that the offending hardware is irreversibly dead or useless. "That was a working motherboard once. One lightning strike later, instant boat anchor!" 2. A person who just takes up space. 3. Obsolete but still working hardware, especially when used of an old S100-bus hobbyist system; originally a term of annoyance, but became more and more affectionate as the hardware became more and more obsolete.

Node:bob, Next:bodysurf code, Previous:boat anchor, Up:= B =

bob n.

At Demon Internet, all tech support personal are called "Bob". (Female support personnel have an option on "Bobette"). This has nothing to do with Bob the divine drilling-equipment salesman of the **Church of the SubGenius**. Nor is it acronymized from "Brother Of **BOFH**", though all parties agree it could have been. Rather, it was triggered by an unusually large draft of new tech-support people in 1995. It was observed that there would be much duplication of names. To ease the confusion, it was decided that all support techs would henceforth be known as "Bob", and identity badges were created labelled "Bob 1" and "Bob 2". (No, we never got any further).

The reason for "Bob" rather than anything else is due to a **luser** calling and asking to speak to "Bob", despite the fact that no "Bob" was currently working for Tech Support. Since we all know "the customer is always right", it was decided that there had to be at least one "Bob" on duty at all times, just in case.

This sillyness inexorably snowballed. Shift leaders and managers began to refer to their groups of "bobs". Whole ranks of support machines were set up (and still exist in the DNS as of 1999) as bob1 through bobN. Then came *alt.tech-support.recovery*, and it was filled with Demon support personnel. They all referred to themselves, and to others, as `bob', and after a while it caught on. There is now a Bob Code describing the Bob nature.

Node:bodysurf code, Next:BOF, Previous:bob, Up:= B =

bodysurf code n.

A program or segment of code written quickly in the heat of inspiration without the benefit of formal design or deep thought. Like its namesake sport, the result is too often a wipeout that leaves the programmer eating sand.

Node:BOF, Next:BOFH, Previous:bodysurf code, Up:= B =

BOF /B-O-F/ or /bof/ n.

1. [common] Abbreviation for the phrase "Birds Of a Feather" (flocking together), an informal discussion group and/or bull session scheduled on a conference program. It is not clear where or when this term originated, but it is now associated with the USENIX conferences for Unix techies and was already established there by 1984. It was used earlier than that at DECUS conferences and is reported to have been common at SHARE meetings as far back as the early 1960s. 2. Acronym, `Beginning of File'.

Node:BOFH, Next:bogo-sort, Previous:BOF, Up:= B =

BOFH // n.

[common] Acronym, Bastard Operator From Hell. A system administrator with absolutely no tolerance for **luser**s. "You say you need more filespace? <massive-global-delete> Seems to me you have plenty left..." Many BOFHs (and others who would be BOFHs if they could get away with it) hang out in the newsgroup *alt.sysadmin.recovery*, although there has also been created a top-level newsgroup hierarchy (*bofh.**) of their own.

Several people have written stories about BOFHs. The set usually considered canonical is by Simon Travaglia and may be found at the Bastard Home Page, http://prime-mover.cc.waikato.ac.nz/Bastard.html. BOFHs and BOFH wannabes hang out on **scary devil monastery** and wield **LART**s.

Node:bogo-sort, Next:bogometer, Previous:BOFH, Up:= B =

bogo-sort /boh`goh-sort'/ n.

(var. `stupid-sort') The archetypical perversely awful algorithm (as opposed to **bubble sort**, which is merely the generic *bad* algorithm). Bogo-sort is equivalent to repeatedly throwing a deck of cards in the air, picking them up at random, and then testing whether they are in order. It serves as a sort of canonical example of awfulness. Looking at a program and seeing a dumb algorithm, one might say "Oh, I see, this program uses bogo-sort." Esp. appropriate for algorithms with factorial or super-exponential running time in the average case and probabilistically infinite worst-case running time. Compare **bogus**, **brute force**, **lasherism**.

A spectacular variant of bogo-sort has been proposed which has the interesting property that, if the Many Worlds interpretation of quantum mechanics is true, it can sort an arbitrarily large array in constant time. (In the Many-Worlds model, the result of any quantum action is to split the universe-before into a sheaf of universes-after, one for each possible way the state vector can collapse; in any one of the universes-after the result appears random.) The steps are: 1. Permute the array randomly using a quantum process, 2. If the array is not sorted, destroy the universe. Implementation of step 2 is left as an exercise for the reader.

Node:bogometer, Next:BogoMIPS, Previous:bogo-sort, Up:= B =

bogometer /boh-gom'-*t-er/ n.

A notional instrument for measuring **bogosity**. Compare the **Troll-O-Meter** and the `wankometer' described in the **wank** entry; see also **bogus**.

Node:BogoMIPS, Next:bogon, Previous:bogometer, Up:= B =

BogoMIPS

The number of million times a second a processor can do absolutely nothing. The **Linux** OS measures BogoMIPS at startup in order to calibrate some soft timing loops that will be used later on; details at the BogoMIPS mini-HOWTO. The name Linus chose, of course, is an ironic comment on the uselessness of all *other* **MIPS** figures.

Node:bogon, Next:bogon filter, Previous:BogoMIPS, Up:= B =

bogon /boh'gon/ n.

[very common; by analogy with proton/electron/neutron, but doubtless reinforced after 1980 by the similarity to Douglas Adams's `Vogons'; see the **Bibliography** in Appendix C and note that Arthur Dent actually mispronounces `Vogons' as `Bogons' at one point] 1. The elementary particle of bogosity (see **quantum bogodynamics**). For instance, "the Ethernet is emitting bogons again" means that it is broken or acting in an erratic or bogus fashion. 2. A query packet sent from a TCP/IP domain resolver to a root server, having the reply bit set instead of the query bit. 3. Any bogus or incorrectly formed packet sent on

a network. 4. By synecdoche, used to refer to any bogus thing, as in "I'd like to go to lunch with you but I've got to go to the weekly staff bogon". 5. A person who is bogus or who says bogus things. This was historically the original usage, but has been overtaken by its derivative senses 1-4. See also **bogosity**, **bogus**; compare **psyton**, **fat electrons**, **magic smoke**.

The bogon has become the type case for a whole bestiary of nonce particle names, including the `clutron' or `cluon' (indivisible particle of cluefulness, obviously the antiparticle of the bogon) and the futon (elementary particle of **randomness**, or sometimes of lameness). These are not so much live usages in themselves as examples of a live meta-usage: that is, it has become a standard joke or linguistic maneuver to "explain" otherwise mysterious circumstances by inventing nonce particle names. And these imply nonce particle theories, with all their dignity or lack thereof (we might note parenthetically that this is a generalization from "(bogus particle) theories" to "bogus (particle theories)"!). Perhaps such particles are the modern-day equivalents of trolls and wood-nymphs as standard starting-points around which to construct explanatory myths. Of course, playing on an existing word (as in the `futon') yields additional flavor. Compare **magic smoke**.

Node:bogon filter, Next:bogon flux, Previous:bogon, Up:= B =

bogon filter /boh'gon fil'tr/ n.

Any device, software or hardware, that limits or suppresses the flow and/or emission of bogons. "Engineering hacked a bogon filter between the Cray and the VAXen, and now we're getting fewer dropped packets." See also **bogosity**, **bogus**.

Node:bogon flux, Next:bogosity, Previous:bogon filter, Up:= B =

bogon flux /boh'gon fluhks/ n.

A measure of a supposed field of **bogosity** emitted by a speaker, measured by a **bogometer**; as a speaker starts to wander into increasing bogosity a listener might say "Warning, warning, bogon flux is rising". See **quantum bogodynamics**.

Node:bogosity, Next:bogotify, Previous:bogon flux, Up:= B =

bogosity /boh-go's*-tee/ n.

1. [orig. CMU, now very common] The degree to which something is **bogus**. Bogosity is measured with a **bogometer**; in a seminar, when a speaker says something bogus, a listener might raise his hand and say "My bogometer just triggered". More extremely, "You just pinned my bogometer" means you just said or did something so outrageously bogus that it is off the scale, pinning the bogometer needle at the highest possible reading (one might also say "You just redlined my bogometer"). The agreed-upon unit of bogosity is the **microLenat**. 2. The potential field generated by a **bogon flux**; see **quantum bogodynamics**. See also **bogon flux**, **bogon filter**, **bogus**.

Node:bogotify, Next:bogue out, Previous:bogosity, Up:= B =

bogotify /boh-go't*-fi:/ vt.

To make or become bogus. A program that has been changed so many times as to become completely disorganized has become bogotified. If you tighten a nut too hard and strip the threads on the bolt, the bolt

has become bogotified and you had better not use it any more. This coinage led to the notional `autobogotiphobia' defined as `the fear of becoming bogotified'; but is not clear that the latter has ever been `live' jargon rather than a self-conscious joke in jargon about jargon. See also **bogosity**, **bogus**.

Node:bogue out, Next:bogus, Previous:bogotify, Up:= B =

bogue out /bohg owt/ vi.

To become bogus, suddenly and unexpectedly. "His talk was relatively sane until somebody asked him a trick question; then he bogued out and did nothing but **flame** afterwards." See also **bogosity**, **bogus**.

Node:bogus, Next:Bohr bug, Previous:bogue out, Up:= B =

bogus adj.

1. Non-functional. "Your patches are bogus." 2. Useless. "OPCON is a bogus program." 3. False. "Your arguments are bogus." 4. Incorrect. "That algorithm is bogus." 5. Unbelievable. "You claim to have solved the halting problem for Turing Machines? That's totally bogus." 6. Silly. "Stop writing those bogus sagas."

Astrology is bogus. So is a bolt that is obviously about to break. So is someone who makes blatantly false claims to have solved a scientific problem. (This word seems to have some, but not all, of the connotations of **random** -- mostly the negative ones.)

It is claimed that `bogus' was originally used in the hackish sense at Princeton in the late 1960s. It was spread to CMU and Yale by Michael Shamos, a migratory Princeton alumnus. A glossary of bogus words was compiled at Yale when the word was first popularized there about 1975-76. These coinages spread into hackerdom from CMU and MIT. Most of them remained wordplay objects rather than actual vocabulary items or live metaphors. Examples: `amboguous' (having multiple bogus interpretations); `bogotissimo' (in a gloriously bogus manner); `bogotophile' (one who is pathologically fascinated by the bogus); `paleobogology' (the study of primeval bogosity).

Some bogowords, however, obtained sufficient live currency to be listed elsewhere in this lexicon; see **bogometer**, **bogon**, **bogotify**, and **quantum bogodynamics** and the related but unlisted **Dr. Fred Mbogo**.

By the early 1980s `bogus' was also current in something like hacker usage sense in West Coast teen slang, and it had gone mainstream by 1985. A correspondent from Cambridge reports, by contrast, that these uses of `bogus' grate on British nerves; in Britain the word means, rather specifically, `counterfeit', as in "a bogus 10-pound note".

Node:Bohr bug, Next:boink, Previous:bogus, Up:= B =

Bohr bug /bohr buhg/ n.

[from quantum physics] A repeatable **bug**; one that manifests reliably under a possibly unknown but well-defined set of conditions. Antonym of **heisenbug**; see also **mandelbug**, **schroedinbug**.

Node:boink, Next:bomb, Previous:Bohr bug, Up:= B =

boink /boynk/

[Usenet: variously ascribed to the TV series "Cheers" "Moonlighting", and "Soap"] 1. v. To have sex with; compare **bounce**, sense 3. (This is mainstream slang.) In Commonwealth hackish the variant `bonk' is more common. 2. n. After the original Peter Korn `Boinkon' **Usenet** parties, used for almost any net social gathering, e.g., Miniboink, a small boink held by Nancy Gillett in 1988; Minniboink, a Boinkcon in Minnesota in 1989; Humpdayboinks, Wednesday get-togethers held in the San Francisco Bay Area. Compare **@-party**. 3. Var of `bonk'; see **bonk/oif**.

Node:bomb, Next:bondage-and-discipline language, Previous:boink, Up:= B =

bomb

1. v. General synonym for **crash** (sense 1) except that it is not used as a noun; esp. used of software or OS failures. "Don't run Empire with less than 32K stack, it'll bomb." 2. n.,v. Atari ST and Macintosh equivalents of a Unix `panic' or Amiga **guru** (sense 2), in which icons of little black-powder bombs or mushroom clouds are displayed, indicating that the system has died. On the Mac, this may be accompanied by a decimal (or occasionally hexadecimal) number indicating what went wrong, similar to the Amiga **guru meditation** number. **MS-DOS** machines tend to get **locked up** in this situation.

Node:bondage-and-discipline language, Next:bonk/oif, Previous:bomb, Up:= B =

bondage-and-discipline language n.

A language (such as **Pascal**, **Ada**, APL, or Prolog) that, though ostensibly general-purpose, is designed so as to enforce an author's theory of `right programming' even though said theory is demonstrably inadequate for systems hacking or even vanilla general-purpose programming. Often abbreviated `B&D'; thus, one may speak of things "having the B&D nature". See **Pascal**; oppose **languages of choice**.

Node:bonk/oif, Next:book titles, Previous:bondage-and-discipline language, Up:= B =

bonk/oif /bonk/, /oyf/ interj.

In the U.S. **MUD** community, it has become traditional to express pique or censure by `bonking' the offending person. Convention holds that one should acknowledge a bonk by saying `oif!' and there is a myth to the effect that failing to do so upsets the cosmic bonk/oif balance, causing much trouble in the universe. Some MUDs have implemented special commands for bonking and oifing. Note: in parts of the U.K. `bonk' is a sexually loaded slang term; care is advised in transatlantic conversations. Commonwealth hackers report a similar convention involving the `fish/bang' balance. See also **talk mode**.

Node:book titles, Next:boot, Previous:bonk/oif, Up:= B =

book titles

There is a tradition in hackerdom of informally tagging important textbooks and standards documents with the dominant color of their covers or with some other conspicuous feature of the cover. Many of these are described in this lexicon under their own entries. See **Aluminum Book**, **Blue Book**, **Camel Book**, **Cinderella Book**, **Devil Book**, **Dragon Book**, **Green Book**, **Orange Book**, **Purple Book**, **Red Book**, **Silver Book**, **White Book**, **Wizard Book**, **Yellow Book**, and **bible**; see also **rainbow series**. Since about 1983 this tradition has gotten a boost from the popular O'Reilly and Associates line of

technical books, which usually feature some kind of exotic animal on the cover.

Node:boot, Next:Borg, Previous:book titles, Up:= B =

boot v.,n.

[techspeak; from `by one's bootstraps'] To load and initialize the operating system on a machine. This usage is no longer jargon (having passed into techspeak) but has given rise to some derivatives that are still jargon.

The derivative `reboot' implies that the machine hasn't been down for long, or that the boot is a **bounce** (sense 4) intended to clear some state of **wedgitude**. This is sometimes used of human thought processes, as in the following exchange: "You've lost me." "OK, reboot. Here's the theory...."

This term is also found in the variants `cold boot' (from power-off condition) and `warm boot' (with the CPU and all devices already powered up, as after a hardware reset or software crash).

Another variant: `soft boot', reinitialization of only part of a system, under control of other software still running: "If you're running the **mess-dos** emulator, control-alt-insert will cause a soft-boot of the emulator, while leaving the rest of the system running."

Opposed to this there is `hard boot', which connotes hostility towards or frustration with the machine being booted: "I'll have to hard-boot this losing Sun." "I recommend booting it hard." One often hard-boots by performing a **power cycle**.

Historical note: this term derives from `bootstrap loader', a short program that was read in from cards or paper tape, or toggled in from the front panel switches. This program was always very short (great efforts were expended on making it short in order to minimize the labor and chance of error involved in toggling it in), but was just smart enough to read in a slightly more complex program (usually from a card or paper tape reader), to which it handed control; this program in turn was smart enough to read the application or operating system from a magnetic tape drive or disk drive. Thus, in successive steps, the computer `pulled itself up by its bootstraps' to a useful operating state. Nowadays the bootstrap is usually found in ROM or EPROM, and reads the first stage in from a fixed location on the disk, called the `boot block'. When this program gains control, it is powerful enough to load the actual OS and hand control over to it.

Node:Borg, Next:borken, Previous:boot, Up:= B =

Borg n.

In "Star Trek: The Next Generation" the Borg is a species of cyborg that ruthlessly seeks to incorporate all sentient life into itself; their slogan is "Resistence is futile. You will be assimilated." In hacker parlance, the Borg is usually **Microsoft**, which is thought to be trying just as ruthlessly to assimilate all computers and the entire Internet to itself (there is a widely circulated image of Bill Gates as a Borg). Being forced to use Windows or NT is often referred to as being "Borged". Interestingly, the **Halloween Documents** reveal that this jargon is live within Microsoft itself. (Other companies, notably Intel and UUNet, have also occasionally been equated to the Borg.) See also **Evil Empire**, **Internet Exploiter**.

Node:borken, Next:bot, Previous:Borg, Up:= B =

borken adj.

(also `borked') Common deliberate typo for `broken'.

Node:bot, Next:bot spot, Previous:borken, Up:= B =

bot n

[common on IRC, MUD and among gamers; from `robot'] 1. An **IRC** or **MUD** user who is actually a program. On IRC, typically the robot provides some useful service. Examples are NickServ, which tries to prevent random users from adopting **nick**s already claimed by others, and MsgServ, which allows one to send asynchronous messages to be delivered when the recipient signs on. Also common are `annoybots', such as KissServ, which perform no useful function except to send cute messages to other people. Service bots are less common on MUDs; but some others, such as the `Julia' bot active in 1990-91, have been remarkably impressive Turing-test experiments, able to pass as human for as long as ten or fifteen minutes of conversation. 2. An AI-controlled player in a computer game (especially a first-person shooter such as Quake) which, unlike ordinary monsters, operates like a human-controlled player, with access to a player's weapons and abilities. An example can be found at http://www.telefragged.com/thefatal/.

Note that bots in both senses were `robots' when the term first appeared in the early 1990s, but the shortened form is now habitual.

Node:bot spot, Next:bottom feeder, Previous:bot, Up:= B =

bot spot n.

[MUD] The user on a MUD with the longest connect time. Derives from the fact that **bot**s on MUDS often stay constantly connected and appear at the bottom of the list.

Node:bottom feeder, Next:bottom-up implementation, Previous:bot spot, Up:= B =

bottom feeder n.

Syn. for **slopsucker**, derived from the fishermen's and naturalists' term for finny creatures who subsist on the primordial ooze.

Node:bottom-up implementation, Next:bounce, Previous:bottom feeder, Up:= B =

bottom-up implementation n.

Hackish opposite of the techspeak term `top-down design'. It has been received wisdom in most programming cultures that it is best to design from higher levels of abstraction down to lower, specifying sequences of action in increasing detail until you get to actual code. Hackers often find (especially in exploratory designs that cannot be closely specified in advance) that it works best to *build* things in the opposite order, by writing and testing a clean set of primitive operations and then knitting them together. Naively applied, this leads to hacked-together bottom-up implementations; a more sophisticated response is `middle-out implementation', in which scratch code within primitives at the mid-level of the system is gradually replaced with a more polished version of the lowest level at the same time the structure above the midlevel is being built.

Node:bounce, Next:bounce message, Previous:bottom-up implementation, Up:= B =

bounce v.

1. [common; perhaps by analogy to a bouncing check] An electronic mail message that is undeliverable and returns an error notification to the sender is said to `bounce'. See also **bounce message**. 2. [Stanford] To play volleyball. The now-demolished **D. C. Power Lab** building used by the Stanford AI Lab in the 1970s had a volleyball court on the front lawn. From 5 P.M. to 7 P.M. was the scheduled maintenance time for the computer, so every afternoon at 5 would come over the intercom the cry: "Now hear this: bounce, bounce!", followed by Brian McCune loudly bouncing a volleyball on the floor outside the offices of known volleyballers. 3. To engage in sexual intercourse; prob. from the expression `bouncing the mattress', but influenced by Roo's psychosexually loaded "Try bouncing me, Tigger!" from the "Winnie-the-Pooh" books. Compare **boink**. 4. To casually reboot a system in order to clear up a transient problem. Reported primarily among **VMS** and **Unix** users. 5. [VM/CMS programmers] *Automatic* warm-start of a machine after an error. "I logged on this morning and found it had bounced 7 times during the night" 6. [IBM] To **power cycle** a peripheral in order to reset it.

Node:bounce message, Next:boustrophedon, Previous:bounce, Up:= B =

bounce message n.

[common] Notification message returned to sender by a site unable to relay **email** to the intended **Internet address** recipient or the next link in a **bang path** (see **bounce**, sense 1). Reasons might include a nonexistent or misspelled username or a **down** relay site. Bounce messages can themselves fail, with occasionally ugly results; see **sorcerer's apprentice mode** and **software laser**. The terms `bounce mail' and `barfmail' are also common.

Node:boustrophedon, Next:box, Previous:bounce message, Up:= B =

boustrophedon n.

[from a Greek word for turning like an ox while plowing] An ancient method of writing using alternate left-to-right and right-to-left lines. This term is actually philologists' techspeak and typesetters' jargon. Erudite hackers use it for an optimization performed by some computer typesetting software and moving-head printers. The adverbial form `boustrophedonically' is also found (hackers purely love constructions like this).

Node:box, Next:boxed comments, Previous:boustrophedon, Up:= B =

box n.

1. A computer; esp. in the construction `foo box' where *foo* is some functional qualifier, like `graphics', or the name of an OS (thus, `Unix box', `MS-DOS box', etc.) "We preprocess the data on Unix boxes before handing it up to the mainframe." 2. [IBM] Without qualification but within an SNA-using site, this refers specifically to an IBM front-end processor or FEP /F-E-P/. An FEP is a small computer necessary to enable an IBM **mainframe** to communicate beyond the limits of the **dinosaur pen**. Typically used in expressions like the cry that goes up when an SNA network goes down: "Looks like the **box** has fallen over." (See **fall over**.) See also **IBM**, **fear and loathing**, **Blue Glue**.

Node:boxed comments, Next:boxen, Previous:box, Up:= B =

boxed comments n.

Comments (explanatory notes attached to program instructions) that occupy several lines by themselves; so called because in assembler and C code they are often surrounded by a box in a style something like this:

```
/*********************************************
 *
 * This is a boxed comment in C style
 *
 *********************************************/
```

Common variants of this style omit the asterisks in column 2 or add a matching row of asterisks closing the right side of the box. The sparest variant omits all but the comment delimiters themselves; the `box' is implied. Oppose **winged comments**.

Node:boxen, Next:boxology, Previous:boxed comments, Up:= B =

boxen /bok'sn/ pl.n.

[very common; by analogy with **VAXen**] Fanciful plural of **box** often encountered in the phrase `Unix boxen', used to describe commodity **Unix** hardware. The connotation is that any two Unix boxen are interchangeable.

Node:boxology, Next:bozotic, Previous:boxen, Up:= B =

boxology /bok-sol'*-jee/ n.

Syn. **ASCII art**. This term implies a more restricted domain, that of box-and-arrow drawings. "His report has a lot of boxology in it." Compare **macrology**.

Node:bozotic, Next:BQS, Previous:boxology, Up:= B =

bozotic /boh-zoh'tik/ or /boh-zo'tik/ adj.

[from the name of a TV clown even more losing than Ronald McDonald] Resembling or having the quality of a bozo; that is, clownish, ludicrously wrong, unintentionally humorous. Compare **wonky**, **demented**. Note that the noun `bozo' occurs in slang, but the mainstream adjectival form would be `bozo-like' or (in New England) `bozoish'.

Node:BQS, Next:brain dump, Previous:bozotic, Up:= B =

BQS /B-Q-S/ adj.

Syn. **Berkeley Quality Software**.

Node:brain dump, Next:brain fart, Previous:BQS, Up:= B =

brain dump n.

[common] The act of telling someone everything one knows about a particular topic or project. Typically used when someone is going to let a new party maintain a piece of code. Conceptually analogous to an operating system **core dump** in that it saves a lot of useful **state** before an exit. "You'll have to give me a brain dump on FOOBAR before you start your new job at HackerCorp." See **core dump** (sense 4). At Sun, this is also known as `TOI' (transfer of information).

Node:brain fart, Next:brain-damaged, Previous:brain dump, Up:= B =

brain fart n.

The actual result of a **braino**, as opposed to the mental glitch that is the braino itself. E.g., typing `dir` on a Unix box after a session with DOS.

Node:brain-damaged, Next:brain-dead, Previous:brain fart, Up:= B =

brain-damaged adj.

1. [common; generalization of `Honeywell Brain Damage' (HBD), a theoretical disease invented to explain certain utter cretinisms in Honeywell **Multics**] adj. Obviously wrong; **cretinous**; **demented**. There is an implication that the person responsible must have suffered brain damage, because he should have known better. Calling something brain-damaged is really bad; it also implies it is unusable, and that its failure to work is due to poor design rather than some accident. "Only six monocase characters per file name? Now *that's* brain-damaged!" 2. [esp. in the Mac world] May refer to free demonstration software that has been deliberately crippled in some way so as not to compete with the product it is intended to sell. Syn. **crippleware**.

Node:brain-dead, Next:braino, Previous:brain-damaged, Up:= B =

brain-dead adj.

[common] Brain-damaged in the extreme. It tends to imply terminal design failure rather than malfunction or simple stupidity. "This comm program doesn't know how to send a break -- how brain-dead!"

Node:braino, Next:branch to Fishkill, Previous:brain-dead, Up:= B =

braino /bray'no/ n.

Syn. for **thinko**. See also **brain fart**.

Node:branch to Fishkill, Next:bread crumbs, Previous:braino, Up:= B =

branch to Fishkill n.

[IBM: from the location of one of the corporation's facilities] Any unexpected jump in a program that produces catastrophic or just plain weird results. See **jump off into never-never land**, **hyperspace**.

Node:bread crumbs, Next:break, Previous:branch to Fishkill, Up:= B =

bread crumbs n.

Debugging statements inserted into a program that emit output or log indicators of the program's **state** to a file so you can see where it dies or pin down the cause of surprising behavior. The term is probably a reference to the Hansel and Gretel story from the Brothers Grimm or the older French folktale of Thumbelina; in several variants of these, a character leaves a trail of bread crumbs so as not to get lost in the woods.

Node:break, Next:break-even point, Previous:bread crumbs, Up:= B =

break

1. vt. To cause to be **broken** (in any sense). "Your latest patch to the editor broke the paragraph commands." 2. v. (of a program) To stop temporarily, so that it may debugged. The place where it stops is a `breakpoint'. 3. [techspeak] vi. To send an RS-232 break (two character widths of line high) over a serial comm line. 4. [Unix] vi. To strike whatever key currently causes the tty driver to send SIGINT to the current process. Normally, break (sense 3), delete or **control-C** does this. 5. `break break' may be said to interrupt a conversation (this is an example of verb doubling). This usage comes from radio communications, which in turn probably came from landline telegraph/teleprinter usage, as badly abused in the Citizen's Band craze a few years ago.

Node:break-even point, Next:breath-of-life packet, Previous:break, Up:= B =

break-even point n.

In the process of implementing a new computer language, the point at which the language is sufficiently effective that one can implement the language in itself. That is, for a new language called, hypothetically, FOOGOL, one has reached break-even when one can write a demonstration compiler for FOOGOL in FOOGOL, discard the original implementation language, and thereafter use working versions of FOOGOL to develop newer ones. This is an important milestone; see **MFTL**.

Since this entry was first written, several correspondents have reported that there actually was a compiler for a tiny Algol-like language called Foogol floating around on various **VAXen** in the early and mid-1980s. A FOOGOL implementation is available at the Retrocomputing Museum http://www.ccil.org/retro.

Node:breath-of-life packet, Next:breedle, Previous:break-even point, Up:= B =

breath-of-life packet n.

[XEROX PARC] An Ethernet packet that contains bootstrap (see **boot**) code, periodically sent out from a working computer to infuse the `breath of life' into any computer on the network that has happened to crash. Machines depending on such packets have sufficient hardware or firmware code to wait for (or request) such a packet during the reboot process. See also **dickless workstation**.

The notional `kiss-of-death packet', with a function complementary to that of a breath-of-life packet, is recommended for dealing with hosts that consume too many network resources. Though `kiss-of-death packet' is usually used in jest, there is at least one documented instance of an Internet subnet with limited

address-table slots in a gateway machine in which such packets were routinely used to compete for slots, rather like Christmas shoppers competing for scarce parking spaces.

Node:breedle, Next:Breidbart Index, Previous:breath-of-life packet, Up:= B =

breedle n.

See **feep**.

Node:Breidbart Index, Next:bring X to its knees, Previous:breedle, Up:= B =

Breidbart Index /bri:d'bart ind*ks/

A measurement of the severity of spam invented by long-time hacker Seth Breidbart, used for programming cancelbots. The Breidbart Index takes into account the fact that excessive multi-posting **EMP** is worse than excessive cross-posting **ECP**. The Breidbart Index is computed as follows: For each article in a spam, take the square-root of the number of newsgroups to which the article is posted. The Breidbart Index is the sum of the square roots of all of the posts in the spam. For example, one article posted to nine newsgroups and again to sixteen would have BI = sqrt(9) + sqrt(16) = 7. It is generally agreed that a spam is cancelable if the Breidbart Index exceeds 20.

The Breidbart Index accumulates over a 45-day window. Ten articles yesterday and ten articles today and ten articles tomorrow add up to a 30-article spam. Spam fighters will often reset the count if you can convince them that the spam was accidental and/or you have seen the error of your ways and won't repeat it. Breidbart Index can accumulate over multiple authors. For example, the "Make Money Fast" pyramid scheme exceeded a BI of 20 a long time ago, and is now considered "cancel on sight".

Node:bring X to its knees, Next:brittle, Previous:Breidbart Index, Up:= B =

bring X to its knees v.

[common] To present a machine, operating system, piece of software, or algorithm with a load so extreme or **pathological** that it grinds to a halt. "To bring a MicroVAX to its knees, try twenty users running **vi** -- or four running **EMACS**." Compare **hog**.

Node:brittle, Next:broadcast storm, Previous:bring X to its knees, Up:= B =

brittle adj.

Said of software that is functional but easily broken by changes in operating environment or configuration, or by any minor tweak to the software itself. Also, any system that responds inappropriately and disastrously to abnormal but expected external stimuli; e.g., a file system that is usually totally scrambled by a power failure is said to be brittle. This term is often used to describe the results of a research effort that were never intended to be robust, but it can be applied to commercial software, which (due to closed-source development) displays the quality far more often than it ought to. Oppose **robust**.

Node:broadcast storm, Next:brochureware, Previous:brittle, Up:= B =

broadcast storm n.

[common] An incorrect packet broadcast on a network that causes most hosts to respond all at once, typically with wrong answers that start the process over again. See **network meltdown**; compare **mail storm**.

Node:brochureware, Next:broken, Previous:broadcast storm, Up:= B =

brochureware n.

Planned but non-existent product like **vaporware**, but with the added implication that marketing is actively selling and promoting it (they've printed brochures). Brochureware is often deployed as a strategic weapon; the idea is to con customers into not committing to an existing product of the competition's. It is a safe bet that when a brochureware product finally becomes real, it will be more expensive than and inferior to the alternatives that had been available for years.

Node:broken, Next:broken arrow, Previous:brochureware, Up:= B =

broken adj.

1. Not working properly (of programs). 2. Behaving strangely; especially (when used of people) exhibiting extreme depression.

Node:broken arrow, Next:BrokenWindows, Previous:broken, Up:= B =

broken arrow n.

[IBM] The error code displayed on line 25 of a 3270 terminal (or a PC emulating a 3270) for various kinds of protocol violations and "unexpected" error conditions (including connection to a **down** computer). On a PC, simulated with `->/_', with the two center characters overstruck.

Note: to appreciate this term fully, it helps to know that `broken arrow' is also military jargon for an accident involving nuclear weapons....

Node:BrokenWindows, Next:broket, Previous:broken arrow, Up:= B =

BrokenWindows n.

Abusive hackerism for the **crufty** and **elephantine** **X** environment on Sun machines; properly called `OpenWindows'.

Node:broket, Next:Brooks's Law, Previous:BrokenWindows, Up:= B =

broket /broh'k*t/ or /broh'ket`/ n.

[rare; by analogy with `bracket': a `broken bracket'] Either of the characters < and >, when used as paired enclosing delimiters. This word originated as a contraction of the phrase `broken bracket', that is, a bracket that is bent in the middle. (At MIT, and apparently in the **Real World** as well, these are usually

called **angle brackets**.)

Node:Brooks's Law, Next:brown-paper-bag bug, Previous:broket, Up:= B =

Brooks's Law prov.

"Adding manpower to a late software project makes it later" -- a result of the fact that the expected advantage from splitting development work among N programmers is O(N) (that is, proportional to N), but the complexity and communications cost associated with coordinating and then merging their work is O(N^2) (that is, proportional to the square of N). The quote is from Fred Brooks, a manager of IBM's OS/360 project and author of "The Mythical Man-Month" (Addison-Wesley, 1975, ISBN 0-201-00650-2), an excellent early book on software engineering. The myth in question has been most tersely expressed as "Programmer time is fungible" and Brooks established conclusively that it is not. Hackers have never forgotten his advice (though it's not the whole story; see **bazaar**); too often, **management** still does. See also **creationism**, **second-system effect**, **optimism**.

Node:brown-paper-bag bug, Next:browser, Previous:Brooks's Law, Up:= B =

brown-paper-bag bug n.

A bug in a public software release that is so embarassing that the author notionally wears a brown paper bag over his head for a while so he won't be recognized on the net. Entered popular usage after the early-1999 release of the first Linux 2.2, which had one. The phrase was used in Linus Torvalds's apology posting.

Node:browser, Next:BRS, Previous:brown-paper-bag bug, Up:= B =

browser n.

A program specifically designed to help users view and navigate hypertext, on-line documentation, or a database. While this general sense has been present in jargon for a long time, the proliferation of browsers for the World Wide Web after 1992 has made it much more popular and provided a central or default meaning of the word previously lacking in hacker usage. Nowadays, if someone mentions using a `browser' without qualification, one may assume it is a Web browser.

Node:BRS, Next:brute force, Previous:browser, Up:= B =

BRS /B-R-S/ n.

Syn. **Big Red Switch**. This abbreviation is fairly common on-line.

Node:brute force, Next:brute force and ignorance, Previous:BRS, Up:= B =

brute force adj.

Describes a primitive programming style, one in which the programmer relies on the computer's processing power instead of using his or her own intelligence to simplify the problem, often ignoring problems of scale and applying naive methods suited to small problems directly to large ones. The term

can also be used in reference to programming style: brute-force programs are written in a heavyhanded, tedious way, full of repetition and devoid of any elegance or useful abstraction (see also **brute force and ignorance**).

The **canonical** example of a brute-force algorithm is associated with the `traveling salesman problem' (TSP), a classical **NP-**hard problem: Suppose a person is in, say, Boston, and wishes to drive to N other cities. In what order should the cities be visited in order to minimize the distance travelled? The brute-force method is to simply generate all possible routes and compare the distances; while guaranteed to work and simple to implement, this algorithm is clearly very stupid in that it considers even obviously absurd routes (like going from Boston to Houston via San Francisco and New York, in that order). For very small N it works well, but it rapidly becomes absurdly inefficient when N increases (for N = 15, there are already 1,307,674,368,000 possible routes to consider, and for N = 1000 -- well, see **bignum**). Sometimes, unfortunately, there is no better general solution than brute force. See also **NP-**.

A more simple-minded example of brute-force programming is finding the smallest number in a large list by first using an existing program to sort the list in ascending order, and then picking the first number off the front.

Whether brute-force programming should actually be considered stupid or not depends on the context; if the problem is not terribly big, the extra CPU time spent on a brute-force solution may cost less than the programmer time it would take to develop a more `intelligent' algorithm. Additionally, a more intelligent algorithm may imply more long-term complexity cost and bug-chasing than are justified by the speed improvement.

Ken Thompson, co-inventor of Unix, is reported to have uttered the epigram "When in doubt, use brute force". He probably intended this as a **ha ha only serious**, but the original Unix kernel's preference for simple, robust, and portable algorithms over **brittle** `smart' ones does seem to have been a significant factor in the success of that OS. Like so many other tradeoffs in software design, the choice between brute force and complex, finely-tuned cleverness is often a difficult one that requires both engineering savvy and delicate esthetic judgment.

Node:brute force and ignorance, Next:BSD, Previous:brute force, Up:= B =

brute force and ignorance n.

A popular design technique at many software houses -- **brute force** coding unrelieved by any knowledge of how problems have been previously solved in elegant ways. Dogmatic adherence to design methodologies tends to encourage this sort of thing. Characteristic of early **larval stage** programming; unfortunately, many never outgrow it. Often abbreviated BFI: "Gak, they used a **bubble sort**! That's strictly from BFI." Compare **bogosity**.

Node:BSD, Next:BSOD, Previous:brute force and ignorance, Up:= B =

BSD /B-S-D/ n.

[abbreviation for `Berkeley Software Distribution'] a family of **Unix** versions for the **DEC** **VAX** and PDP-11 developed by Bill Joy and others at **Berzerkeley** starting around 1980, incorporating paged virtual memory, TCP/IP networking enhancements, and many other features. The BSD versions (4.1, 4.2, and 4.3) and the commercial versions derived from them (SunOS, ULTRIX, and Mt. Xinu) held the technical lead in the Unix world until AT&T's successful standardization efforts after about 1986; descendants are still widely popular. Note that BSD versions going back to 2.9 are often referred to by their version numbers, without the BSD prefix. See **4.2**, **Unix**, **USG Unix**.

Node:BSOD, Next:BUAF, Previous:BSD, Up:= B =

BSOD /B-S-O-D/

Very commmon abbreviation for **Blue Screen of Death**. Both spoken and written.

Node:BUAF, Next:BUAG, Previous:BSOD, Up:= B =

BUAF // n.

[abbreviation, from *alt.fan.warlord*] Big Ugly ASCII Font -- a special form of **ASCII art**. Various programs exist for rendering text strings into block, bloob, and pseudo-script fonts in cells between four and six character cells on a side; this is smaller than the letters generated by older **banner** (sense 2) programs. These are sometimes used to render one's name in a **sig block**, and are critically referred to as `BUAF's. See **warlording**.

Node:BUAG, Next:bubble sort, Previous:BUAF, Up:= B =

BUAG // n.

[abbreviation, from *alt.fan.warlord*] Big Ugly ASCII Graphic. Pejorative term for ugly **ASCII art**, especially as found in **sig block**s. For some reason, mutations of the head of Bart Simpson are particularly common in the least imaginative **sig block**s. See **warlording**.

Node:bubble sort, Next:bucky bits, Previous:BUAG, Up:= B =

bubble sort n.

Techspeak for a particular sorting technique in which pairs of adjacent values in the list to be sorted are compared and interchanged if they are out of order; thus, list entries `bubble upward' in the list until they bump into one with a lower sort value. Because it is not very good relative to other methods and is the one typically stumbled on by **naive** and untutored programmers, hackers consider it the **canonical** example of a naive algorithm. (However, it's been shown by repeated experiment that below about 5000 records bubble-sort is OK anyway.) The canonical example of a really *bad* algorithm is **bogo-sort**. A bubble sort might be used out of ignorance, but any use of bogo-sort could issue only from brain damage or willful perversity.

Node:bucky bits, Next:buffer chuck, Previous:bubble sort, Up:= B =

bucky bits /buh'kee bits/ n.

1. obs. The bits produced by the CONTROL and META shift keys on a SAIL keyboard (octal 200 and 400 respectively), resulting in a 9-bit keyboard character set. The MIT AI TV (Knight) keyboards extended this with TOP and separate left and right CONTROL and META keys, resulting in a 12-bit character set; later, LISP Machines added such keys as SUPER, HYPER, and GREEK (see **space-cadet keyboard**). 2. By extension, bits associated with `extra' shift keys on any keyboard, e.g., the ALT on an IBM PC or command and option keys on a Macintosh.

It has long been rumored that `bucky bits' were named for Buckminster Fuller during a period when he was consulting at Stanford. Actually, bucky bits were invented by Niklaus Wirth when *he* was at Stanford in 1964-65; he first suggested the idea of an EDIT key to set the 8th bit of an otherwise 7-bit ASCII character). It seems that, unknown to Wirth, certain Stanford hackers had privately nicknamed him `Bucky' after a prominent portion of his dental anatomy, and this nickname transferred to the bit. Bucky-bit commands were used in a number of editors written at Stanford, including most notably TV-EDIT and NLS.

The term spread to MIT and CMU early and is now in general use. Ironically, Wirth himself remained unaware of its derivation for nearly 30 years, until GLS dug up this history in early 1993! See **double bucky**, **quadruple bucky**.

Node:buffer chuck, Next:buffer overflow, Previous:bucky bits, Up:= B =

buffer chuck n.

Shorter and ruder syn. for **buffer overflow**.

Node:buffer overflow, Next:bug, Previous:buffer chuck, Up:= B =

buffer overflow n.

What happens when you try to stuff more data into a buffer (holding area) than it can handle. This problem is commonly exploited by **cracker**s to get arbitrary commands executed by a program running with root permissions. This may be due to a mismatch in the processing rates of the producing and consuming processes (see **overrun** and **firehose syndrome**), or because the buffer is simply too small to hold all the data that must accumulate before a piece of it can be processed. For example, in a text-processing tool that **crunch**es a line at a time, a short line buffer can result in **lossage** as input from a long line overflows the buffer and trashes data beyond it. Good defensive programming would check for overflow on each character and stop accepting data when the buffer is full up. The term is used of and by humans in a metaphorical sense. "What time did I agree to meet you? My buffer must have overflowed." Or "If I answer that phone my buffer is going to overflow." See also **spam**, **overrun screw**.

Node:bug, Next:bug-compatible, Previous:buffer overflow, Up:= B =

bug n.

An unwanted and unintended property of a program or piece of hardware, esp. one that causes it to malfunction. Antonym of **feature**. Examples: "There's a bug in the editor: it writes things out backwards." "The system crashed because of a hardware bug." "Fred is a winner, but he has a few bugs" (i.e., Fred is a good guy, but he has a few personality problems).

Historical note: Admiral Grace Hopper (an early computing pioneer better known for inventing **COBOL**) liked to tell a story in which a technician solved a **glitch** in the Harvard Mark II machine by pulling an actual insect out from between the contacts of one of its relays, and she subsequently promulgated **bug** in its hackish sense as a joke about the incident (though, as she was careful to admit, she was not there when it happened). For many years the logbook associated with the incident and the actual bug in question (a moth) sat in a display case at the Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC). The entire story, with a picture of the logbook and the moth taped into it, is recorded in the "Annals of the History of Computing", Vol. 3, No. 3 (July 1981), pp. 285-286.

The text of the log entry (from September 9, 1947), reads "1545 Relay #70 Panel F (moth) in relay. First actual case of bug being found". This wording establishes that the term was already in use at the time in its current specific sense -- and Hopper herself reports that the term `bug' was regularly applied to problems in radar electronics during WWII.

Indeed, the use of `bug' to mean an industrial defect was already established in Thomas Edison's time, and a more specific and rather modern use can be found in an electrical handbook from 1896 ("Hawkin's New Catechism of Electricity", Theo. Audel & Co.) which says: "The term `bug' is used to a limited extent to designate any fault or trouble in the connections or working of electric apparatus." It further notes that the term is "said to have originated in quadruplex telegraphy and have been transferred to all electric apparatus."

The latter observation may explain a common folk etymology of the term; that it came from telephone company usage, in which "bugs in a telephone cable" were blamed for noisy lines. Though this derivation seems to be mistaken, it may well be a distorted memory of a joke first current among *telegraph* operators more than a century ago!

Or perhaps not a joke. Historians of the field inform us that the term "bug" was regularly used in the early days of telegraphy to refer to a variety of semi-automatic telegraphy keyers that would send a string of dots if you held them down. In fact, the Vibroplex keyers (which were among the most common of this type) even had a graphic of a beetle on them (and still do)! While the ability to send repeated dots automatically was very useful for professional morse code operators, these were also significantly trickier to use than the older manual keyers, and it could take some practice to ensure one didn't introduce extraneous dots into the code by holding the key down a fraction too long. In the hands of an inexperienced operator, a Vibroplex "bug" on the line could mean that a lot of garbled Morse would soon be coming your way.

Further, the term "bug" has long been used among radio technicians to describe a device that converts electromagnetic field variations into acoustic signals. It is used to trace radio interference and look for dangerous radio emissions. Radio community usage derives from the roach-like shape of the first versions used by 19th century physicists. The first versions consisted of a coil of wire (roach body), with the two wire ends sticking out and bent back to nearly touch forming a spark gap (roach antennae). The bug is to the radio technician what the stethoscope is to the stereotype medical doctor. This sense is almost certainly ancestral to modern use of "bug" for a covert monitoring device, but may also have contributed to the use of "bug" for the effects of radio interference itself.

Actually, use of `bug' in the general sense of a disruptive event goes back to Shakespeare! (Henry VI, part III - Act V, Scene II: King Edward: "So, lie thou there. Die thou; and die our fear; For Warwick was a bug that fear'd us all.") In the first edition of Samuel Johnson's dictionary one meaning of `bug' is "A frightful object; a walking spectre"; this is traced to `bugbear', a Welsh term for a variety of mythological monster which (to complete the circle) has recently been reintroduced into the popular lexicon through fantasy role-playing games.

In any case, in jargon the word almost never refers to insects. Here is a plausible conversation that never actually happened:

"There is a bug in this ant farm!"

"What do you mean? I don't see any ants in it."

"That's the bug."

A careful discussion of the etymological issues can be found in a paper by Fred R. Shapiro, 1987, "Entomology of the Computer Bug: History and Folklore", American Speech 62(4):376-378.

[There has been a widespread myth that the original bug was moved to the Smithsonian, and an earlier

version of this entry so asserted. A correspondent who thought to check discovered that the bug was not there. While investigating this in late 1990, your editor discovered that the NSWC still had the bug, but had unsuccessfully tried to get the Smithsonian to accept it -- and that the present curator of their History of American Technology Museum didn't know this and agreed that it would make a worthwhile exhibit. It was moved to the Smithsonian in mid-1991, but due to space and money constraints was not actually exhibited years afterwards. Thus, the process of investigating the original-computer-bug bug fixed it in an entirely unexpected way, by making the myth true! --ESR]

Node:bug-compatible, Next:bug-for-bug compatible, Previous:bug, Up:= B =

bug-compatible adj.

[common] Said of a design or revision that has been badly compromised by a requirement to be compatible with **fossil**s or **misfeature**s in other programs or (esp.) previous releases of itself. "MS-DOS 2.0 used \ as a path separator to be bug-compatible with some cretin's choice of / as an option character in 1.0."

Node:bug-for-bug compatible, Next:bug-of-the-month club, Previous:bug-compatible, Up:= B =

bug-for-bug compatible n.

Same as **bug-compatible**, with the additional implication that much tedious effort went into ensuring that each (known) bug was replicated.

Node:bug-of-the-month club, Next:buglix, Previous:bug-for-bug compatible, Up:= B =

bug-of-the-month club n.

[from "book-of-the-month club", a time-honored mail-order-marketing technique in the U.S.] A mythical club which users of `sendmail(8)' (the UNIX mail daemon) belong to; this was coined on the Usenet newsgroup comp.security.unix at a time when sendmail security holes, which allowed outside **cracker**s access to the system, were being uncovered at an alarming rate, forcing sysadmins to update very often. Also, more completely, `fatal security bug-of-the-month club'.

Node:buglix, Next:bulletproof, Previous:bug-of-the-month club, Up:= B =

buglix /buhg'liks/ n.

[uncommon] Pejorative term referring to **DEC**'s ULTRIX operating system in its earlier *severely* buggy versions. Still used to describe ULTRIX, but without nearly so much venom. Compare **AIDX**, **HP-SUX**, **Nominal Semidestructor**, **Telerat**, **sun-stools**.

Node:bulletproof, Next:bum, Previous:buglix, Up:= B =

bulletproof adj.

Used of an algorithm or implementation considered extremely **robust**; lossage-resistant; capable of correctly recovering from any imaginable exception condition -- a rare and valued quality. Implies that

the programmer has thought of all possible errors, and added **code** to protect against each one. Thus, in some cases, this can imply code that is too heavyweight, due to excessive paranoia on the part of the programmer. Syn. **armor-plated**.

Node:bum, Next:bump, Previous:bulletproof, Up:= B =

bum

1. vt. To make highly efficient, either in time or space, often at the expense of clarity. "I managed to bum three more instructions out of that code." "I spent half the night bumming the interrupt code." In 1996, this term and the practice it describes are semi-obsolete. In **elder days**, John McCarthy (inventor of **LISP**) used to compare some efficiency-obsessed hackers among his students to "ski bums"; thus, optimization became "program bumming", and eventually just "bumming". 2. To squeeze out excess; to remove something in order to improve whatever it was removed from (without changing function; this distinguishes the process from a **featurectomy**). 3. n. A small change to an algorithm, program, or hardware device to make it more efficient. "This hardware bum makes the jump instruction faster." Usage: now uncommon, largely superseded by v. **tune** (and n. **tweak**, **hack**), though none of these exactly capture sense 2. All these uses are rare in Commonwealth hackish, because in the parent dialects of English the noun `bum' is a rude synonym for `buttocks' and the verb `bum' for buggery.

Node:bump, Next:burble, Previous:bum, Up:= B =

bump vt.

Synonym for increment. Has the same meaning as C's ++ operator. Used esp. of counter variables, pointers, and index dummies in `for`, `while`, and `do-while` loops.

Node:burble, Next:buried treasure, Previous:bump, Up:= B =

burble v.

[from Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky"] Like **flame**, but connotes that the source is truly clueless and ineffectual (mere flamers can be competent). A term of deep contempt. "There's some guy on the phone burbling about how he got a DISK FULL error and it's all our comm software's fault." This is mainstream slang in some parts of England.

Node:buried treasure, Next:burn-in period, Previous:burble, Up:= B =

buried treasure n.

A surprising piece of code found in some program. While usually not wrong, it tends to vary from **crufty** to **bletcherous**, and has lain undiscovered only because it was functionally correct, however horrible it is. Used sarcastically, because what is found is anything *but* treasure. Buried treasure almost always needs to be dug up and removed. "I just found that the scheduler sorts its queue using **bubble sort**! Buried treasure!"

Node:burn-in period, Next:burst page, Previous:buried treasure, Up:= B =

burn-in period n.

1. A factory test designed to catch systems with **marginal** components before they get out the door; the theory is that burn-in will protect customers by outwaiting the steepest part of the **bathtub curve** (see **infant mortality**). 2. A period of indeterminate length in which a person using a computer is so intensely involved in his project that he forgets basic needs such as food, drink, sleep, etc. Warning: Excessive burn-in can lead to burn-out. See **hack mode**, **larval stage**.

Historical note: the origin of "burn-in" (sense 1) is apparently the practice of setting a new-model airplane's brakes on fire, then extinguishing the fire, in order to make them hold better. This was done on the first version of the U.S. spy-plane, the U-2.

Node:burst page, Next:busy-wait, Previous:burn-in period, Up:= B =

burst page n.

Syn. **banner**, sense 1.

Node:busy-wait, Next:buzz, Previous:burst page, Up:= B =

busy-wait vi.

Used of human behavior, conveys that the subject is busy waiting for someone or something, intends to move instantly as soon as it shows up, and thus cannot do anything else at the moment. "Can't talk now, I'm busy-waiting till Bill gets off the phone."

Technically, `busy-wait' means to wait on an event by **spin**ning through a tight or timed-delay loop that polls for the event on each pass, as opposed to setting up an interrupt handler and continuing execution on another part of the task. This is a wasteful technique, best avoided on time-sharing systems where a busy-waiting program may **hog** the processor.

Node:buzz, Next:BWQ, Previous:busy-wait, Up:= B =

buzz vi.

1. Of a program, to run with no indication of progress and perhaps without guarantee of ever finishing; esp. said of programs thought to be executing tight loops of code. A program that is buzzing appears to be **catatonic**, but never gets out of catatonia, while a buzzing loop may eventually end of its own accord. "The program buzzes for about 10 seconds trying to sort all the names into order." See **spin**; see also **grovel**. 2. [ETA Systems] To test a wire or printed circuit trace for continuity, esp. by applying an AC rather than DC signal. Some wire faults will pass DC tests but fail an AC buzz test. 3. To process an array or list in sequence, doing the same thing to each element. "This loop buzzes through the tz array looking for a terminator type."

Node:BWQ, Next:by hand, Previous:buzz, Up:= B =

BWQ /B-W-Q/ n.

[IBM: abbreviation, `Buzz Word Quotient'] The percentage of buzzwords in a speech or documents. Usually roughly proportional to **bogosity**. See **TLA**.

Node:by hand, Next:byte, Previous:BWQ, Up:= B =

by hand adv.

[common] 1. Said of an operation (especially a repetitive, trivial, and/or tedious one) that ought to be performed automatically by the computer, but which a hacker instead has to step tediously through. "My mailer doesn't have a command to include the text of the message I'm replying to, so I have to do it by hand." This does not necessarily mean the speaker has to retype a copy of the message; it might refer to, say, dropping into a subshell from the mailer, making a copy of one's mailbox file, reading that into an editor, locating the top and bottom of the message in question, deleting the rest of the file, inserting `>' characters on each line, writing the file, leaving the editor, returning to the mailer, reading the file in, and later remembering to delete the file. Compare **eyeball search**. 2. By extension, writing code which does something in an explicit or low-level way for which a presupplied library routine ought to have been available. "This cretinous B-tree library doesn't supply a decent iterator, so I'm having to walk the trees by hand."

Node:byte, Next:byte sex, Previous:by hand, Up:= B =

byte /bi:t/ n.

[techspeak] A unit of memory or data equal to the amount used to represent one character; on modern architectures this is usually 8 bits, but may be 9 on 36-bit machines. Some older architectures used `byte' for quantities of 6 or 7 bits, and the PDP-10 supported `bytes' that were actually bitfields of 1 to 36 bits! These usages are now obsolete, and even 9-bit bytes have become rare in the general trend toward power-of-2 word sizes.

Historical note: The term was coined by Werner Buchholz in 1956 during the early design phase for the IBM Stretch computer; originally it was described as 1 to 6 bits (typical I/O equipment of the period used 6-bit chunks of information). The move to an 8-bit byte happened in late 1956, and this size was later adopted and promulgated as a standard by the System/360. The word was coined by mutating the word `bite' so it would not be accidentally misspelled as **bit**. See also **nybble**.

Node:byte sex, Next:bytesexual, Previous:byte, Up:= B =

byte sex n.

[common] The byte sex of hardware is **big-endian** or **little-endian**; see those entries.

Node:bytesexual, Next:Bzzzt! Wrong., Previous:byte sex, Up:= B =

bytesexual /bi:t`sek'shu-*l/ adj.

[rare] Said of hardware, denotes willingness to compute or pass data in either **big-endian** or **little-endian** format (depending, presumably, on a **mode bit** somewhere). See also **NUXI problem**.

Node:Bzzzt! Wrong., Next:C, Previous:bytesexual, Up:= B =

Bzzzt! Wrong. /bzt rong/ excl.

[common; Usenet/Internet; punctuation varies] From a Robin Williams routine in the movie "Dead Poets Society" spoofing radio or TV quiz programs, such as *Truth or Consequences*, where an incorrect answer earns one a blast from the buzzer and condolences from the interlocutor. A way of expressing mock-rude disagreement, usually immediately following an included quote from another poster. The less abbreviated "*Bzzzzt*, wrong, but thank you for playing" is also common; capitalization and emphasis of the buzzer sound varies.

Node:= C =, Next:= D =, Previous:= B =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= C =

- C:
- C Programmer's Disease:
- C++:
- calculator:
- Camel Book:
- can:
- can't happen:
- cancelbot:
- Cancelmoose[tm]:
- candygrammar:
- canonical:
- card walloper:
- careware:
- cargo cult programming:
- cascade:
- case and paste:
- casters-up mode:
- casting the runes:
- cat:
- catatonic:
- cathedral:
- cd tilde:
- CDA:
- cdr:
- chad:
- chad box:
- chain:
- channel:
- channel hopping:
- channel op:
- chanop:
- char:
- charityware:
- chase pointers:
- chawmp:
- check:
- cheerfully:
- chemist:
- Chernobyl chicken:

- Chernobyl packet:
- chicken head:
- chiclet keyboard:
- Chinese Army technique:
- choad:
- choke:
- chomp:
- chomper:
- CHOP:
- Christmas tree:
- Christmas tree packet:
- chrome:
- chug:
- Church of the SubGenius:
- Cinderella Book:
- CI$:
- Classic C:
- clean:
- CLM:
- clobber:
- clock:
- clocks:
- clone:
- clone-and-hack coding:
- clover key:
- clue-by-four:
- clustergeeking:
- code:
- coaster:
- COBOL:
- COBOL fingers:
- cobweb site:
- code grinder:
- code monkey:
- Code of the Geeks:
- code police:
- codes:
- codewalker:
- coefficient of X:
- cokebottle:
- cold boot:
- COME FROM:
- comm mode:
- command key:
- comment out:
- Commonwealth Hackish:
- compact:
- compiler jock:
- compo:
- compress:
- Compu$erve:
- computer confetti:

- computer geek:
- computron:
- con:
- condition out:
- condom:
- confuser:
- connector conspiracy:
- cons:
- considered harmful:
- console:
- console jockey:
- content-free:
- control-C:
- control-O:
- control-Q:
- control-S:
- Conway's Law:
- cookbook:
- cooked mode:
- cookie:
- cookie bear:
- cookie file:
- cookie jar:
- cookie monster:
- copious free time:
- copper:
- copy protection:
- copybroke:
- copycenter:
- copyleft:
- copyparty:
- copywronged:
- core:
- core cancer:
- core dump:
- core leak:
- Core Wars:
- corge:
- cosmic rays:
- cough and die:
- cow orker:
- cowboy:
- CP/M:
- CPU Wars:
- crack root:
- cracker:
- cracking:
- crank:
- crapplet:
- CrApTeX:
- crash:
- crash and burn:

- crawling horror:
- cray:
- cray instability:
- crayola:
- crayola books:
- crayon:
- creationism:
- creep:
- creeping elegance:
- creeping featurism:
- creeping featuritis:
- cretin:
- cretinous:
- crippleware:
- critical mass:
- crlf:
- crock:
- cross-post:
- crudware:
- cruft:
- cruft together:
- cruftsmanship:
- crufty:
- crumb:
- crunch:
- cryppie:
- CTSS:
- cube:
- cubing:
- cup holder:
- cursor dipped in X:
- cuspy:
- cut a tape:
- cybercrud:
- cyberpunk:
- cyberspace:
- cycle:
- cycle crunch:
- cycle drought:
- cycle of reincarnation:
- cycle server:
- cypherpunk:
- C|N>K:

Node:C, Next:C Programmer's Disease, Previous:Bzzzt! Wrong., Up:= C =

C n.

1. The third letter of the English alphabet. 2. ASCII 1000011. 3. The name of a programming language designed by Dennis Ritchie during the early 1970s and immediately used to reimplement **Unix**; so called because many features derived from an earlier compiler named `B' in commemoration of *its* parent,

BCPL. (BCPL was in turn descended from an earlier Algol-derived language, CPL.) Before Bjarne Stroustrup settled the question by designing **C++**, there was a humorous debate over whether C's successor should be named `D' or `P'. C became immensely popular outside Bell Labs after about 1980 and is now the dominant language in systems and microcomputer applications programming. See also **languages of choice**, **indent style**.

C is often described, with a mixture of fondness and disdain varying according to the speaker, as "a language that combines all the elegance and power of assembly language with all the readability and maintainability of assembly language".

Node:C Programmer's Disease, Next:C++, Previous:C, Up:= C =

C Programmer's Disease n.

The tendency of the undisciplined C programmer to set arbitrary but supposedly generous static limits on table sizes (defined, if you're lucky, by constants in header files) rather than taking the trouble to do proper dynamic storage allocation. If an application user later needs to put 68 elements into a table of size 50, the afflicted programmer reasons that he or she can easily reset the table size to 68 (or even as much as 70, to allow for future expansion) and recompile. This gives the programmer the comfortable feeling of having made the effort to satisfy the user's (unreasonable) demands, and often affords the user multiple opportunities to explore the marvelous consequences of **fandango on core**. In severe cases of the disease, the programmer cannot comprehend why each fix of this kind seems only to further disgruntle the user.

Node:C++, Next:calculator, Previous:C Programmer's Disease, Up:= C =

C++ /C'-pluhs-pluhs/ n.

Designed by Bjarne Stroustrup of AT&T Bell Labs as a successor to **C**. Now one of the **languages of choice**, although many hackers still grumble that it is the successor to either Algol 68 or **Ada** (depending on generation), and a prime example of **second-system effect**. Almost anything that can be done in any language can be done in C++, but it requires a **language lawyer** to know what is and what is not legal--the design is *almost* too large to hold in even hackers' heads. Much of the **cruft** results from C++'s attempt to be backward compatible with C. Stroustrup himself has said in his retrospective book "The Design and Evolution of C++" (p. 207), "Within C++, there is a much smaller and cleaner language struggling to get out." [Many hackers would now add "Yes, and it's called **Java**" --ESR]

Node:calculator, Next:Camel Book, Previous:C++, Up:= C =

calculator [Cambridge] n.

Syn. for **bitty box**.

Node:Camel Book, Next:can, Previous:calculator, Up:= C =

Camel Book n.

Universally recognized nickname for the book "Programming Perl", by Larry Wall and Randal L. Schwartz, O'Reilly and Associates 1991, ISBN 0-937175-64-1 (second edition 1996, ISBN 1-56592-149-6). The definitive reference on **Perl**.

Node:can, Next:can't happen, Previous:Camel Book, Up:= C =

can vt.

To abort a job on a time-sharing system. Used esp. when the person doing the deed is an operator, as in "canned from the **console**". Frequently used in an imperative sense, as in "Can that print job, the LPT just popped a sprocket!" Synonymous with **gun**. It is said that the ASCII character with mnemonic CAN (0011000) was used as a kill-job character on some early OSes. Alternatively, this term may derive from mainstream slang `canned' for being laid off or fired.

Node:can't happen, Next:cancelbot, Previous:can, Up:= C =

can't happen

The traditional program comment for code executed under a condition that should never be true, for example a file size computed as negative. Often, such a condition being true indicates data corruption or a faulty algorithm; it is almost always handled by emitting a fatal error message and terminating or crashing, since there is little else that can be done. Some case variant of "can't happen" is also often the text emitted if the `impossible' error actually happens! Although "can't happen" events are genuinely infrequent in production code, programmers wise enough to check for them habitually are often surprised at how frequently they are triggered during development and how many headaches checking for them turns out to head off. See also **firewall code** (sense 2).

Node:cancelbot, Next:Cancelmoose[tm], Previous:can't happen, Up:= C =

cancelbot /kan'sel-bot/

[Usenet: compound, cancel + robot] 1. Mythically, a **robocanceller** 2. In reality, most cancelbots are manually operated by being fed lists of spam message IDs.

Node:Cancelmoose[tm], Next:candygrammar, Previous:cancelbot, Up:= C =

Cancelmoose[tm] /kan'sel-moos/

[Usenet] The archetype and model of all good **spam**-fighters. Once upon a time, the 'Moose would send out spam-cancels and then post notice anonymously to *news.admin.policy*, *news.admin.misc*, and *alt.current-events.net-abuse*. The 'Moose stepped to the fore on its own initiative, at a time (mid-1994) when spam-cancels were irregular and disorganized, and behaved altogether admirably - fair, even-handed, and quick to respond to comments and criticism, all without self-aggrandizement or martyrdom. Cancelmoose[tm] quickly gained near-unanimous support from the readership of all three above-mentioned groups.

Nobody knows who Cancelmoose[tm] really is, and there aren't even any good rumors. However, the 'Moose now has an e-mail address (moose@cm.org) and a web site (http://www.cm.org.)

By early 1995, others had stepped into the spam-cancel business, and appeared to be comporting themselves well, after the 'Moose's manner. The 'Moose has now gotten out of the business, and is more interested in ending spam (and cancels) entirely.

Node:candygrammar, Next:canonical, Previous:Cancelmoose[tm], Up:= C =

candygrammar n.

A programming-language grammar that is mostly **syntactic sugar**; the term is also a play on `candygram'. **COBOL**, Apple's Hypertalk language, and a lot of the so-called `4GL' database languages share this property. The usual intent of such designs is that they be as English-like as possible, on the theory that they will then be easier for unskilled people to program. This intention comes to grief on the reality that syntax isn't what makes programming hard; it's the mental effort and organization required to specify an algorithm precisely that costs. Thus the invariable result is that `candygrammar' languages are just as difficult to program in as terser ones, and far more painful for the experienced hacker.

[The overtones from the old Chevy Chase skit on Saturday Night Live should not be overlooked. This was a "Jaws" parody. Someone lurking outside an apartment door tries all kinds of bogus ways to get the occupant to open up, while ominous music plays in the background. The last attempt is a half-hearted "Candygram!" When the door is opened, a shark bursts in and chomps the poor occupant. [There is a similar gag in "Blazing Saddles" --ESR] There is a moral here for those attracted to candygrammars. Note that, in many circles, pretty much the same ones who remember Monty Python sketches, all it takes is the word "Candygram!", suitably timed, to get people rolling on the floor. -- GLS]

Node:canonical, Next:card walloper, Previous:candygrammar, Up:= C =

canonical adj.

[very common; historically, `according to religious law'] The usual or standard state or manner of something. This word has a somewhat more technical meaning in mathematics. Two formulas such as 9 + x and x + 9 are said to be equivalent because they mean the same thing, but the second one is in `canonical form' because it is written in the usual way, with the highest power of x first. Usually there are fixed rules you can use to decide whether something is in canonical form. The jargon meaning, a relaxation of the technical meaning, acquired its present loading in computer-science culture largely through its prominence in Alonzo Church's work in computation theory and mathematical logic (see **Knights of the Lambda Calculus**). Compare **vanilla**.

Non-technical academics do not use the adjective `canonical' in any of the senses defined above with any regularity; they do however use the nouns `canon' and `canonicity' (not **canonicalness or **canonicality). The `canon' of a given author is the complete body of authentic works by that author (this usage is familiar to Sherlock Holmes fans as well as to literary scholars). `*The* canon' is the body of works in a given field (e.g., works of literature, or of art, or of music) deemed worthwhile for students to study and for scholars to investigate.

The word `canon' has an interesting history. It derives ultimately from the Greek `kanon' (akin to the English `cane') referring to a reed. Reeds were used for measurement, and in Latin and later Greek the word `canon' meant a rule or a standard. The establishment of a canon of scriptures within Christianity was meant to define a standard or a rule for the religion. The above non-techspeak academic usages stem from this instance of a defined and accepted body of work. Alongside this usage was the promulgation of `canons' (`rules') for the government of the Catholic Church. The techspeak usages ("according to religious law") derive from this use of the Latin `canon'.

Hackers invest this term with a playfulness that makes an ironic contrast with its historical meaning. A true story: One Bob Sjoberg, new at the MIT AI Lab, expressed some annoyance at the incessant use of jargon. Over his loud objections, GLS and RMS made a point of using as much of it as possible in his presence, and eventually it began to sink in. Finally, in one conversation, he used the word `canonical' in jargon-like fashion without thinking. Steele: "Aha! We've finally got you talking jargon too!" Stallman: "What did he say?" Steele: "Bob just used `canonical' in the canonical way."

Of course, canonicality depends on context, but it is implicitly defined as the way *hackers* normally expect things to be. Thus, a hacker may claim with a straight face that `according to religious law' is *not* the canonical meaning of `canonical'.

Node:card walloper, Next:careware, Previous:canonical, Up:= C =

card walloper n.

An EDP programmer who grinds out batch programs that do stupid things like print people's paychecks. Compare **code grinder**. See also **punched card**, **eighty-column mind**.

Node:careware, Next:cargo cult programming, Previous:card walloper, Up:= C =

careware /keir'weir/ n.

A variety of **shareware** for which either the author suggests that some payment be made to a nominated charity or a levy directed to charity is included on top of the distribution charge. Syn. **charityware**; compare **crippleware**, sense 2.

Node:cargo cult programming, Next:cascade, Previous:careware, Up:= C =

cargo cult programming n.

A style of (incompetent) programming dominated by ritual inclusion of code or program structures that serve no real purpose. A cargo cult programmer will usually explain the extra code as a way of working around some bug encountered in the past, but usually neither the bug nor the reason the code apparently avoided the bug was ever fully understood (compare **shotgun debugging**, **voodoo programming**).

The term `cargo cult' is a reference to aboriginal religions that grew up in the South Pacific after World War II. The practices of these cults center on building elaborate mockups of airplanes and military style landing strips in the hope of bringing the return of the god-like airplanes that brought such marvelous cargo during the war. Hackish usage probably derives from Richard Feynman's characterization of certain practices as "cargo cult science" in his book "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!" (W. W. Norton & Co, New York 1985, ISBN 0-393-01921-7).

Node:cascade, Next:case and paste, Previous:cargo cult programming, Up:= C =

cascade n.

1. A huge volume of spurious error-message output produced by a compiler with poor error recovery. Too frequently, one trivial syntax error (such as a missing `)' or `}') throws the parser out of synch so that much of the remaining program text is interpreted as garbaged or ill-formed. 2. A chain of Usenet followups, each adding some trivial variation or riposte to the text of the previous one, all of which is reproduced in the new message; an **include war** in which the object is to create a sort of communal graffito.

Node:case and paste, Next:casters-up mode, Previous:cascade, Up:= C =

case and paste n.

[from `cut and paste'] 1. The addition of a new **feature** to an existing system by selecting the code from an existing feature and pasting it in with minor changes. Common in telephony circles because most operations in a telephone switch are selected using `case` statements. Leads to **software bloat**.

In some circles of EMACS users this is called `programming by Meta-W', because Meta-W is the EMACS command for copying a block of text to a kill buffer in preparation to pasting it in elsewhere. The term is condescending, implying that the programmer is acting mindlessly rather than thinking carefully about what is required to integrate the code for two similar cases.

At **DEC** (now Compaq), this is sometimes called `clone-and-hack' coding.

Node:casters-up mode, Next:casting the runes, Previous:case and paste, Up:= C =

casters-up mode n.

[IBM, prob. fr. slang *belly up*] Yet another synonym for `broken' or `down'. Usually connotes a major failure. A system (hardware or software) which is `down' may be already being restarted before the failure is noticed, whereas one which is `casters up' is usually a good excuse to take the rest of the day off (as long as you're not responsible for fixing it).

Node:casting the runes, Next:cat, Previous:casters-up mode, Up:= C =

casting the runes n.

What a **guru** does when you ask him or her to run a particular program and type at it because it never works for anyone else; esp. used when nobody can ever see what the guru is doing different from what J. Random Luser does. Compare **incantation**, **runes**, **examining the entrails**; also see the AI koan about Tom Knight in "**Some AI Koans**" (Appendix A).

A correspondent from England tells us that one of ICL's most talented systems designers used to be called out occasionally to service machines which the **field circus** had given up on. Since he knew the design inside out, he could often find faults simply by listening to a quick outline of the symptoms. He used to play on this by going to some site where the field circus had just spent the last two weeks solid trying to find a fault, and spreading a diagram of the system out on a table top. He'd then shake some chicken bones and cast them over the diagram, peer at the bones intently for a minute, and then tell them that a certain module needed replacing. The system would start working again immediately upon the replacement.

Node:cat, Next:catatonic, Previous:casting the runes, Up:= C =

cat [from `catenate' via **Unix** `cat(1)`] vt.

1. [techspeak] To spew an entire file to the screen or some other output sink without pause. 2. By extension, to dump large amounts of data at an unprepared target or with no intention of browsing it carefully. Usage: considered silly. Rare outside Unix sites. See also **dd**, **BLT**.

Among Unix fans, `cat(1)` is considered an excellent example of user-interface design, because it delivers the file contents without such verbosity as spacing or headers between the files, and because it does not require the files to consist of lines of text, but works with any sort of data.

Among Unix haters, `cat(1)` is considered the **canonical** example of *bad* user-interface design, because of its woefully unobvious name. It is far more often used to **blast** a file to standard output than to concatenate two files. The name `cat` for the former operation is just as unintuitive as, say, LISP's **cdr**.

Of such oppositions are **holy wars** made....

Node:catatonic, Next:cathedral, Previous:cat, Up:= C =

catatonic adj.

Describes a condition of suspended animation in which something is so **wedged** or **hung** that it makes no response. If you are typing on a terminal and suddenly the computer doesn't even echo the letters back to the screen as you type, let alone do what you're asking it to do, then the computer is suffering from catatonia (possibly because it has crashed). "There I was in the middle of a winning game of **nethack** and it went catatonic on me! Aaargh!" Compare **buzz**.

Node:cathedral, Next:cd tilde, Previous:catatonic, Up:= C =

cathedral n.,adj.

[see **bazaar** for derivation] The `classical' mode of software engineering long thought to be necessarily implied by **Brooks's Law**. Features small teams, tight project control, and long release intervals. This term came into use after analysis of the Linux experience suggested there might be something wrong (or at least incomplete) in the classical assumptions.

Node:cd tilde, Next:CDA, Previous:cathedral, Up:= C =

cd tilde /C-D til-d*/ vi.

To go home. From the Unix C-shell and Korn-shell command `cd ~`, which takes one to one's `$HOME` (`cd` with no arguments happens to do the same thing). By extension, may be used with other arguments; thus, over an electronic chat link, `cd ~coffee` would mean "I'm going to the coffee machine."

Node:CDA, Next:cdr, Previous:cd tilde, Up:= C =

CDA /C-D-A/

The "Communications Decency Act" of 1996, passed on **Black Thursday** as section 502 of a major telecommunications reform bill. The CDA made it a federal crime in the USA to send a communication which is "obscene, lewd, lascivious, filthy, or indecent, with intent to annoy, abuse, threaten, or harass another person." It also threatened with imprisonment anyone who "knowingly" makes accessible to minors any message that "describes, in terms patently offensive as measured by contemporary community standards, sexual or excretory activities or organs".

While the CDA was sold as a measure to protect minors from the putative evils of pornography, the repressive political aims of the bill were laid bare by the Hyde amendment, which intended to outlaw discussion of abortion on the Internet.

To say that this direct attack on First Amendment free-speech rights was not well received on the Internet

would be putting it mildly. A firestorm of protest followed, including a February 29th mass demonstration by thousands of netters who turned their **home page**s black for 48 hours. Several civil-rights groups and computing/telecommunications companies mounted a constitutional challenge. The CDA was demolished by a strongly-worded decision handed down on in 8th-circuit Federal court and subsequently affirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court on 26 June 1997 (`White Thursday'). See also **Exon**.

Node:cdr, Next:chad, Previous:CDA, Up:= C =

cdr /ku'dr/ or /kuh'dr/ vt.

[from LISP] To skip past the first item from a list of things (generalized from the LISP operation on binary tree structures, which returns a list consisting of all but the first element of its argument). In the form `cdr down', to trace down a list of elements: "Shall we cdr down the agenda?" Usage: silly. See also **loop through**.

Historical note: The instruction format of the IBM 704 that hosted the original LISP implementation featured two 15-bit fields called the `address' and `decrement' parts. The term `cdr' was originally `Contents of Decrement part of Register'. Similarly, `car' stood for `Contents of Address part of Register'.

The cdr and car operations have since become bases for formation of compound metaphors in non-LISP contexts. GLS recalls, for example, a programming project in which strings were represented as linked lists; the get-character and skip-character operations were of course called CHAR and CHDR.

Node:chad, Next:chad box, Previous:cdr, Up:= C =

chad /chad/ n.

1. [common] The perforated edge strips on printer paper, after they have been separated from the printed portion. Also called **selvage**, **perf**, and **ripoff**. 2. obs. The confetti-like paper bits punched out of cards or paper tape; this has also been called `chaff', `computer confetti', and `keypunch droppings'. It's reported that this was very old Army slang, and it may now be mainstream; it has been reported seen (1993) in directions for a card-based voting machine in California.

Historical note: One correspondent believes `chad' (sense 2) derives from the Chadless keypunch (named for its inventor), which cut little u-shaped tabs in the card to make a hole when the tab folded back, rather than punching out a circle/rectangle; it was clear that if the Chadless keypunch didn't make them, then the stuff that other keypunches made had to be `chad'. There is a legend that the word was originally acronymic, standing for "Card Hole Aggregate Debris", but this has all the earmarks of a **backronym**.

Node:chad box, Next:chain, Previous:chad, Up:= C =

chad box n.

A metal box about the size of a lunchbox (or in some models a large wastebasket), for collecting the **chad** (sense 2) that accumulated in **Iron Age** card punches. You had to open the covers of the card punch periodically and empty the chad box. The **bit bucket** was notionally the equivalent device in the CPU enclosure, which was typically across the room in another great gray-and-blue box.

Node:chain, Next:channel, Previous:chad box, Up:= C =

chain

1. vi. [orig. from BASIC's `CHAIN` statement] To hand off execution to a child or successor without going through the **OS** command interpreter that invoked it. The state of the parent program is lost and there is no returning to it. Though this facility used to be common on memory-limited micros and is still widely supported for backward compatibility, the jargon usage is semi-obsolescent; in particular, most Unix programmers will think of this as an **exec**. Oppose the more modern `subshell'. 2. n. A series of linked data areas within an operating system or application. `Chain rattling' is the process of repeatedly running through the linked data areas searching for one which is of interest to the executing program. The implication is that there is a very large number of links on the chain.

Node:channel, Next:channel hopping, Previous:chain, Up:= C =

channel n.

[IRC] The basic unit of discussion on **IRC**. Once one joins a channel, everything one types is read by others on that channel. Channels are named with strings that begin with a `#' sign and can have topic descriptions (which are generally irrelevant to the actual subject of discussion). Some notable channels are `#initgame`, `#hottub`, `callahans`, and `#report`. At times of international crisis, `#report` has hundreds of members, some of whom take turns listening to various news services and typing in summaries of the news, or in some cases, giving first-hand accounts of the action (e.g., Scud missile attacks in Tel Aviv during the Gulf War in 1991).

Node:channel hopping, Next:channel op, Previous:channel, Up:= C =

channel hopping n.

[common; IRC, GEnie] To rapidly switch channels on **IRC**, or a GEnie chat board, just as a social butterfly might hop from one group to another at a party. This term may derive from the TV watcher's idiom, `channel surfing'.

Node:channel op, Next:chanop, Previous:channel hopping, Up:= C =

channel op /chan'l op/ n.

[IRC] Someone who is endowed with privileges on a particular **IRC** channel; commonly abbreviated `chanop' or `CHOP'. These privileges include the right to **kick** users, to change various status bits, and to make others into CHOPs.

Node:chanop, Next:char, Previous:channel op, Up:= C =

chanop /chan'-op/ n.

[IRC] See **channel op**.

Node:char, Next:charityware, Previous:chanop, Up:= C =

char /keir/ or /char/; rarely, /kar/ n.

Shorthand for `character'. Esp. used by C programmers, as `char' is C's typename for character data.

Node:charityware, Next:chase pointers, Previous:char, Up:= C =

charityware /cha'rit-ee-weir`/ n.

Syn. **careware**.

Node:chase pointers, Next:chawmp, Previous:charityware, Up:= C =

chase pointers

1. vi. To go through multiple levels of indirection, as in traversing a linked list or graph structure. Used esp. by programmers in C, where explicit pointers are a very common data type. This is techspeak, but it remains jargon when used of human networks. "I'm chasing pointers. Bob said you could tell me who to talk to about...." See **dangling pointer** and **snap**. 2. [Cambridge] `pointer chase' or `pointer hunt': The process of going through a **core dump** (sense 1), interactively or on a large piece of paper printed with hex **runes**, following dynamic data-structures. Used only in a debugging context.

Node:chawmp, Next:check, Previous:chase pointers, Up:= C =

chawmp n.

[University of Florida] 16 or 18 bits (half of a machine word). This term was used by FORTH hackers during the late 1970s/early 1980s; it is said to have been archaic then, and may now be obsolete. It was coined in revolt against the promiscuous use of `word' for anything between 16 and 32 bits; `word' has an additional special meaning for FORTH hacks that made the overloading intolerable. For similar reasons, /gaw'bl/ (spelled `gawble' or possibly `gawbul') was in use as a term for 32 or 48 bits (presumably a full machine word, but our sources are unclear on this). These terms are more easily understood if one thinks of them as faithful phonetic spellings of `chomp' and `gobble' pronounced in a Florida or other Southern U.S. dialect. For general discussion of similar terms, see **nybble**.

Node:check, Next:cheerfully, Previous:chawmp, Up:= C =

check n.

A hardware-detected error condition, most commonly used to refer to actual hardware failures rather than software-induced traps. E.g., a `parity check' is the result of a hardware-detected parity error. Recorded here because the word often humorously extended to non-technical problems. For example, the term `child check' has been used to refer to the problems caused by a small child who is curious to know what happens when s/he presses all the cute buttons on a computer's console (of course, this particular problem could have been prevented with **molly-guard**s).

Node:cheerfully, Next:chemist, Previous:check, Up:= C =

cheerfully adv.

See **happily**.

Node:chemist, Next:Chernobyl chicken, Previous:cheerfully, Up:= C =

chemist n.

[Cambridge] Someone who wastes computer time on **number-crunching** when you'd far rather the machine were doing something more productive, such as working out anagrams of your name or printing Snoopy calendars or running **life** patterns. May or may not refer to someone who actually studies chemistry.

Node:Chernobyl chicken, Next:Chernobyl packet, Previous:chemist, Up:= C =

Chernobyl chicken n.

See **laser chicken**.

Node:Chernobyl packet, Next:chicken head, Previous:Chernobyl chicken, Up:= C =

Chernobyl packet /cher-noh'b*l pak'*t/ n.

A network packet that induces a **broadcast storm** and/or **network meltdown**, in memory of the April 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl in Ukraine. The typical scenario involves an IP Ethernet datagram that passes through a gateway with both source and destination Ether and IP address set as the respective broadcast addresses for the subnetworks being gated between. Compare **Christmas tree packet**.

Node:chicken head, Next:chiclet keyboard, Previous:Chernobyl packet, Up:= C =

chicken head n.

[Commodore] The Commodore Business Machines logo, which strongly resembles a poultry part (within Commodore itself the logo was always called `chicken lips'). Rendered in ASCII as `C='. With the arguable exception of the Amiga (see **amoeba**), Commodore's machines are notoriously crocky little **bitty box**es (see also **PETSCII**). Thus, this usage may owe something to Philip K. Dick's novel "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" (the basis for the movie "Blade Runner"; the novel is now sold under that title), in which a `chickenhead' is a mutant with below-average intelligence.

Node:chiclet keyboard, Next:Chinese Army technique, Previous:chicken head, Up:= C =

chiclet keyboard n.

A keyboard with a small, flat rectangular or lozenge-shaped rubber or plastic keys that look like pieces of chewing gum. (Chiclets is the brand name of a variety of chewing gum that does in fact resemble the keys of chiclet keyboards.) Used esp. to describe the original IBM PCjr keyboard. Vendors unanimously liked these because they were cheap, and a lot of early portable and laptop products got launched using them. Customers rejected the idea with almost equal unanimity, and chiclets are not often seen on anything larger than a digital watch any more.

Node:Chinese Army technique, Next:choad, Previous:chiclet keyboard, Up:= C =

Chinese Army technique n.

Syn. **Mongolian Hordes technique**.

Node:choad, Next:choke, Previous:Chinese Army technique, Up:= C =

choad /chohd/ n.

Synonym for `penis' used in *alt.tasteless* and popularized by the denizens thereof. They say: "We think maybe it's from Middle English but we're all too damned lazy to check the OED." [I'm not. It isn't. --ESR] This term is alleged to have been inherited through 1960s underground comics, and to have been recently sighted in the Beavis and Butthead cartoons. Speakers of the Hindi, Bengali and Gujarati languages have confirmed that `choad' is in fact an Indian vernacular word equivalent to `fuck'; it is therefore likely to have entered English slang via the British Raj.

Node:choke, Next:chomp, Previous:choad, Up:= C =

choke v.

1. [common] To reject input, often ungracefully. "NULs make System V's `lpr(1)` choke." "I tried building an **EMACS** binary to use **X**, but `cpp(1)` choked on all those `#defines`." See **barf**, **gag**, **vi**. 2. [MIT] More generally, to fail at any endeavor, but with some flair or bravado; the popular definition is "to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory."

Node:chomp, Next:chomper, Previous:choke, Up:= C =

chomp vi.

1. To **lose**; specifically, to chew on something of which more was bitten off than one can. Probably related to gnashing of teeth. 2. To bite the bag; See **bagbiter**.

A hand gesture commonly accompanies this. To perform it, hold the four fingers together and place the thumb against their tips. Now open and close your hand rapidly to suggest a biting action (much like what Pac-Man does in the classic video game, though this pantomime seems to predate that). The gesture alone means `chomp chomp' (see "**Verb Doubling**" in the "**Jargon Construction**" section of the Prependices). The hand may be pointed at the object of complaint, and for real emphasis you can use both hands at once. Doing this to a person is equivalent to saying "You chomper!" If you point the gesture at yourself, it is a humble but humorous admission of some failure. You might do this if someone told you that a program you had written had failed in some surprising way and you felt dumb for not having anticipated it.

Node:chomper, Next:CHOP, Previous:chomp, Up:= C =

chomper n.

Someone or something that is chomping; a loser. See **loser**, **bagbiter**, **chomp**.

Node:CHOP, Next:Christmas tree, Previous:chomper, Up:= C =

CHOP /chop/ n.

[IRC] See **channel op**.

Node:Christmas tree, Next:Christmas tree packet, Previous:CHOP, Up:= C =

Christmas tree n.

A kind of RS-232 line tester or breakout box featuring rows of blinking red and green LEDs suggestive of Christmas lights.

Node:Christmas tree packet, Next:chrome, Previous:Christmas tree, Up:= C =

Christmas tree packet n.

A packet with every single option set for whatever protocol is in use. See **kamikaze packet**, **Chernobyl packet**. (The term doubtless derives from a fanciful image of each little option bit being represented by a different-colored light bulb, all turned on.) Compare **Godzillagram**.

Node:chrome, Next:chug, Previous:Christmas tree packet, Up:= C =

chrome n.

[from automotive slang via wargaming] Showy features added to attract users but contributing little or nothing to the power of a system. "The 3D icons in Motif are just chrome, but they certainly are *pretty* chrome!" Distinguished from **bells and whistles** by the fact that the latter are usually added to gratify developers' own desires for featurefulness. Often used as a term of contempt.

Node:chug, Next:Church of the SubGenius, Previous:chrome, Up:= C =

chug vi.

To run slowly; to **grind** or **grovel**. "The disk is chugging like crazy."

Node:Church of the SubGenius, Next:Cinderella Book, Previous:chug, Up:= C =

Church of the SubGenius n.

A mutant offshoot of **Discordianism** launched in 1981 as a spoof of fundamentalist Christianity by the `Reverend' Ivan Stang, a brilliant satirist with a gift for promotion. Popular among hackers as a rich source of bizarre imagery and references such as "Bob" the divine drilling-equipment salesman, the Benevolent Space Xists, and the Stark Fist of Removal. Much SubGenius theory is concerned with the acquisition of the mystical substance or quality of **slack**. There is a home page at http://www.subgenius.com/.

Node:Cinderella Book, Next:CI$, Previous:Church of the SubGenius, Up:= C =

Cinderella Book [CMU] n.

"Introduction to Automata Theory, Languages, and Computation", by John Hopcroft and Jeffrey Ullman, (Addison-Wesley, 1979). So called because the cover depicts a girl (putatively Cinderella) sitting in front of a Rube Goldberg device and holding a rope coming out of it. On the back cover, the device is in shambles after she has (inevitably) pulled on the rope. See also **book titles**.

Node:CI$, Next:Classic C, Previous:Cinderella Book, Up:= C =

CI$ // n.

Hackerism for `CIS', CompuServe Information Service. The dollar sign refers to CompuServe's rather steep line charges. Often used in **sig block**s just before a CompuServe address. Syn. **Compu$erve**.

Node:Classic C, Next:clean, Previous:CI$, Up:= C =

Classic C /klas'ik C/ n.

[a play on `Coke Classic'] The C programming language as defined in the first edition of **K&R**, with some small additions. It is also known as `K&R C'. The name came into use while C was being standardized by the ANSI X3J11 committee. Also `C Classic'.

An analogous construction is sometimes applied elsewhere: thus, `X Classic', where X = Star Trek (referring to the original TV series) or X = PC (referring to IBM's ISA-bus machines as opposed to the PS/2 series). This construction is especially used of product series in which the newer versions are considered serious losers relative to the older ones.

Node:clean, Next:CLM, Previous:Classic C, Up:= C =

clean 1. adj.

Used of hardware or software designs, implies `elegance in the small', that is, a design or implementation that may not hold any surprises but does things in a way that is reasonably intuitive and relatively easy to comprehend from the outside. The antonym is `grungy' or **crufty**. 2. v. To remove unneeded or undesired files in a effort to reduce clutter: "I'm cleaning up my account." "I cleaned up the garbage and now have 100 Meg free on that partition."

Node:CLM, Next:clobber, Previous:clean, Up:= C =

CLM /C-L-M/

[Sun: `Career Limiting Move'] 1. n. An action endangering one's future prospects of getting plum projects and raises, and possibly one's job: "His Halloween costume was a parody of his manager. He won the prize for `best CLM'." 2. adj. Denotes extreme severity of a bug, discovered by a customer and obviously missed earlier because of poor testing: "That's a CLM bug!"

Node:clobber, Next:clock, Previous:CLM, Up:= C =

clobber vt.

To overwrite, usually unintentionally: "I walked off the end of the array and clobbered the stack." Compare **mung**, **scribble**, **trash**, and **smash the stack**.

Node:clock, Next:clocks, Previous:clobber, Up:= C =

clock

1. n 1. [techspeak] The master oscillator that steps a CPU or other digital circuit through its paces. This has nothing to do with the time of day, although the software counter that keeps track of the latter may be derived from the former. 2. vt. To run a CPU or other digital circuit at a particular rate. "If you clock it at 100MHz, it gets warm.". See **overclock**. 3. vt. To force a digital circuit from one state to the next by applying a single clock pulse. "The data must be stable 10ns before you clock the latch."

Node:clocks, Next:clone, Previous:clock, Up:= C =

clocks n.

Processor logic cycles, so called because each generally corresponds to one clock pulse in the processor's timing. The relative execution times of instructions on a machine are usually discussed in clocks rather than absolute fractions of a second; one good reason for this is that clock speeds for various models of the machine may increase as technology improves, and it is usually the relative times one is interested in when discussing the instruction set. Compare **cycle**, **jiffy**.

Node:clone, Next:clone-and-hack coding, Previous:clocks, Up:= C =

clone n.

1. An exact duplicate: "Our product is a clone of their product." Implies a legal reimplementation from documentation or by reverse-engineering. Also connotes lower price. 2. A shoddy, spurious copy: "Their product is a clone of our product." 3. A blatant ripoff, most likely violating copyright, patent, or trade secret protections: "Your product is a clone of my product." This use implies legal action is pending. 4. `PC clone:' a PC-BUS/ISA or EISA-compatible 80x86-based microcomputer (this use is sometimes spelled `klone' or `PClone'). These invariably have much more bang for the buck than the IBM archetypes they resemble. 5. In the construction `Unix clone': An OS designed to deliver a Unix-lookalike environment without Unix license fees, or with additional `mission-critical' features such as support for real-time programming. 6. v. To make an exact copy of something. "Let me clone that" might mean "I want to borrow that paper so I can make a photocopy" or "Let me get a copy of that file before you **mung** it".

Node:clone-and-hack coding, Next:clover key, Previous:clone, Up:= C =

clone-and-hack coding n.

[DEC] Syn. **case and paste**.

Node:clover key, Next:clue-by-four, Previous:clone-and-hack coding, Up:= C =

clover key n.

[Mac users] See **feature key**.

Node:clue-by-four, Next:clustergeeking, Previous:clover key, Up:= C =

clue-by-four

[Usenet: portmanteau, clue + two-by-four] The notional stick with which one whacks an aggressively clueless person. This term derives from a western American folk saying about training a mule "First, you got to hit him with a two-by-four. That's to get his attention." The clue-by-four is a close relative of the **LART**.

Node:clustergeeking, Next:coaster, Previous:clue-by-four, Up:= C =

clustergeeking /kluh'st*r-gee`king/ n.

[CMU] Spending more time at a computer cluster doing CS homework than most people spend breathing.

Node:coaster, Next:COBOL, Previous:clustergeeking, Up:= C =

coaster n.

1. Unuseable CD produced during failed attempt at writing to writeable or re-writeable CD media. Certainly related to the coaster-like shape of a CD, and the relative value of these failures. "I made a lot of coasters before I got a good CD." 2. Useless CDs received in the mail from the likes of AOL, MSN, CI$, Prodigy, ad nauseam.

Node:COBOL, Next:COBOL fingers, Previous:coaster, Up:= C =

COBOL /koh'bol/ n.

[COmmon Business-Oriented Language] (Synonymous with **evil**.) A weak, verbose, and flabby language used by **card wallopers** to do boring mindless things on **dinosaur** mainframes. Hackers believe that all COBOL programmers are **suits** or **code grinders**, and no self-respecting hacker will ever admit to having learned the language. Its very name is seldom uttered without ritual expressions of disgust or horror. One popular one is Edsger W. Dijkstra's famous observation that "The use of COBOL cripples the mind; its teaching should, therefore, be regarded as a criminal offense." (from "Selected Writings on Computing: A Personal Perspective") See also **fear and loathing**, **software rot**.

Node:COBOL fingers, Next:cobweb site, Previous:COBOL, Up:= C =

COBOL fingers /koh'bol fing'grz/ n.

Reported from Sweden, a (hypothetical) disease one might get from coding in COBOL. The language requires code verbose beyond all reason (see **candygrammar**); thus it is alleged that programming too

much in COBOL causes one's fingers to wear down to stubs by the endless typing. "I refuse to type in all that source code again; it would give me COBOL fingers!"

Node:cobweb site, Next:code, Previous:COBOL fingers, Up:= C =

cobweb site n.

A World Wide Web Site that hasn't been updated so long it has figuratively grown cobwebs.

Node:code, Next:code grinder, Previous:cobweb site, Up:= C =

code n.

The stuff that software writers write, either in source form or after translation by a compiler or assembler. Often used in opposition to "data", which is the stuff that code operates on. This is a mass noun, as in "How much code does it take to do a **bubble sort**?", or "The code is loaded at the high end of RAM." Anyone referring to software as "the software codes" is probably a **newbie** or a **suit**.

Node:code grinder, Next:code monkey, Previous:code, Up:= C =

code grinder n.

1. A **suit**-wearing minion of the sort hired in legion strength by banks and insurance companies to implement payroll packages in RPG and other such unspeakable horrors. In its native habitat, the code grinder often removes the suit jacket to reveal an underplumage consisting of button-down shirt (starch optional) and a tie. In times of dire stress, the sleeves (if long) may be rolled up and the tie loosened about half an inch. It seldom helps. The **code grinder**'s milieu is about as far from hackerdom as one can get and still touch a computer; the term connotes pity. See **Real World**, **suit**. 2. Used of or to a hacker, a really serious slur on the person's creative ability; connotes a design style characterized by primitive technique, rule-boundedness, **brute force**, and utter lack of imagination. Compare **card walloper**; contrast **hacker**, **Real Programmer**.

Node:code monkey, Next:Code of the Geeks, Previous:code grinder, Up:= C =

code monkey n

1. A person only capable of grinding out code, but unable to perform the higher-primate tasks of software architecture, analysis, and design. Mildly insulting. Often applied to the most junior people on a programming team. 2. Anyone who writes code for a living; a programmer. 3. A self-deprecating way of denying responsibility for a **management** decision, or of complaining about having to live with such decisions. As in "Don't ask me why we need to write a compiler in+COBOL, I'm just a code monkey."

Node:Code of the Geeks, Next:code police, Previous:code monkey, Up:= C =

Code of the Geeks n.

see **geek code**.

Node:code police, Next:codes, Previous:Code of the Geeks, Up:= C =

code police n.

[by analogy with George Orwell's `thought police'] A mythical team of Gestapo-like storm troopers that might burst into one's office and arrest one for violating programming style rules. May be used either seriously, to underline a claim that a particular style violation is dangerous, or ironically, to suggest that the practice under discussion is condemned mainly by anal-retentive **weenie**s. "Dike out that goto or the code police will get you!" The ironic usage is perhaps more common.

Node:codes, Next:codewalker, Previous:code police, Up:= C =

codes n.

[scientific computing] Programs. This usage is common in people who hack supercomputers and heavy-duty **number-crunching**, rare to unknown elsewhere (if you say "codes" to hackers outside scientific computing, their first association is likely to be "and cyphers").

Node:codewalker, Next:coefficient of X, Previous:codes, Up:= C =

codewalker n.

A program component that traverses other programs for a living. Compilers have codewalkers in their front ends; so do cross-reference generators and some database front ends. Other utility programs that try to do too much with source code may turn into codewalkers. As in "This new `vgrind` feature would require a codewalker to implement."

Node:coefficient of X, Next:cokebottle, Previous:codewalker, Up:= C =

coefficient of X n.

Hackish speech makes heavy use of pseudo-mathematical metaphors. Four particularly important ones involve the terms `coefficient', `factor', `index of X', and `quotient'. They are often loosely applied to things you cannot really be quantitative about, but there are subtle distinctions among them that convey information about the way the speaker mentally models whatever he or she is describing.

`Foo factor' and `foo quotient' tend to describe something for which the issue is one of presence or absence. The canonical example is **fudge factor**. It's not important how much you're fudging; the term simply acknowledges that some fudging is needed. You might talk of liking a movie for its silliness factor. Quotient tends to imply that the property is a ratio of two opposing factors: "I would have won except for my luck quotient." This could also be "I would have won except for the luck factor", but using *quotient* emphasizes that it was bad luck overpowering good luck (or someone else's good luck overpowering your own).

`Foo index' and `coefficient of foo' both tend to imply that foo is, if not strictly measurable, at least something that can be larger or smaller. Thus, you might refer to a paper or person as having a `high bogosity index', whereas you would be less likely to speak of a `high bogosity factor'. `Foo index' suggests that foo is a condensation of many quantities, as in the mundane cost-of-living index; `coefficient of foo' suggests that foo is a fundamental quantity, as in a coefficient of friction. The choice between these terms is often one of personal preference; e.g., some people might feel that bogosity is a

fundamental attribute and thus say `coefficient of bogosity', whereas others might feel it is a combination of factors and thus say `bogosity index'.

Node:cokebottle, Next:cold boot, Previous:coefficient of X, Up:= C =

cokebottle /kohk'bot-l/ n.

Any very unusual character, particularly one you can't type because it isn't on your keyboard. MIT people used to complain about the `control-meta-cokebottle' commands at SAIL, and SAIL people complained right back about the `escape-escape-cokebottle' commands at MIT. After the demise of the **space-cadet keyboard**, `cokebottle' faded away as serious usage, but was often invoked humorously to describe an (unspecified) weird or non-intuitive keystroke command. It may be due for a second inning, however. The OSF/Motif window manager, `mwm(1)`, has a reserved keystroke for switching to the default set of keybindings and behavior. This keystroke is (believe it or not) `control-meta-bang' (see **bang**). Since the exclamation point looks a lot like an upside down Coke bottle, Motif hackers have begun referring to this keystroke as `cokebottle'. See also **quadruple bucky**.

Node:cold boot, Next:COME FROM, Previous:cokebottle, Up:= C =

cold boot n.

See **boot**.

Node:COME FROM, Next:comm mode, Previous:cold boot, Up:= C =

COME FROM n.

A semi-mythical language construct dual to the `go to'; `COME FROM` <label> would cause the referenced label to act as a sort of trapdoor, so that if the program ever reached it control would quietly and **automagically** be transferred to the statement following the `COME FROM`. `COME FROM` was first proposed in R. Lawrence Clark's "A Linguistic Contribution to GOTO-less programming", which appeared in a 1973 **Datamation** issue (and was reprinted in the April 1984 issue of "Communications of the ACM"). This parodied the then-raging `structured programming' **holy wars** (see **considered harmful**). Mythically, some variants are the `assigned COME FROM' and the `computed COME FROM' (parodying some nasty control constructs in FORTRAN and some extended BASICs). Of course, multi-tasking (or non-determinism) could be implemented by having more than one `COME FROM` statement coming from the same label.

In some ways the FORTRAN `DO` looks like a `COME FROM` statement. After the terminating statement number/`CONTINUE` is reached, control continues at the statement following the DO. Some generous FORTRANs would allow arbitrary statements (other than `CONTINUE`) for the statement, leading to examples like:

```
      DO 10 I=1,LIMIT
C imagine many lines of code here, leaving the
C original DO statement lost in the spaghetti...
      WRITE(6,10) I,FROB(I)
 10   FORMAT(1X,I5,G10.4)
```

in which the trapdoor is just after the statement labeled 10. (This is particularly surprising because the label doesn't appear to have anything to do with the flow of control at all!)

While sufficiently astonishing to the unsuspecting reader, this form of `COME FROM` statement isn't completely general. After all, control will eventually pass to the following statement. The implementation of the general form was left to Univac FORTRAN, ca. 1975 (though a roughly similar feature existed on the IBM 7040 ten years earlier). The statement `AT 100` would perform a `COME FROM 100`. It was intended strictly as a debugging aid, with dire consequences promised to anyone so deranged as to use it in production code. More horrible things had already been perpetrated in production languages, however; doubters need only contemplate the `ALTER` verb in **COBOL**.

`COME FROM` was supported under its own name for the first time 15 years later, in C-INTERCAL (see **INTERCAL**, **retrocomputing**); knowledgeable observers are still reeling from the shock.

Node:comm mode, Next:command key, Previous:COME FROM, Up:= C =

comm mode /kom mohd/ n.

[ITS: from the feature supporting on-line chat; the term may spelled with one or two m's] Syn. for **talk mode**.

Node:command key, Next:comment out, Previous:comm mode, Up:= C =

command key n.

[Mac users] Syn. **feature key**.

Node:comment out, Next:Commonwealth Hackish, Previous:command key, Up:= C =

comment out vt.

To surround a section of code with comment delimiters or to prefix every line in the section with a comment marker; this prevents it from being compiled or interpreted. Often done when the code is redundant or obsolete, but is being left in the source to make the intent of the active code clearer; also when the code in that section is broken and you want to bypass it in order to debug some other part of the code. Compare **condition out**, usually the preferred technique in languages (such as **C**) that make it possible.

Node:Commonwealth Hackish, Next:compact, Previous:comment out, Up:= C =

Commonwealth Hackish n.

Hacker jargon as spoken in English outside the U.S., esp. in the British Commonwealth. It is reported that Commonwealth speakers are more likely to pronounce truncations like `char' and `soc', etc., as spelled (/char/, /sok/), as opposed to American /keir/ and /sohsh/. Dots in **newsgroup** names (especially two-component names) tend to be pronounced more often (so soc.wibble is /sok dot wib'l/ rather than /sohsh wib'l/). The prefix **meta** may be pronounced /mee't*/; similarly, Greek letter beta is usually /bee't*/, zeta is usually /zee't*/, and so forth. Preferred **metasyntactic variable**s include **blurgle**, `eek`, `ook`, `frodo`, and `bilbo`; **wibble**, `wobble`, and in emergencies `wubble`; `flob`, `banana`, `tom`, `dick`, `harry`, `wombat`, `frog`, **fish**, **womble** and so on and on (see **foo**, sense 4).

Alternatives to verb doubling include suffixes `-o-rama', `frenzy' (as in feeding frenzy), and `city'

(examples: "barf city!" "hack-o-rama!" "core dump frenzy!"). Finally, note that the American terms `parens', `brackets', and `braces' for (), [], and {} are uncommon; Commonwealth hackish prefers `brackets', `square brackets', and `curly brackets'. Also, the use of `pling' for **bang** is common outside the United States.

See also **attoparsec**, **calculator**, **chemist**, **console jockey**, **fish**, **go-faster stripes**, **grunge**, **hakspek**, **heavy metal**, **leaky heap**, **lord high fixer**, **loose bytes**, **muddie**, **nadger**, **noddy**, **psychedelicware**, **plingnet**, **raster blaster**, **RTBM**, **seggie**, **spod**, **sun lounge**, **terminal junkie**, **tick-list features**, **weeble**, **weasel**, **YABA**, and notes or definitions under **Bad Thing**, **barf**, **bogus**, **bum**, **chase pointers**, **cosmic rays**, **crippleware**, **crunch**, **dodgy**, **gonk**, **hamster**, **hardwarily**, **mess-dos**, **nybble**, **proglet**, **root**, **SEX**, **tweak**, **womble**, and **xyzzy**.

Node:compact, Next:compiler jock, Previous:Commonwealth Hackish, Up:= C =

compact adj.

Of a design, describes the valuable property that it can all be apprehended at once in one's head. This generally means the thing created from the design can be used with greater facility and fewer errors than an equivalent tool that is not compact. Compactness does not imply triviality or lack of power; for example, C is compact and FORTRAN is not, but C is more powerful than FORTRAN. Designs become non-compact through accreting **feature**s and **cruft** that don't merge cleanly into the overall design scheme (thus, some fans of **Classic C** maintain that ANSI C is no longer compact).

Node:compiler jock, Next:compo, Previous:compact, Up:= C =

compiler jock n.

See **jock** (sense 2).

Node:compo, Next:compress, Previous:compiler jock, Up:= C =

compo n.

[**demoscene**] Finnish-originated slang for `competition'. Demo compos are held at a **demoparty**. The usual protocol is that several groups make demos for a compo, they are shown on a big screen, and then the party participants vote for the best one. Prizes (from sponsors and party entrance fees) are given. Standard compo formats include **intro** compos (4k or 64k demos), music compos, graphics compos, quick **demo** compos (build a demo within 4 hours for example), etc.

Node:compress, Next:Compu$erve, Previous:compo, Up:= C =

compress [Unix] vt.

When used without a qualifier, generally refers to **crunch**ing of a file using a particular C implementation of compression by Joseph M. Orost et al. and widely circulated via **Usenet**; use of **crunch** itself in this sense is rare among Unix hackers. Specifically, compress is built around the Lempel-Ziv-Welch algorithm as described in "A Technique for High Performance Data Compression", Terry A. Welch, "IEEE Computer", vol. 17, no. 6 (June 1984), pp. 8-19.

Node:Compu$erve, Next:computer confetti, Previous:compress, Up:= C =

Compu$erve n.

See **CI$**. Synonyms CompuSpend and Compu$pend are also reported.

Node:computer confetti, Next:computer geek, Previous:Compu$erve, Up:= C =

computer confetti n.

Syn. **chad**. Though this term is common, this use of punched-card chad is not a good idea, as the pieces are stiff and have sharp corners that could injure the eyes. GLS reports that he once attended a wedding at MIT during which he and a few other guests enthusiastically threw chad instead of rice. The groom later grumbled that he and his bride had spent most of the evening trying to get the stuff out of their hair.

Node:computer geek, Next:computron, Previous:computer confetti, Up:= C =

computer geek n.

1. One who eats (computer) bugs for a living. One who fulfills all the dreariest negative stereotypes about hackers: an asocial, malodorous, pasty-faced monomaniac with all the personality of a cheese grater. Cannot be used by outsiders without implied insult to all hackers; compare black-on-black vs. white-on-black usage of `nigger'. A computer geek may be either a fundamentally clueless individual or a proto-hacker in **larval stage**. Also called `turbo nerd', `turbo geek'. See also **propeller head**, **clustergeeking**, **geek out**, **wannabee**, **terminal junkie**, **spod**, **weenie**. 2. Some self-described computer geeks use this term in a positive sense and protest sense 1 (this seems to have been a post-1990 development). For one such argument, see http://www.darkwater.com/omni/geek.html. See also **geek code**.

Node:computron, Next:con, Previous:computer geek, Up:= C =

computron /kom'pyoo-tron`/

n. 1. [common] A notional unit of computing power combining instruction speed and storage capacity, dimensioned roughly in instructions-per-second times megabytes-of-main-store times megabytes-of-mass-storage. "That machine can't run GNU Emacs, it doesn't have enough computrons!" This usage is usually found in metaphors that treat computing power as a fungible commodity good, like a crop yield or diesel horsepower. See **bitty box**, **Get a real computer!**, **toy**, **crank**. 2. A mythical subatomic particle that bears the unit quantity of computation or information, in much the same way that an electron bears one unit of electric charge (see also **bogon**). An elaborate pseudo-scientific theory of computrons has been developed based on the physical fact that the molecules in a solid object move more rapidly as it is heated. It is argued that an object melts because the molecules have lost their information about where they are supposed to be (that is, they have emitted computrons). This explains why computers get so hot and require air conditioning; they use up computrons. Conversely, it should be possible to cool down an object by placing it in the path of a computron beam. It is believed that this may also explain why machines that work at the factory fail in the computer room: the computrons there have been all used up by the other hardware. (The popularity of this theory probably owes something to the "Warlock" stories by Larry Niven, the best known being "What Good is a Glass Dagger?", in which magic is fueled by an exhaustible natural resource called `mana'.)

Node:con, Next:condition out, Previous:computron, Up:= C =

con n.

[from SF fandom] A science-fiction convention. Not used of other sorts of conventions, such as professional meetings. This term, unlike many others imported from SF-fan slang, is widely recognized even by hackers who aren't **fan**s. "We'd been corresponding on the net for months, then we met face-to-face at a con."

Node:condition out, Next:condom, Previous:con, Up:= C =

condition out vt.

To prevent a section of code from being compiled by surrounding it with a conditional-compilation directive whose condition is always false. The **canonical** examples of these directives are `#if 0` (or `#ifdef notdef`, though some find the latter **bletcherous**) and `#endif` in C. Compare **comment out**.

Node:condom, Next:confuser, Previous:condition out, Up:= C =

condom n.

1. The protective plastic bag that accompanies 3.5-inch microfloppy diskettes. Rarely, also used of (paper) disk envelopes. Unlike the write protect tab, the condom (when left on) not only impedes the practice of **SEX** but has also been shown to have a high failure rate as drive mechanisms attempt to access the disk -- and can even fatally frustrate insertion. 2. The protective cladding on a **light pipe**. 3. `keyboard condom': A flexible, transparent plastic cover for a keyboard, designed to provide some protection against dust and **programming fluid** without impeding typing. 4. `elephant condom': the plastic shipping bags used inside cardboard boxes to protect hardware in transit. 5. n. obs. A dummy directory `/usr/tmp/sh`, created to foil the **Great Worm** by exploiting a portability bug in one of its parts. So named in the title of a *comp.risks* article by Gene Spafford during the Worm crisis, and again in the text of "The Internet Worm Program: An Analysis", Purdue Technical Report CSD-TR-823.

Node:confuser, Next:connector conspiracy, Previous:condom, Up:= C =

confuser n.

Common soundalike slang for `computer'. Usually encountered in compounds such as `confuser room', `personal confuser', `confuser guru'. Usage: silly.

Node:connector conspiracy, Next:cons, Previous:confuser, Up:= C =

connector conspiracy n.

[probably came into prominence with the appearance of the KL-10 (one model of the **PDP-10**), none of whose connectors matched anything else] The tendency of manufacturers (or, by extension, programmers or purveyors of anything) to come up with new products that don't fit together with the old stuff, thereby making you buy either all new stuff or expensive interface devices. The KL-10 Massbus connector was actually *patented* by **DEC**, which reputedly refused to license the design and thus effectively locked third parties out of competition for the lucrative Massbus peripherals market. This policy is a source of never-ending frustration for the diehards who maintain older PDP-10 or VAX systems. Their CPUs work fine, but they are stuck with dying, obsolescent disk and tape drives with low capacity and high power

requirements.

(A closely related phenomenon, with a slightly different intent, is the habit manufacturers have of inventing new screw heads so that only Designated Persons, possessing the magic screwdrivers, can remove covers and make repairs or install options. A good 1990s example is the use of Torx screws for cable-TV set-top boxes. Older Apple Macintoshes took this one step further, requiring not only a long Torx screwdriver but a specialized case-cracking tool to open the box.)

In these latter days of open-systems computing this term has fallen somewhat into disuse, to be replaced by the observation that "Standards are great! There are so many of them to choose from!" Compare **backward combatability**.

Node:cons, Next:considered harmful, Previous:connector conspiracy, Up:= C =

cons /konz/ or /kons/

[from LISP] 1. vt. To add a new element to a specified list, esp. at the top. "OK, cons picking a replacement for the console TTY onto the agenda." 2. `cons up': vt. To synthesize from smaller pieces: "to cons up an example".

In LISP itself, `cons` is the most fundamental operation for building structures. It takes any two objects and returns a `dot-pair' or two-branched tree with one object hanging from each branch. Because the result of a cons is an object, it can be used to build binary trees of any shape and complexity. Hackers think of it as a sort of universal constructor, and that is where the jargon meanings spring from.

Node:considered harmful, Next:console, Previous:cons, Up:= C =

considered harmful adj.

[very common] Edsger W. Dijkstra's note in the March 1968 "Communications of the ACM", "Goto Statement Considered Harmful", fired the first salvo in the structured programming wars (text at http://www.acm.org/classics). Amusingly, the ACM considered the resulting acrimony sufficiently harmful that it will (by policy) no longer print an article taking so assertive a position against a coding practice. (Years afterwards, a contrary view contrary view was uttered in a CACM letter called, inevitably, "`Goto considered harmful' considered harmful"". In the ensuing decades, a large number of both serious papers and parodies have borne titles of the form "X considered Y". The structured-programming wars eventually blew over with the realization that both sides were wrong, but use of such titles has remained as a persistent minor in-joke (the `considered silly' found at various places in this lexicon is related).

Node:console, Next:console jockey, Previous:considered harmful, Up:= C =

console n.

1. The operator's station of a **mainframe**. In times past, this was a privileged location that conveyed godlike powers to anyone with fingers on its keys. Under Unix and other modern timesharing OSes, such privileges are guarded by passwords instead, and the console is just the **tty** the system was booted from. Some of the mystique remains, however, and it is traditional for sysadmins to post urgent messages to all users from the console (on Unix, /dev/console). 2. On microcomputer Unix boxes, the main screen and keyboard (as opposed to character-only terminals talking to a serial port). Typically only the console can do real graphics or run **X**.

Node:console jockey, Next:content-free, Previous:console, Up:= C =

console jockey n.

See **terminal junkie**.

Node:content-free, Next:control-C, Previous:console jockey, Up:= C =

content-free adj.

[by analogy with techspeak `context-free'] Used of a message that adds nothing to the recipient's knowledge. Though this adjective is sometimes applied to **flamage**, it more usually connotes derision for communication styles that exalt form over substance or are centered on concerns irrelevant to the subject ostensibly at hand. Perhaps most used with reference to speeches by company presidents and other professional manipulators. "Content-free? Uh... that's anything printed on glossy paper." (See also **four-color glossies**.) "He gave a talk on the implications of electronic networks for postmodernism and the fin-de-siecle aesthetic. It was content-free."

Node:control-C, Next:control-O, Previous:content-free, Up:= C =

control-C vi.

1. "Stop whatever you are doing." From the interrupt character used on many operating systems to abort a running program. Considered silly. 2. interj. Among BSD Unix hackers, the canonical humorous response to "Give me a break!"

Node:control-O, Next:control-Q, Previous:control-C, Up:= C =

control-O vi.

"Stop talking." From the character used on some operating systems to abort output but allow the program to keep on running. Generally means that you are not interested in hearing anything more from that person, at least on that topic; a standard response to someone who is flaming. Considered silly. Compare **control-S**.

Node:control-Q, Next:control-S, Previous:control-O, Up:= C =

control-Q vi.

"Resume." From the ASCII DC1 or **XON** character (the pronunciation /X-on/ is therefore also used), used to undo a previous **control-S**.

Node:control-S, Next:Conway's Law, Previous:control-Q, Up:= C =

control-S vi.

"Stop talking for a second." From the ASCII DC3 or XOFF character (the pronunciation /X-of/ is therefore also used). Control-S differs from **control-O** in that the person is asked to stop talking (perhaps because you are on the phone) but will be allowed to continue when you're ready to listen to him -- as opposed to control-O, which has more of the meaning of "Shut up." Considered silly.

Node:Conway's Law, Next:cookbook, Previous:control-S, Up:= C =

Conway's Law prov.

The rule that the organization of the software and the organization of the software team will be congruent; commonly stated as "If you have four groups working on a compiler, you'll get a 4-pass compiler". The original statement was more general, "Organizations which design systems are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations." This first appeared in the April 1968 issue of **Datamation**. Compare **SNAFU principle**.

The law was named after Melvin Conway, an early proto-hacker who wrote an assembler for the Burroughs 220 called SAVE. (The name `SAVE' didn't stand for anything; it was just that you lost fewer card decks and listings because they all had SAVE written on them.)

There is also Tom Cheatham's amendment of Conway's Law: "If a group of N persons implements a COBOL compiler, there will be N-1 passes. Someone in the group has to be the manager."

Node:cookbook, Next:cooked mode, Previous:Conway's Law, Up:= C =

cookbook n.

[from amateur electronics and radio] A book of small code segments that the reader can use to do various **magic** things in programs. One current example is the "**PostScript** Language Tutorial and Cookbook" by Adobe Systems, Inc (Addison-Wesley, ISBN 0-201-10179-3), also known as the **Blue Book** which has recipes for things like wrapping text around arbitrary curves and making 3D fonts. Cookbooks, slavishly followed, can lead one into **voodoo programming**, but are useful for hackers trying to **monkey up** small programs in unknown languages. This function is analogous to the role of phrasebooks in human languages.

Node:cooked mode, Next:cookie, Previous:cookbook, Up:= C =

cooked mode n.

[Unix, by opposition from **raw mode**] The normal character-input mode, with interrupts enabled and with erase, kill and other special-character interpretations performed directly by the tty driver. Oppose **raw mode**, **rare mode**. This term is techspeak under Unix but jargon elsewhere; other operating systems often have similar mode distinctions, and the raw/rare/cooked way of describing them has spread widely along with the C language and other Unix exports. Most generally, `cooked mode' may refer to any mode of a system that does extensive preprocessing before presenting data to a program.

Node:cookie, Next:cookie bear, Previous:cooked mode, Up:= C =

cookie n.

A handle, transaction ID, or other token of agreement between cooperating programs. "I give him a

packet, he gives me back a cookie." The claim check you get from a dry-cleaning shop is a perfect mundane example of a cookie; the only thing it's useful for is to relate a later transaction to this one (so you get the same clothes back). Compare **magic cookie**; see also **fortune cookie**. Now mainstream in the specific sense of web-browser cookies.

Node:cookie bear, Next:cookie file, Previous:cookie, Up:= C =

cookie bear n. obs.

Original term, pre-Sesame-Street, for what is now universally called a **cookie monster**. A correspondent observes "In those days, hackers were actually getting their yucks from...sit down now...Andy Williams. Yes, *that* Andy Williams. Seems he had a rather hip (by the standards of the day) TV variety show. One of the best parts of the show was the recurring `cookie bear' sketch. In these sketches, a guy in a bear suit tried all sorts of tricks to get a cookie out of Williams. The sketches would always end with Williams shrieking (and I don't mean figuratively), `No cookies! Not now, not ever...NEVER!!!' And the bear would fall down. Great stuff."

Node:cookie file, Next:cookie jar, Previous:cookie bear, Up:= C =

cookie file n.

A collection of **fortune cookie**s in a format that facilitates retrieval by a fortune program. There are several different cookie files in public distribution, and site admins often assemble their own from various sources including this lexicon.

Node:cookie jar, Next:cookie monster, Previous:cookie file, Up:= C =

cookie jar n.

An area of memory set aside for storing **cookie**s. Most commonly heard in the Atari ST community; many useful ST programs record their presence by storing a distinctive **magic number** in the jar. Programs can inquire after the presence or otherwise of other programs by searching the contents of the jar.

Node:cookie monster, Next:copious free time, Previous:cookie jar, Up:= C =

cookie monster n.

[from the children's TV program "Sesame Street"] Any of a family of early (1970s) hacks reported on **TOPS-10**, **ITS**, **Multics**, and elsewhere that would lock up either the victim's terminal (on a time-sharing machine) or the **console** (on a batch **mainframe**), repeatedly demanding "I WANT A COOKIE". The required responses ranged in complexity from "COOKIE" through "HAVE A COOKIE" and upward. Folklorist Jan Brunvand (see **FOAF**) has described these programs as urban legends (implying they probably never existed) but they existed, all right, in several different versions. See also **wabbit**. Interestingly, the term `cookie monster' appears to be a **retcon**; the original term was **cookie bear**.

Node:copious free time, Next:copper, Previous:cookie monster, Up:= C =

copious free time n.

[Apple; orig. fr. the intro to Tom Lehrer's song "It Makes A Fellow Proud To Be A Soldier"] 1. [used ironically to indicate the speaker's lack of the quantity in question] A mythical schedule slot for accomplishing tasks held to be unlikely or impossible. Sometimes used to indicate that the speaker is interested in accomplishing the task, but believes that the opportunity will not arise. "I'll implement the automatic layout stuff in my copious free time." 2. [Archly] Time reserved for bogus or otherwise idiotic tasks, such as implementation of **chrome**, or the stroking of **suit**s. "I'll get back to him on that feature in my copious free time."

Node:copper, Next:copy protection, Previous:copious free time, Up:= C =

copper n.

Conventional electron-carrying network cable with a core conductor of copper -- or aluminum! Opposed to **light pipe** or, say, a short-range microwave link.

Node:copy protection, Next:copybroke, Previous:copper, Up:= C =

copy protection n.

A class of methods for preventing incompetent pirates from stealing software and legitimate customers from using it. Considered silly.

Node:copybroke, Next:copycenter, Previous:copy protection, Up:= C =

copybroke /kop'ee-brohk/ adj.

1. [play on `copyright'] Used to describe an instance of a copy-protected program that has been `broken'; that is, a copy with the copy-protection scheme disabled. Syn. **copywronged**. 2. Copy-protected software which is unusable because of some bit-rot or bug that has confused the anti-piracy check. See also **copy protection**.

Node:copycenter, Next:copyleft, Previous:copybroke, Up:= C =

copycenter n.

[play on `copyright' and `copyleft'] 1. The copyright notice carried by the various flavors of freeware BSD. According to Kirk McKusick at BSDCon 1999: "The way it was characterized politically, you had copyright, which is what the big companies use to lock everything up; you had copyleft, which is free software's way of making sure they can't lock it up; and then Berkeley had what we called "copycenter", which is "take it down to the copy center and make as many copies as you want".

Node:copyleft, Next:copyparty, Previous:copycenter, Up:= C =

copyleft /kop'ee-left/ n.

[play on `copyright'] 1. The copyright notice (`General Public License') carried by **GNU** **EMACS** and

other Free Software Foundation software, granting reuse and reproduction rights to all comers (but see also **General Public Virus**). 2. By extension, any copyright notice intended to achieve similar aims.

Node:copyparty, Next:copywronged, Previous:copyleft, Up:= C =

copyparty n.

[C64/amiga **demoscene**]A computer party organized so demosceners can meet other in real life, and to facilitate software copying (mostly pirated software). The copyparty has become less common as the Internet makes communication easier. The demoscene has gradually evolved the **demoparty** to replace it.

Node:copywronged, Next:core, Previous:copyparty, Up:= C =

copywronged /kop'ee-rongd/ adj.

[play on `copyright'] Syn. for **copybroke**.

Node:core, Next:core cancer, Previous:copywronged, Up:= C =

core n.

Main storage or RAM. Dates from the days of ferrite-core memory; now archaic as techspeak most places outside IBM, but also still used in the Unix community and by old-time hackers or those who would sound like them. Some derived idioms are quite current; `in core', for example, means `in memory' (as opposed to `on disk'), and both **core dump** and the `core image' or `core file' produced by one are terms in favor. Some varieties of Commonwealth hackish prefer **store**.

Node:core cancer, Next:core dump, Previous:core, Up:= C =

core cancer n.

[rare] A process that exhibits a slow but inexorable resource **leak** -- like a cancer, it kills by crowding out productive `tissue'.

Node:core dump, Next:core leak, Previous:core cancer, Up:= C =

core dump n.

[common **Iron Age** jargon, preserved by Unix] 1. [techspeak] A copy of the contents of **core**, produced when a process is aborted by certain kinds of internal error. 2. By extension, used for humans passing out, vomiting, or registering extreme shock. "He dumped core. All over the floor. What a mess." "He heard about X and dumped core." 3. Occasionally used for a human rambling on pointlessly at great length; esp. in apology: "Sorry, I dumped core on you". 4. A recapitulation of knowledge (compare **bits**, sense 1). Hence, spewing all one knows about a topic (syn. **brain dump**), esp. in a lecture or answer to an exam question. "Short, concise answers are better than core dumps" (from the instructions to an exam at Columbia). See **core**.

Node:core leak, Next:Core Wars, Previous:core dump, Up:= C =

core leak n.

Syn. **memory leak**.

Node:Core Wars, Next:corge, Previous:core leak, Up:= C =

Core Wars n.

A game between `assembler' programs in a machine or machine simulator, where the objective is to kill your opponent's program by overwriting it. Popularized in the 1980s by A. K. Dewdney's column in "Scientific American" magazine, but described in "Software Practice And Experience" a decade earlier. The game was actually devised and played by Victor Vyssotsky, Robert Morris Sr., and Doug McIlroy in the early 1960s (Dennis Ritchie is sometimes incorrectly cited as a co-author, but was not involved). Their original game was called `Darwin' and ran on a IBM 7090 at Bell Labs. See **core**. For information on the modern game, do a web search for the `rec.games.corewar FAQ' or surf to the King Of The Hill site.

Node:corge, Next:cosmic rays, Previous:Core Wars, Up:= C =

corge /korj/ n.

[originally, the name of a cat] Yet another **metasyntactic variable**, invented by Mike Gallaher and propagated by the **GOSMACS** documentation. See **grault**.

Node:cosmic rays, Next:cough and die, Previous:corge, Up:= C =

cosmic rays n.

Notionally, the cause of **bit rot**. However, this is a semi-independent usage that may be invoked as a humorous way to **handwave** away any minor **randomness** that doesn't seem worth the bother of investigating. "Hey, Eric -- I just got a burst of garbage on my **tube**, where did that come from?" "Cosmic rays, I guess." Compare **sunspots**, **phase of the moon**. The British seem to prefer the usage `cosmic showers'; `alpha particles' is also heard, because stray alpha particles passing through a memory chip can cause single-bit errors (this becomes increasingly more likely as memory sizes and densities increase).

Factual note: Alpha particles cause bit rot, cosmic rays do not (except occasionally in spaceborne computers). Intel could not explain random bit drops in their early chips, and one hypothesis was cosmic rays. So they created the World's Largest Lead Safe, using 25 tons of the stuff, and used two identical boards for testing. One was placed in the safe, one outside. The hypothesis was that if cosmic rays were causing the bit drops, they should see a statistically significant difference between the error rates on the two boards. They did not observe such a difference. Further investigation demonstrated conclusively that the bit drops were due to alpha particle emissions from thorium (and to a much lesser degree uranium) in the encapsulation material. Since it is impossible to eliminate these radioactives (they are uniformly distributed through the earth's crust, with the statistically insignificant exception of uranium lodes) it became obvious that one has to design memories to withstand these hits.

Node:cough and die, Next:cow orker, Previous:cosmic rays, Up:= C =

cough and die v.

Syn. **barf**. Connotes that the program is throwing its hands up by design rather than because of a bug or oversight. "The parser saw a control-A in its input where it was looking for a printable, so it coughed and died." Compare **die**, **die horribly**, **scream and die**.

Node:cow orker, Next:cowboy, Previous:cough and die, Up:= C =

cow orker n.

[Usenet] n. fortuitous typo for co-worker, widely used in Usenet, with perhaps a hint that orking cows is illegal. This term was popularized by Scott Adams (the creator of **Dilbert**) but seems to have originated earlier in a 1997 **scary devil monastery** FAQ. Compare **hing**, **grilf**, **filk**, **newsfroup**.

Node:cowboy, Next:CP/M, Previous:cow orker, Up:= C =

cowboy n.

[Sun, from William Gibson's **cyberpunk** SF] Synonym for **hacker**. It is reported that at Sun this word is often said with reverence.

Node:CP/M, Next:CPU Wars, Previous:cowboy, Up:= C =

CP/M /C-P-M/ n.

[Control Program/Monitor; later **retcon**ned to Control Program for Microcomputers] An early microcomputer **OS** written by hacker Gary Kildall for 8080- and Z80-based machines, very popular in the late 1970s but virtually wiped out by MS-DOS after the release of the IBM PC in 1981. Legend has it that Kildall's company blew its chance to write the OS for the IBM PC because Kildall decided to spend a day IBM's reps wanted to meet with him enjoying the perfect flying weather in his private plane. Many of CP/M's features and conventions strongly resemble those of early **DEC** operating systems such as **TOPS-10**, OS/8, RSTS, and RSX-11. See **MS-DOS**, **operating system**.

Node:CPU Wars, Next:crack root, Previous:CP/M, Up:= C =

CPU Wars /C-P-U worz/ n.

A 1979 large-format comic by Chas Andres chronicling the attempts of the brainwashed androids of IPM (Impossible to Program Machines) to conquer and destroy the peaceful denizens of HEC (Human Engineered Computers). This rather transparent allegory featured many references to **ADVENT** and the immortal line "Eat flaming death, minicomputer mongrels!" (uttered, of course, by an IPM stormtrooper). The whole shebang is now available on the Web.

It is alleged that the author subsequently received a letter of appreciation on IBM company stationery from the head of IBM's Thomas J. Watson Research Laboratories (then, as now, one of the few islands of true hackerdom in the IBM archipelago). The lower loop of the B in the IBM logo, it is said, had been carefully whited out. See **eat flaming death**.

Node:crack root, Next:cracker, Previous:CPU Wars, Up:= C =

crack root v.

[very common] To defeat the security system of a Unix machine and gain **root** privileges thereby; see **cracking**.

Node:cracker, Next:cracking, Previous:crack root, Up:= C =

cracker n.

One who breaks security on a system. Coined ca. 1985 by hackers in defense against journalistic misuse of **hacker** (q.v., sense 8). An earlier attempt to establish `worm' in this sense around 1981-82 on Usenet was largely a failure.

Use of both these neologisms reflects a strong revulsion against the theft and vandalism perpetrated by cracking rings. While it is expected that any real hacker will have done some playful cracking and knows many of the basic techniques, anyone past **larval stage** is expected to have outgrown the desire to do so except for immediate, benign, practical reasons (for example, if it's necessary to get around some security in order to get some work done).

Thus, there is far less overlap between hackerdom and crackerdom than the **mundane** reader misled by sensationalistic journalism might expect. Crackers tend to gather in small, tight-knit, very secretive groups that have little overlap with the huge, open poly-culture this lexicon describes; though crackers often like to describe *themselves* as hackers, most true hackers consider them a separate and lower form of life.

Ethical considerations aside, hackers figure that anyone who can't imagine a more interesting way to play with their computers than breaking into someone else's has to be pretty **losing**. Some other reasons crackers are looked down on are discussed in the entries on **cracking** and **phreaking**. See also **samurai**, **dark-side hacker**, and **hacker ethic**. For a portrait of the typical teenage cracker, see **warez d00dz**.

Node:cracking, Next:crank, Previous:cracker, Up:= C =

cracking n.

[very common] The act of breaking into a computer system; what a **cracker** does. Contrary to widespread myth, this does not usually involve some mysterious leap of hackerly brilliance, but rather persistence and the dogged repetition of a handful of fairly well-known tricks that exploit common weaknesses in the security of target systems. Accordingly, most crackers are only mediocre hackers.

Node:crank, Next:crapplet, Previous:cracking, Up:= C =

crank vt.

[from automotive slang] Verb used to describe the performance of a machine, especially sustained performance. "This box cranks (or, cranks at) about 6 megaflops, with a burst mode of twice that on vectorized operations."

Node:crapplet, Next:CrApTeX, Previous:crank, Up:= C =

crapplet n.

[portmanteau, crap + applet] A worthless applet, esp. a Java widget attached to a web page that doesn't work or even crashes your browser. Also spelled `craplet'.

Node:CrApTeX, Next:crash, Previous:crapplet, Up:= C =

CrApTeX /krap'tekh/ n.

[University of York, England] Term of abuse used to describe TeX and LaTeX when they don't work (when used by TeXhackers), or all the time (by everyone else). The non-TeX-enthusiasts generally dislike it because it is more verbose than other formatters (e.g. **troff**) and because (particularly if the standard Computer Modern fonts are used) it generates vast output files. See **religious issues**, **TeX**.

Node:crash, Next:crash and burn, Previous:CrApTeX, Up:= C =

crash

1. n. A sudden, usually drastic failure. Most often said of the **system** (q.v., sense 1), esp. of magnetic disk drives (the term originally described what happens when the air gap of a hard disk collapses). "Three **luser**s lost their files in last night's disk crash." A disk crash that involves the read/write heads dropping onto the surface of the disks and scraping off the oxide may also be referred to as a `head crash', whereas the term `system crash' usually, though not always, implies that the operating system or other software was at fault. 2. v. To fail suddenly. "Has the system just crashed?" "Something crashed the OS!" See **down**. Also used transitively to indicate the cause of the crash (usually a person or a program, or both). "Those idiots playing **SPACEWAR** crashed the system." 3. vi. Sometimes said of people hitting the sack after a long **hacking run**; see **gronk out**.

Node:crash and burn, Next:crawling horror, Previous:crash, Up:= C =

crash and burn vi.,n.

A spectacular crash, in the mode of the conclusion of the car-chase scene in the movie "Bullitt" and many subsequent imitators (compare **die horribly**). Sun-3 monitors losing the flyback transformer and lightning strikes on VAX-11/780 backplanes are notable crash and burn generators. The construction `crash-and-burn machine' is reported for a computer used exclusively for alpha or **beta** testing, or reproducing bugs (i.e., not for development). The implication is that it wouldn't be such a disaster if that machine crashed, since only the testers would be inconvenienced.

Node:crawling horror, Next:cray, Previous:crash and burn, Up:= C =

crawling horror n.

Ancient crufty hardware or software that is kept obstinately alive by forces beyond the control of the hackers at a site. Like **dusty deck** or **gonkulator**, but connotes that the thing described is not just an irritation but an active menace to health and sanity. "Mostly we code new stuff in C, but they pay us to maintain one big FORTRAN II application from nineteen-sixty-X that's a real crawling horror...." Compare **WOMBAT**.

Node:cray, Next:cray instability, Previous:crawling horror, Up:= C =

cray /kray/ n.

1. (properly, capitalized) One of the line of supercomputers designed by Cray Research. 2. Any supercomputer at all. 3. The **canonical** **number-crunching** machine.

The term is actually the lowercased last name of Seymour Cray, a noted computer architect and co-founder of the company. Numerous vivid legends surround him, some true and some admittedly invented by Cray Research brass to shape their corporate culture and image.

Node:cray instability, Next:crayola, Previous:cray, Up:= C =

cray instability n.

1. A shortcoming of a program or algorithm that manifests itself only when a large problem is being run on a powerful machine (see **cray**). Generally more subtle than bugs that can be detected in smaller problems running on a workstation or mini. 2. More specifically, a shortcoming of algorithms which are well behaved when run on gentle floating point hardware (such as IEEE-standard or PDP-series machines) but which break down badly when exposed to a Cray's unique `rounding' rules.

Node:crayola, Next:crayola books, Previous:cray instability, Up:= C =

crayola /kray-oh'l*/ n.

A super-mini or -micro computer that provides some reasonable percentage of supercomputer performance for an unreasonably low price. Might also be a **killer micro**.

Node:crayola books, Next:crayon, Previous:crayola, Up:= C =

crayola books n.

The **rainbow series** of National Computer Security Center (NCSC) computer security standards (see **Orange Book**). Usage: humorous and/or disparaging.

Node:crayon, Next:creationism, Previous:crayola books, Up:= C =

crayon n.

1. Someone who works on Cray supercomputers. More specifically, it implies a programmer, probably of the CDC ilk, probably male, and almost certainly wearing a tie (irrespective of gender). Systems types who have a Unix background tend not to be described as crayons. 2. Formerly, anyone who worked for Cray Research; since the buyout by SGI, anyone they inherited from Cray. 3. A **computron** (sense 2) that participates only in **number-crunching**. 4. A unit of computational power equal to that of a single Cray-1. There is a standard joke about this usage that derives from an old Crayola crayon promotional gimmick: When you buy 64 crayons you get a free sharpener.

Node:creationism, Next:creep, Previous:crayon, Up:= C =

creationism n.

The (false) belief that large, innovative software designs can be completely specified in advance and then painlessly magicked out of the void by the normal efforts of a team of normally talented programmers. In fact, experience has shown repeatedly that good designs arise only from evolutionary, exploratory interaction between one (or at most a small handful of) exceptionally able designer(s) and an active user population -- and that the first try at a big new idea is always wrong. Unfortunately, because these truths don't fit the planning models beloved of **management**, they are generally ignored.

Node:creep, Next:creeping elegance, Previous:creationism, Up:= C =

creep v.

To advance, grow, or multiply inexorably. In hackish usage this verb has overtones of menace and silliness, evoking the creeping horrors of low-budget monster movies.

Node:creeping elegance, Next:creeping featurism, Previous:creep, Up:= C =

creeping elegance n.

Describes a tendency for parts of a design to become **elegant** past the point of diminishing return, something which often happens at the expense of the less interesting parts of the design, the schedule, and other things deemed important in the **Real World**. See also **creeping featurism**, **second-system effect**, **tense**.

Node:creeping featurism, Next:creeping featuritis, Previous:creeping elegance, Up:= C =

creeping featurism /kree'ping fee'chr-izm/ n.

[common] 1. Describes a systematic tendency to load more **chrome** and **feature**s onto systems at the expense of whatever elegance they may have possessed when originally designed. See also **feeping creaturism**. "You know, the main problem with **BSD** Unix has always been creeping featurism." 2. More generally, the tendency for anything complicated to become even more complicated because people keep saying "Gee, it would be even better if it had this feature too". (See **feature**.) The result is usually a patchwork because it grew one ad-hoc step at a time, rather than being planned. Planning is a lot of work, but it's easy to add just one extra little feature to help someone ... and then another ... and another.... When creeping featurism gets out of hand, it's like a cancer. Usually this term is used to describe computer programs, but it could also be said of the federal government, the IRS 1040 form, and new cars. A similar phenomenon sometimes afflicts conscious redesigns; see **second-system effect**. See also **creeping elegance**.

Node:creeping featuritis, Next:cretin, Previous:creeping featurism, Up:= C =

creeping featuritis /kree'ping fee'-chr-i:`t*s/ n.

Variant of **creeping featurism**, with its own spoonerization: `feeping creaturitis'. Some people like to reserve this form for the disease as it actually manifests in software or hardware, as opposed to the lurking general tendency in designers' minds. (After all, -ism means `condition' or `pursuit of', whereas -itis usually means `inflammation of'.)

Node:cretin, Next:cretinous, Previous:creeping featuritis, Up:= C =

cretin /kret'in/ or /kree'tn/ n.

Congenital **loser**; an obnoxious person; someone who can't do anything right. It has been observed that many American hackers tend to favor the British pronunciation /kret'in/ over standard American /kree'tn/; it is thought this may be due to the insidious phonetic influence of Monty Python's Flying Circus.

Node:cretinous, Next:crippleware, Previous:cretin, Up:= C =

cretinous /kret'n-*s/ or /kreet'n-*s/ adj.

Wrong; stupid; non-functional; very poorly designed. Also used pejoratively of people. See **dread high-bit disease** for an example. Approximate synonyms: **bletcherous**, **bagbiting** **losing**, **brain-damaged**.

Node:crippleware, Next:critical mass, Previous:cretinous, Up:= C =

crippleware n.

1. [common] Software that has some important functionality deliberately removed, so as to entice potential users to pay for a working version. 2. [Cambridge] Variety of **guiltware** that exhorts you to donate to some charity (compare **careware**, **nagware**). 3. Hardware deliberately crippled, which can be upgraded to a more expensive model by a trivial change (e.g., cutting a jumper).

An excellent example of crippleware (sense 3) is Intel's 486SX chip, which is a standard 486DX chip with the co-processor dyked out (in some early versions it was present but disabled). To upgrade, you buy a complete 486DX chip with *working* co-processor (its identity thinly veiled by a different pinout) and plug it into the board's expansion socket. It then disables the SX, which becomes a fancy power sink. Don't you love Intel?

Node:critical mass, Next:crlf, Previous:crippleware, Up:= C =

critical mass n.

In physics, the minimum amount of fissionable material required to sustain a chain reaction. Of a software product, describes a condition of the software such that fixing one bug introduces one plus **epsilon** bugs. (This malady has many causes: **creeping featurism**, ports to too many disparate environments, poor initial design, etc.) When software achieves critical mass, it can never be fixed; it can only be discarded and rewritten.

Node:crlf, Next:crock, Previous:critical mass, Up:= C =

crlf /ker'l*f/, sometimes /kru'l*f/ or /C-R-L-F/ n.

(often capitalized as `CRLF') A carriage return (CR, ASCII 0001101) followed by a line feed (LF, ASCII 0001010). More loosely, whatever it takes to get you from the end of one line of text to the beginning of the next line. See **newline**, **terpri**. Under **Unix** influence this usage has become less common (Unix uses a bare line feed as its `CRLF').

Node:crock, Next:cross-post, Previous:crlf, Up:= C =

crock n.

[from the American scatologism `crock of shit'] 1. An awkward feature or programming technique that ought to be made cleaner. For example, using small integers to represent error codes without the program interpreting them to the user (as in, for example, Unix `make(1)`, which returns code 139 for a process that dies due to **segfault**). 2. A technique that works acceptably, but which is quite prone to failure if disturbed in the least. For example, a too-clever programmer might write an assembler which mapped instruction mnemonics to numeric opcodes algorithmically, a trick which depends far too intimately on the particular bit patterns of the opcodes. (For another example of programming with a dependence on actual opcode values, see **The Story of Mel** in Appendix A.) Many crocks have a tightly woven, almost completely unmodifiable structure. See **kluge**, **brittle**. The adjectives `crockish' and `crocky', and the nouns `crockishness' and `crockitude', are also used.

Node:cross-post, Next:crudware, Previous:crock, Up:= C =

cross-post vi.

[Usenet; very common] To post a single article simultaneously to several newsgroups. Distinguished from posting the article repeatedly, once to each newsgroup, which causes people to see it multiple times (which is very bad form). Gratuitous cross-posting without a Followup-To line directing responses to a single followup group is frowned upon, as it tends to cause **followup** articles to go to inappropriate newsgroups when people respond to only one part of the original posting.

Node:crudware, Next:cruft, Previous:cross-post, Up:= C =

crudware /kruhd'weir/ n.

Pejorative term for the hundreds of megabytes of low-quality **freeware** circulated by user's groups and BBS systems in the micro-hobbyist world. "Yet *another* set of disk catalog utilities for **MS-DOS**? What crudware!"

Node:cruft, Next:cruft together, Previous:crudware, Up:= C =

cruft /kruhft/

[very common; back-formation from **crufty**] 1. n. An unpleasant substance. The dust that gathers under your bed is cruft; the TMRC Dictionary correctly noted that attacking it with a broom only produces more. 2. n. The results of shoddy construction. 3. vt. [from `hand cruft', pun on `hand craft'] To write assembler code for something normally (and better) done by a compiler (see **hand-hacking**). 4. n. Excess; superfluous junk; used esp. of redundant or superseded code. 5. [University of Wisconsin] n. Cruft is to hackers as gaggle is to geese; that is, at UW one properly says "a cruft of hackers".

Node:cruft together, Next:cruftsmanship, Previous:cruft, Up:= C =

cruft together vt.

(also `cruft up') To throw together something ugly but temporarily workable. Like vt. **kluge up**, but more pejorative. "There isn't any program now to reverse all the lines of a file, but I can probably cruft one together in about 10 minutes." See **hack together**, **hack up**, **kluge up**, **crufty**.

Node:cruftsmanship, Next:crufty, Previous:cruft together, Up:= C =

cruftsmanship /kruhfts'm*n-ship / n.

[from **cruft**] The antithesis of craftsmanship.

Node:crufty, Next:crumb, Previous:cruftsmanship, Up:= C =

crufty /kruhf'tee/ adj.

[very common; origin unknown; poss. from `crusty' or `cruddy'] 1. Poorly built, possibly over-complex. The **canonical** example is "This is standard old crufty **DEC** software". In fact, one fanciful theory of the origin of `crufty' holds that was originally a mutation of `crusty' applied to DEC software so old that the `s' characters were tall and skinny, looking more like `f' characters. 2. Unpleasant, especially to the touch, often with encrusted junk. Like spilled coffee smeared with peanut butter and catsup. 3. Generally unpleasant. 4. (sometimes spelled `cruftie') n. A small crufty object (see **frob**); often one that doesn't fit well into the scheme of things. "A LISP property list is a good place to store crufties (or, collectively, **random** cruft)."

This term is one of the oldest in the jargon and no one is sure of its etymology, but it is suggestive that there is a Cruft Hall at Harvard University which is part of the old physics building; it's said to have been the physics department's radar lab during WWII. To this day (early 1993) the windows appear to be full of random techno-junk. MIT or Lincoln Labs people may well have coined the term as a knock on the competition.

Node:crumb, Next:crunch, Previous:crufty, Up:= C =

crumb n.

Two binary digits; a **quad**. Larger than a **bit**, smaller than a **nybble**. Considered silly. Syn. **tayste**. General discussion of such terms is under **nybble**.

Node:crunch, Next:cryppie, Previous:crumb, Up:= C =

crunch 1. vi.

To process, usually in a time-consuming or complicated way. Connotes an essentially trivial operation that is nonetheless painful to perform. The pain may be due to the triviality's being embedded in a loop from 1 to 1,000,000,000. "FORTRAN programs do mostly **number-crunching**." 2. vt. To reduce the size of a file by a complicated scheme that produces bit configurations completely unrelated to the original data, such as by a Huffman code. (The file ends up looking something like a paper document would if somebody crunched the paper into a wad.) Since such compression usually takes more computations than simpler methods such as run-length encoding, the term is doubly appropriate. (This meaning is usually used in the construction `file crunch(ing)' to distinguish it from **number-crunching**.) See **compress**. 3. n. The character #. Used at XEROX and CMU, among other places. See **ASCII**. 4. vt. To squeeze program source into a minimum-size representation that will still compile or execute. The term came into being

specifically for a famous program on the BBC micro that crunched BASIC source in order to make it run more quickly (it was a wholly interpretive BASIC, so the number of characters mattered). **Obfuscated C Contest** entries are often crunched; see the first example under that entry.

Node:cryppie, Next:CTSS, Previous:crunch, Up:= C =

cryppie /krip'ee/ n.

A cryptographer. One who hacks or implements cryptographic software or hardware.

Node:CTSS, Next:cube, Previous:cryppie, Up:= C =

CTSS /C-T-S-S/ n.

Compatible Time-Sharing System. An early (1963) experiment in the design of interactive time-sharing operating systems, ancestral to **Multics**, **Unix**, and **ITS**. The name **ITS** (Incompatible Time-sharing System) was a hack on CTSS, meant both as a joke and to express some basic differences in philosophy about the way I/O services should be presented to user programs.

Node:cube, Next:cubing, Previous:CTSS, Up:= C =

cube n.

1. [short for `cubicle'] A module in the open-plan offices used at many programming shops. "I've got the manuals in my cube." 2. A NeXT machine (which resembles a matte-black cube).

Node:cubing, Next:cup holder, Previous:cube, Up:= C =

cubing vi.

[parallel with `tubing'] 1. Hacking on an IPSC (Intel Personal SuperComputer) hypercube. "Louella's gone cubing *again*!!" 2. Hacking Rubik's Cube or related puzzles, either physically or mathematically. 3. An indescribable form of self-torture (see sense 1 or 2).

Node:cup holder, Next:cursor dipped in X, Previous:cubing, Up:= C =

cup holder n.

The tray of a CD-ROM drive, or by extension the CD drive itself. So called because of a common tech support legend about the idiot who called to complain that the cup holder on his computer broke. A joke program was once distributed around the net called "cupholder.exe", which when run simply extended the CD drive tray. The humor of this was of course lost on people whose drive had a slot or a caddy instead.

Node:cursor dipped in X, Next:cuspy, Previous:cup holder, Up:= C =

cursor dipped in X n.

There are a couple of metaphors in English of the form `pen dipped in X' (perhaps the most common values of X are `acid', `bile', and `vitriol'). These map over neatly to this hackish usage (the cursor being what moves, leaving letters behind, when one is composing on-line). "Talk about a **nastygram**! He must've had his cursor dipped in acid when he wrote that one!"

Node:cuspy, Next:cut a tape, Previous:cursor dipped in X, Up:= C =

cuspy /kuhs'pee/ adj.

[WPI: from the **DEC** abbreviation CUSP, for `Commonly Used System Program', i.e., a utility program used by many people] 1. (of a program) Well-written. 2. Functionally excellent. A program that performs well and interfaces well to users is cuspy. See **rude**. 3. [NYU] Said of an attractive woman, especially one regarded as available. Implies a certain curvaceousness.

Node:cut a tape, Next:cybercrud, Previous:cuspy, Up:= C =

cut a tape vi.

To write a software or document distribution on magnetic tape for shipment. Has nothing to do with physically cutting the medium! Early versions of this lexicon claimed that one never analogously speaks of `cutting a disk', but this has since been reported as live usage. Related slang usages are mainstream business's `cut a check', the recording industry's `cut a record', and the military's `cut an order'.

All of these usages reflect physical processes in obsolete recording and duplication technologies. The first stage in manufacturing an old-style vinyl record involved cutting grooves in a stamping die with a precision lathe. More mundanely, the dominant technology for mass duplication of paper documents in pre-photocopying days involved "cutting a stencil", punching away portions of the wax overlay on a silk screen. More directly, paper tape with holes punched in it was an important early storage medium.

Node:cybercrud, Next:cyberpunk, Previous:cut a tape, Up:= C =

cybercrud /si:'ber-kruhd/ n.

1. [coined by Ted Nelson] Obfuscatory tech-talk. Verbiage with a high **MEGO** factor. The computer equivalent of bureaucratese. 2. Incomprehensible stuff embedded in email. First there were the "Received" headers that show how mail flows through systems, then MIME (Multi-purpose Internet Mail Extensions) headers and part boundaries, and now huge blocks of radix-64 for PEM (Privacy Enhanced Mail) or PGP (Pretty Good Privacy) digital signatures and certificates of authenticity. This stuff all services a purpose and good user interfaces should hide it, but all too often users are forced to wade through it.

Node:cyberpunk, Next:cyberspace, Previous:cybercrud, Up:= C =

cyberpunk /si:'ber-puhnk/ n.,adj.

[orig. by SF writer Bruce Bethke and/or editor Gardner Dozois] A subgenre of SF launched in 1982 by William Gibson's epoch-making novel "Neuromancer" (though its roots go back through Vernor Vinge's "True Names" (see the **Bibliography** in Appendix C) to John Brunner's 1975 novel "The Shockwave Rider"). Gibson's near-total ignorance of computers and the present-day hacker culture enabled him to speculate about the role of computers and hackers in the future in ways hackers have since found both

irritatingly naïve and tremendously stimulating. Gibson's work was widely imitated, in particular by the short-lived but innovative "Max Headroom" TV series. See **cyberspace**, **ice**, **jack in**, **go flatline**.

Since 1990 or so, popular culture has included a movement or fashion trend that calls itself `cyberpunk', associated especially with the rave/techno subculture. Hackers have mixed feelings about this. On the one hand, self-described cyberpunks too often seem to be shallow trendoids in black leather who have substituted enthusiastic blathering about technology for actually learning and *doing* it. Attitude is no substitute for competence. On the other hand, at least cyberpunks are excited about the right things and properly respectful of hacking talent in those who have it. The general consensus is to tolerate them politely in hopes that they'll attract people who grow into being true hackers.

Node:cyberspace, Next:cycle, Previous:cyberpunk, Up:= C =

cyberspace /si:'br-spays`/ n.

1. Notional `information-space' loaded with visual cues and navigable with brain-computer interfaces called `cyberspace decks'; a characteristic prop of **cyberpunk** SF. Serious efforts to construct **virtual reality** interfaces modeled explicitly on Gibsonian cyberspace are under way, using more conventional devices such as glove sensors and binocular TV headsets. Few hackers are prepared to deny outright the possibility of a cyberspace someday evolving out of the network (see **the network**). 2. The Internet or **Matrix** (sense #2) as a whole, considered as a crude cyberspace (sense 1). Although this usage became widely popular in the mainstream press during 1994 when the Internet exploded into public awareness, it is strongly deprecated among hackers because the Internet does not meet the high, SF-inspired standards they have for true cyberspace technology. Thus, this use of the term usually tags a **wannabee** or outsider. Oppose **meatspace**. 3. Occasionally, the metaphoric location of the mind of a person in **hack mode**. Some hackers report experiencing strong eidetic imagery when in hack mode; interestingly, independent reports from multiple sources suggest that there are common features to the experience. In particular, the dominant colors of this subjective `cyberspace' are often gray and silver, and the imagery often involves constellations of marching dots, elaborate shifting patterns of lines and angles, or moire patterns.

Node:cycle, Next:cycle crunch, Previous:cyberspace, Up:= C =

cycle

1. n. The basic unit of computation. What every hacker wants more of (noted hacker Bill Gosper described himself as a "cycle junkie"). One can describe an instruction as taking so many `clock cycles'. Often the computer can access its memory once on every clock cycle, and so one speaks also of `memory cycles'. These are technical meanings of **cycle**. The jargon meaning comes from the observation that there are only so many cycles per second, and when you are sharing a computer the cycles get divided up among the users. The more cycles the computer spends working on your program rather than someone else's, the faster your program will run. That's why every hacker wants more cycles: so he can spend less time waiting for the computer to respond. 2. By extension, a notional unit of *human* thought power, emphasizing that lots of things compete for the typical hacker's think time. "I refused to get involved with the Rubik's Cube back when it was big. Knew I'd burn too many cycles on it if I let myself." 3. vt. Syn. **bounce** (sense 4), **120 reset**; from the phrase `cycle power'. "Cycle the machine again, that serial port's still hung."

Node:cycle crunch, Next:cycle drought, Previous:cycle, Up:= C =

cycle crunch n.,obs.

A situation wherein the number of people trying to use a computer simultaneously has reached the point where no one can get enough cycles because they are spread too thin and the system has probably begun to **thrash**. This scenario is an inevitable result of Parkinson's Law applied to timesharing. Usually the only solution is to buy more computer. Happily, this has rapidly become easier since the mid-1980s, so much so that the very term `cycle crunch' now has a faintly archaic flavor; most hackers now use workstations or personal computers as opposed to traditional timesharing systems, and are far more likely to complain of `bandwidth crunch' on their shared networks rather than cycle crunch.

Node:cycle drought, Next:cycle of reincarnation, Previous:cycle crunch, Up:= C =

cycle drought n.

A scarcity of cycles. It may be due to a **cycle crunch**, but it could also occur because part of the computer is temporarily not working, leaving fewer cycles to go around. "The **high moby** is **down**, so we're running with only half the usual amount of memory. There will be a cycle drought until it's fixed."

Node:cycle of reincarnation, Next:cycle server, Previous:cycle drought, Up:= C =

cycle of reincarnation n.

See **wheel of reincarnation**.

Node:cycle server, Next:cypherpunk, Previous:cycle of reincarnation, Up:= C =

cycle server n.

A powerful machine that exists primarily for running large compute-, disk-, or memory-intensive jobs (more formally called a `compute server'). Implies that interactive tasks such as editing are done on other machines on the network, such as workstations.

Node:cypherpunk, Next:C|N>K, Previous:cycle server, Up:= C =

cypherpunk n.

[from **cyberpunk**] Someone interested in the uses of encryption via electronic ciphers for enhancing personal privacy and guarding against tyranny by centralized, authoritarian power structures, especially government. There is an active cypherpunks mailing list at cypherpunks-request@toad.com coordinating work on public-key encryption freeware, privacy, and digital cash. See also **tentacle**.

Node:C|N>K, Next:D. C. Power Lab, Previous:cypherpunk, Up:= C =

C|N>K n.

[Usenet] Coffee through Nose to Keyboard; that is, "I laughed so hard I **snarf**ed my coffee onto my keyboard.". Common on *alt.fan.pratchett* and **scary devil monastery**; recognized elsewhere. The Acronymphomania FAQ on *alt.fan.pratchett* recognizes variants such as T|N>K = `Tea through Nose to Keyboard' and C|N>S = `Coffee through Nose to Screen'.

= D =

- D. C. Power Lab:
- daemon:
- daemon book:
- dahmum:
- dancing frog:
- dangling pointer:
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- Datamation:
- DAU:
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- day mode:
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- dead:
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- deep hack mode:
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- defined as:
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- demigod:
- demo:
- demo mode:
- demoeffect:
- demogroup:
- demon:
- demon dialer:

- demoparty:
- demoscene:
- dentro:
- depeditate:
- deprecated:
- derf:
- deserves to lose:
- desk check:
- despew:
- Devil Book:
- /dev/null:
- dickless workstation:
- dictionary flame:
- diddle:
- die:
- die horribly:
- diff:
- digit:
- dike:
- Dilbert:
- ding:
- dink:
- dinosaur:
- dinosaur pen:
- dinosaurs mating:
- dirtball:
- dirty power:
- disclaimer:
- Discordianism:
- disk farm:
- display hack:
- dispress:
- Dissociated Press:
- distribution:
- disusered:
- do protocol:
- doc:
- documentation:
- dodgy:
- dogcow:
- dogfood:
- dogpile:
- dogwash:
- domainist:
- Don't do that then!:
- dongle:
- dongle-disk:
- donuts:
- doorstop:
- DoS attack:
- dot file:
- double bucky:

- doubled sig:
- down:
- download:
- DP:
- DPB:
- DPer:
- Dr. Fred Mbogo:
- dragon:
- Dragon Book:
- drain:
- dread high-bit disease:
- Dread Questionmark Disease:
- DRECNET:
- driver:
- droid:
- drone:
- drool-proof paper:
- drop on the floor:
- drop-ins:
- drop-outs:
- drugged:
- drum:
- drunk mouse syndrome:
- dub dub dub:
- Duff's device:
- dumb terminal:
- dumbass attack:
- dumbed down:
- dump:
- dumpster diving:
- dup killer:
- dup loop:
- dusty deck:
- DWIM:
- dynner:

Node:D. C. Power Lab, Next:daemon, Previous:C|N>K, Up:= D =

D. C. Power Lab n.

The former site of **SAIL**. Hackers thought this was very funny because the obvious connection to electrical engineering was nonexistent -- the lab was named for a Donald C. Power. Compare **Marginal Hacks**.

Node:daemon, Next:daemon book, Previous:D. C. Power Lab, Up:= D =

daemon /day'mn/ or /dee'mn/ n.

[from the mythological meaning, later rationalized as the acronym `Disk And Execution MONitor'] A program that is not invoked explicitly, but lies dormant waiting for some condition(s) to occur. The idea

is that the perpetrator of the condition need not be aware that a daemon is lurking (though often a program will commit an action only because it knows that it will implicitly invoke a daemon). For example, under **ITS** writing a file on the **LPT** spooler's directory would invoke the spooling daemon, which would then print the file. The advantage is that programs wanting (in this example) files printed need neither compete for access to nor understand any idiosyncrasies of the **LPT**. They simply enter their implicit requests and let the daemon decide what to do with them. Daemons are usually spawned automatically by the system, and may either live forever or be regenerated at intervals.

Daemon and **demon** are often used interchangeably, but seem to have distinct connotations. The term `daemon' was introduced to computing by **CTSS** people (who pronounced it /dee'mon/) and used it to refer to what ITS called a **dragon**; the prototype was a program called DAEMON that automatically made tape backups of the file system. Although the meaning and the pronunciation have drifted, we think this glossary reflects current (2000) usage.

Node:daemon book, Next:dahmum, Previous:daemon, Up:= D =

daemon book n.

"The Design and Implementation of the 4.3BSD UNIX Operating System", by Samuel J. Leffler, Marshall Kirk McKusick, Michael J. Karels, and John S. Quarterman (Addison-Wesley Publishers, 1989, ISBN 0-201-06196-1); or "The Design and Implementation of the 4.4 BSD Operating System" by Marshall Kirk McKusick, Keith Bostic, Michael J. Karels and John S. Quarterman (Addison-Wesley Longman, 1996, SBN 0-201-54979-4) Either of the standard reference books on the internals of **BSD** Unix. So called because the covers have a picture depicting a little devil (a visual play on **daemon**) in sneakers, holding a pitchfork (referring to one of the characteristic features of Unix, the `fork(2)` system call). Also known as the **Devil Book**.

Node:dahmum, Next:dancing frog, Previous:daemon book, Up:= D =

dahmum /dah'mum/ n.

[Usenet] The material of which protracted **flame war**s, especially those about operating systems, is composed. Homeomorphic to **spam**. The term `dahmum' is derived from the name of a militant **OS/2** advocate, and originated when an extensively crossposted OS/2-versus-**Linux** debate was fed through **Dissociated Press**.

Node:dancing frog, Next:dangling pointer, Previous:dahmum, Up:= D =

dancing frog n.

[Vancouver area] A problem that occurs on a computer that will not reappear while anyone else is watching. From the classic Warner Brothers cartoon "One Froggy Evening", featuring a dancing and singing Michigan J. Frog that just croaks when anyone else is around (now the WB network mascot).

Node:dangling pointer, Next:dark-side hacker, Previous:dancing frog, Up:= D =

dangling pointer n.

[common] A reference that doesn't actually lead anywhere (in C and some other languages, a pointer that doesn't actually point at anything valid). Usually this happens because it formerly pointed to something

that has moved or disappeared. Used as jargon in a generalization of its techspeak meaning; for example, a local phone number for a person who has since moved to the other coast is a dangling pointer. Compare **dead link**.

Node:dark-side hacker, Next:Datamation, Previous:dangling pointer, Up:= D =

dark-side hacker n.

A criminal or malicious hacker; a **cracker**. From George Lucas's Darth Vader, "seduced by the dark side of the Force". The implication that hackers form a sort of elite of technological Jedi Knights is intended. Oppose **samurai**.

Node:Datamation, Next:DAU, Previous:dark-side hacker, Up:= D =

Datamation /day`t*-may'sh*n/ n.

A magazine that many hackers assume all **suit**s read. Used to question an unbelieved quote, as in "Did you read that in `Datamation?'" (But see below; this slur may be dated by the time you read this.) It used to publish something hackishly funny every once in a while, like the original paper on **COME FROM** in 1973, and Ed Post's "Real Programmers Don't Use Pascal" ten years later, but for a long time after that it was much more exclusively **suit**-oriented and boring. Following a change of editorship in 1994, Datamation is trying for more of the technical content and irreverent humor that marked its early days.

Datamation now has a WWW page at http://www.datamation.com worth visiting for its selection of computer humor, including "Real Programmers Don't Use Pascal" and the `Bastard Operator From Hell' stories by Simon Travaglia (see **BOFH**).

Node:DAU, Next:Dave the Resurrector, Previous:Datamation, Up:= D =

DAU /dow/ n.

[German FidoNet] German acronym for Dümmster Anzunehmender User (stupidest imaginable user). From the engineering-slang GAU for Grösster Anzunehmender Unfall, worst assumable accident, esp. of a LNG tank farm plant or something with similarly disastrous consequences. In popular German, GAU is used only to refer to worst-case nuclear acidents such as a core meltdown. See **cretin**, **fool**, **loser** and **weasel**.

Node:Dave the Resurrector, Next:day mode, Previous:DAU, Up:= D =

Dave the Resurrector n.

[Usenet; also abbreviated DtR] A **cancelbot** that cancels cancels. Dave the Resurrector originated when some **spam**-spewers decided to try to impede spam-fighting by wholesale cancellation of anti-spam coordination messages in the *news.admin.net-abuse.usenet* newsgroup.

Node:day mode, Next:dd, Previous:Dave the Resurrector, Up:= D =

day mode n.

See **phase** (sense 1). Used of people only.

Node:dd, Next:DDT, Previous:day mode, Up:= D =

dd /dee-dee/ vt.

[Unix: from IBM **JCL**] Equivalent to **cat** or **BLT**. Originally the name of a Unix copy command with special options suitable for block-oriented devices; it was often used in heavy-handed system maintenance, as in "Let's `dd` the root partition onto a tape, then use the boot PROM to load it back on to a new disk". The Unix `dd(1)` was designed with a weird, distinctly non-Unixy keyword option syntax reminiscent of IBM System/360 JCL (which had an elaborate DD `Dataset Definition' specification for I/O devices); though the command filled a need, the interface design was clearly a prank. The jargon usage is now very rare outside Unix sites and now nearly obsolete even there, as `dd(1)` has been **deprecated** for a long time (though it has no exact replacement). The term has been displaced by **BLT** or simple English `copy'.

Node:DDT, Next:de-rezz, Previous:dd, Up:= D =

DDT /D-D-T/ n.

[from the insecticide para-dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethene] 1. Generic term for a program that assists in debugging other programs by showing individual machine instructions in a readable symbolic form and letting the user change them. In this sense the term DDT is now archaic, having been widely displaced by `debugger' or names of individual programs like `adb`, `sdb`, `dbx`, or `gdb`. 2. [ITS] Under MIT's fabled **ITS** operating system, DDT (running under the alias HACTRN, a six-letterism for `Hack Translator') was also used as the **shell** or top level command language used to execute other programs. 3. Any one of several specific DDTs (sense 1) supported on early **DEC** hardware and CP/M. The PDP-10 Reference Handbook (1969) contained a footnote on the first page of the documentation for DDT that illuminates the origin of the term:

> Historical footnote: DDT was developed at MIT for the PDP-1 computer in 1961. At that time DDT stood for "DEC Debugging Tape". Since then, the idea of an on-line debugging program has propagated throughout the computer industry. DDT programs are now available for all DEC computers. Since media other than tape are now frequently used, the more descriptive name "Dynamic Debugging Technique" has been adopted, retaining the DDT abbreviation. Confusion between DDT-10 and another well known pesticide, dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane (C14-H9-Cl5) should be minimal since each attacks a different, and apparently mutually exclusive, class of bugs.

(The `tape' referred to was, incidentally, not magnetic but paper.) Sadly, this quotation was removed from later editions of the handbook after the **suit**s took over and **DEC** became much more `businesslike'.

The history above is known to many old-time hackers. But there's more: Peter Samson, compiler of the original **TMRC** lexicon, reports that he named `DDT' after a similar tool on the TX-0 computer, the direct ancestor of the PDP-1 built at MIT's Lincoln Lab in 1957. The debugger on that ground-breaking machine (the first transistorized computer) rejoiced in the name FLIT (FLexowriter Interrogation Tape).

Node:de-rezz, Next:dead, Previous:DDT, Up:= D =

de-rezz /dee-rez'/

[from `de-resolve' via the movie "Tron"] (also `derez') 1. vi. To disappear or dissolve; the image that goes with it is of an object breaking up into raster lines and static and then dissolving. Occasionally used of a person who seems to have suddenly `fuzzed out' mentally rather than physically. Usage: extremely silly, also rare. This verb was actually invented as *fictional* hacker jargon, and adopted in a spirit of irony by real hackers years after the fact. 2. vt. The Macintosh resource decompiler. On a Macintosh, many program structures (including the code itself) are managed in small segments of the program file known as `resources'; `Rez' and `DeRez' are a pair of utilities for compiling and decompiling resource files. Thus, decompiling a resource is `derezzing'. Usage: very common.

Node:dead, Next:dead code, Previous:de-rezz, Up:= D =

dead adj.

1. Non-functional; **down**; **crash**ed. Especially used of hardware. 2. At XEROX PARC, software that is working but not undergoing continued development and support. 3. Useless; inaccessible. Antonym: `live'. Compare **dead code**.

Node:dead code, Next:dead link, Previous:dead, Up:= D =

dead code n.

Routines that can never be accessed because all calls to them have been removed, or code that cannot be reached because it is guarded by a control structure that provably must always transfer control somewhere else. The presence of dead code may reveal either logical errors due to alterations in the program or significant changes in the assumptions and environment of the program (see also **software rot**); a good compiler should report dead code so a maintainer can think about what it means. (Sometimes it simply means that an *extremely* defensive programmer has inserted **can't happen** tests which really can't happen -- yet.) Syn. **grunge**. See also **dead**, and **The Story of Mel**.

Node:dead link, Next:DEADBEEF, Previous:dead code, Up:= D =

dead link n.

[very common] A World-Wide-Web URL that no longer points to the information it was written to reach. Usually this happens because the document has been moved or deleted. Lots of dead links make a WWW page frustrating and useless and are the #1 sign of poor page maintainance. Compare **dangling pointer**, **link rot**.

Node:DEADBEEF, Next:deadlock, Previous:dead link, Up:= D =

DEADBEEF /ded-beef/ n.

The hexadecimal word-fill pattern for freshly allocated memory (decimal -21524111) under a number of IBM environments, including the RS/6000. Some modern debugging tools deliberately fill freed memory with this value as a way of converting **heisenbug**s into **Bohr bug**s. As in "Your program is DEADBEEF" (meaning gone, aborted, flushed from memory); if you start from an odd half-word boundary, of course, you have BEEFDEAD. See also the anecdote under **fool**.

Node:deadlock, Next:deadly embrace, Previous:DEADBEEF, Up:= D =

deadlock n.

1. [techspeak] A situation wherein two or more processes are unable to proceed because each is waiting for one of the others to do something. A common example is a program communicating to a server, which may find itself waiting for output from the server before sending anything more to it, while the server is similarly waiting for more input from the controlling program before outputting anything. (It is reported that this particular flavor of deadlock is sometimes called a `starvation deadlock', though the term `starvation' is more properly used for situations where a program can never run simply because it never gets high enough priority. Another common flavor is `constipation', in which each process is trying to send stuff to the other but all buffers are full because nobody is reading anything.) See **deadly embrace**. 2. Also used of deadlock-like interactions between humans, as when two people meet in a narrow corridor, and each tries to be polite by moving aside to let the other pass, but they end up swaying from side to side without making any progress because they always move the same way at the same time.

Node:deadly embrace, Next:death code, Previous:deadlock, Up:= D =

deadly embrace n.

Same as **deadlock**, though usually used only when exactly two processes are involved. This is the more popular term in Europe, while **deadlock** predominates in the United States.

Node:death code, Next:Death Square, Previous:deadly embrace, Up:= D =

death code n.

A routine whose job is to set everything in the computer -- registers, memory, flags, everything -- to zero, including that portion of memory where it is running; its last act is to stomp on its own "store zero" instruction. Death code isn't very useful, but writing it is an interesting hacking challenge on architectures where the instruction set makes it possible, such as the PDP-8 (it has also been done on the DG Nova).

Perhaps the ultimate death code is on the TI 990 series, where all registers are actually in RAM, and the instruction "store immediate 0" has the opcode "0". The PC will immediately wrap around core as many times as it can until a user hits HALT. Any empty memory location is death code. Worse, the manufacturer recommended use of this instruction in startup code (which would be in ROM and therefore survive).

Node:Death Square, Next:Death Star, Previous:death code, Up:= D =

Death Square n.

The corporate logo of Novell, the people who acquired USL after AT&T let go of it (Novell eventually sold the Unix group to SCO). Coined by analogy with **Death Star**, because many people believed Novell was bungling the lead in Unix systems exactly as AT&T did for many years.

Node:Death Star, Next:DEC, Previous:Death Square, Up:= D =

Death Star n.

[from the movie "Star Wars"] 1. The AT&T corporate logo, which appears on computers sold by AT&T and bears an uncanny resemblance to the Death Star in the movie. This usage is particularly common among partisans of **BSD** Unix, who tend to regard the AT&T versions as inferior and AT&T as a bad guy. Copies still circulate of a poster printed by Mt. Xinu showing a starscape with a space fighter labeled 4.2 BSD streaking away from a broken AT&T logo wreathed in flames. 2. AT&T's internal magazine, "Focus", uses `death star' to describe an incorrectly done AT&T logo in which the inner circle in the top left is dark instead of light -- a frequent result of dark-on-light logo images.

Node:DEC, Next:DEC Wars, Previous:Death Star, Up:= D =

DEC /dek/ n.

1. v. Verbal (and only rarely written) shorthand for *decrement*, i.e. `decrease by one'. Especially used by assembly programmers, as many assembly languages have a `dec` mnemonic. Antonym: **inc**. 2. n. Commonly used abbreviation for Digital Equipment Corporation, later deprecated by DEC itself in favor of "Digital" and now entirely obsolete following the buyout by Compaq. Before the **killer micro** revolution of the late 1980s, hackerdom was closely symbiotic with DEC's pioneering timesharing machines. The first of the group of cultures described by this lexicon nucleated around the PDP-1 (see **TMRC**). Subsequently, the PDP-6, **PDP-10**, **PDP-20**, PDP-11 and **VAX** were all foci of large and important hackerdoms, and DEC machines long dominated the ARPANET and Internet machine population. DEC was the technological leader of the minicomputer era (roughly 1967 to 1987), but its failure to embrace microcomputers and Unix early cost it heavily in profits and prestige after **silicon** got cheap. Nevertheless, the microprocessor design tradition owes a major debt to the PDP-11 instruction set, and every one of the major general-purpose microcomputer OSs so far (CP/M, MS-DOS, Unix, OS/2, Windows NT) was either genetically descended from a DEC OS, or incubated on DEC hardware, or both. Accordingly, DEC was for many years still regarded with a certain wry affection even among many hackers too young to have grown up on DEC machines.

DEC reclaimed some of its old reputation among techies in the first half of the 1990s. The success of the Alpha, an innovatively-designed and very high-performance **killer micro**, helped a lot. So did DEC's newfound receptiveness to Unix and open systems in general. When Compaq acquired DEC at the end of 1998 there was some concern that these gains would be lost along with the DEC nameplate, but the merged company has so far turned out to be culturally dominated by the ex-DEC side.

Node:DEC Wars, Next:decay, Previous:DEC, Up:= D =

DEC Wars n.

A 1983 **Usenet** posting by Alan Hastings and Steve Tarr spoofing the "Star Wars" movies in hackish terms. Some years later, ESR (disappointed by Hastings and Tarr's failure to exploit a great premise more thoroughly) posted a 3-times-longer complete rewrite called Unix WARS; the two are often confused.

Node:decay, Next:deckle, Previous:DEC Wars, Up:= D =

decay n.,vi

[from nuclear physics] An automatic conversion which is applied to most array-valued expressions in **C**; they `decay into' pointer-valued expressions pointing to the array's first element. This term is borderline techspeak, but is not used in the official standard for the language.

Node:deckle, Next:DED, Previous:decay, Up:= D =

deckle /dek'l/ n.

[from dec- and **nybble**; the original spelling seems to have been `decle'] Two **nickle**s; 10 bits. Reported among developers for Mattel's GI 1600 (the Intellivision games processor), a chip with 16-bit-wide RAM but 10-bit-wide ROM. See **nybble** for other such terms.

Node:DED, Next:deep hack mode, Previous:deckle, Up:= D =

DED /D-E-D/ n.

Dark-Emitting Diode (that is, a burned-out LED). Compare **SED**, **LER**, **write-only memory**. In the early 1970s both Signetics and Texas instruments released DED spec sheets as **AFJ**s (suggested uses included "as a power-off indicator").

Node:deep hack mode, Next:deep magic, Previous:DED, Up:= D =

deep hack mode n.

See **hack mode**.

Node:deep magic, Next:deep space, Previous:deep hack mode, Up:= D =

deep magic n.

[poss. from C. S. Lewis's "Narnia" books] An awesomely arcane technique central to a program or system, esp. one neither generally published nor available to hackers at large (compare **black art**); one that could only have been composed by a true **wizard**. Compiler optimization techniques and many aspects of **OS** design used to be **deep magic**; many techniques in cryptography, signal processing, graphics, and AI still are. Compare **heavy wizardry**. Esp. found in comments of the form "Deep magic begins here...". Compare **voodoo programming**.

Node:deep space, Next:defenestration, Previous:deep magic, Up:= D =

deep space n.

1. Describes the notional location of any program that has gone **off the trolley**. Esp. used of programs that just sit there silently grinding long after either failure or some output is expected. "Uh oh. I should have gotten a prompt ten seconds ago. The program's in deep space somewhere." Compare **buzz**, **catatonic**, **hyperspace**. 2. The metaphorical location of a human so dazed and/or confused or caught up in some esoteric form of **bogosity** that he or she no longer responds coherently to normal communication. Compare **page out**.

Node:defenestration, Next:defined as, Previous:deep space, Up:= D =

defenestration n.

[mythically from a traditional Czech assasination method, via SF fandom] 1. Proper karmic retribution for an incorrigible punster. "Oh, ghod, that was *awful*!" "Quick! Defenestrate him!" 2. The act of exiting a window system in order to get better response time from a full-screen program. This comes from the dictionary meaning of `defenestrate', which is to throw something out a window. 3. The act of discarding something under the assumption that it will improve matters. "I don't have any disk space left." "Well, why don't you defenestrate that 100 megs worth of old core dumps?" 4. Under a GUI, the act of dragging something out of a window (onto the screen). "Next, defenestrate the MugWump icon." 5. The act of completely removing Micro$oft Windows from a PC in favor of a better OS (typically Linux).

Node:defined as, Next:dehose, Previous:defenestration, Up:= D =

defined as adj.

In the role of, usually in an organization-chart sense. "Pete is currently defined as bug prioritizer." Compare **logical**.

Node:dehose, Next:deliminator, Previous:defined as, Up:= D =

dehose /dee-hohz/ vt.

To clear a **hosed** condition.

Node:deliminator, Next:delint, Previous:dehose, Up:= D =

deliminator /de-lim'-in-ay-t*r/ n.

[portmanteau, delimiter + eliminate] A string or pattern used to delimit text into fields, but which is itself eliminated from the resulting list of fields. This jargon seems to have originated among Perl hackers in connection with the Perl split() function; however, it has been sighted in live use among Java and even Visual Basic programmers.

Node:delint, Next:delta, Previous:deliminator, Up:= D =

delint /dee-lint/ v. obs.

To modify code to remove problems detected when **lint**ing. Confusingly, this process is also referred to as `linting' code. This term is no longer in general use because ANSI C compilers typically issue compile-time warnings almost as detailed as lint warnings.

Node:delta, Next:demented, Previous:delint, Up:= D =

delta n.

1. [techspeak] A quantitative change, especially a small or incremental one (this use is general in physics and engineering). "I just doubled the speed of my program!" "What was the delta on program size?" "About 30 percent." (He doubled the speed of his program, but increased its size by only 30 percent.) 2. [Unix] A **diff**, especially a **diff** stored under the set of version-control tools called SCCS (Source Code Control System) or RCS (Revision Control System). 3. n. A small quantity, but not as small as **epsilon**.

The jargon usage of **delta** and **epsilon** stems from the traditional use of these letters in mathematics for very small numerical quantities, particularly in `epsilon-delta' proofs in limit theory (as in the differential calculus). The term **delta** is often used, once **epsilon** has been mentioned, to mean a quantity that is slightly bigger than **epsilon** but still very small. "The cost isn't epsilon, but it's delta" means that the cost isn't totally negligible, but it is nevertheless very small. Common constructions include `within delta of --', `within epsilon of --': that is, `close to' and `even closer to'.

Node:demented, Next:demigod, Previous:delta, Up:= D =

demented adj.

Yet another term of disgust used to describe a malfunctioning program. The connotation in this case is that the program works as designed, but the design is bad. Said, for example, of a program that generates large numbers of meaningless error messages, implying that it is on the brink of imminent collapse. Compare **wonky**, **brain-damaged**, **bozotic**.

Node:demigod, Next:demo, Previous:demented, Up:= D =

demigod n.

A hacker with years of experience, a world-wide reputation, and a major role in the development of at least one design, tool, or game used by or known to more than half of the hacker community. To qualify as a genuine demigod, the person must recognizably identify with the hacker community and have helped shape it. Major demigods include Ken Thompson and Dennis Ritchie (co-inventors of **Unix** and **C**), Richard M. Stallman (inventor of **EMACS**), Larry Wall (inventor of **Perl**), Linus Torvalds (inventor of Linux), and most recently James Gosling (inventor of Java). In their hearts of hearts, most hackers dream of someday becoming demigods themselves, and more than one major software project has been driven to completion by the author's veiled hopes of apotheosis. See also **net.god**, **true-hacker**.

Node:demo, Next:demo mode, Previous:demigod, Up:= D =

demo /de'moh/

[short for `demonstration'] 1. v. To demonstrate a product or prototype. A far more effective way of inducing bugs to manifest than any number of **test** runs, especially when important people are watching. 2. n. The act of demoing. "I've gotta give a demo of the drool-proof interface; how does it work again?" 3. n. Esp. as `demo version', can refer either to an early, barely-functional version of a program which can be used for demonstration purposes as long as the operator uses *exactly* the right commands and skirts its numerous bugs, deficiencies, and unimplemented portions, or to a special version of a program (frequently with some features crippled) which is distributed at little or no cost to the user for enticement purposes. 4. [**demoscene**] A sequence of **demoeffect**s (usually) combined with self-composed music and hand-drawn ("pixelated") graphics. These days (1997) usually built to attend a **compo**. Often called `eurodemos' outside Europe, as most of the **demoscene** activity seems to have gathered in northern Europe and especially Scandinavia. See also **intro**, **dentro**.

Node:demo mode, Next:demoeffect, Previous:demo, Up:= D =

demo mode n.

1. [Sun] The state of being **heads down** in order to finish code in time for a **demo**, usually due yesterday.

2. A mode in which video games sit by themselves running through a portion of the game, also known as `attract mode'. Some serious **app**s have a demo mode they use as a screen saver, or may go through a demo mode on startup (for example, the Microsoft Windows opening screen -- which lets you impress your neighbors without actually having to put up with **Microsloth Windows**).

Node:demoeffect, Next:demogroup, Previous:demo mode, Up:= D =

demoeffect n.

[**demoscene**] What among hackers is called a **display hack**. Classical effects include "plasma" (colorful mess), "keftales" (x*x+y*y and other similar patterns, usually combined with color-cycling), realtime fractals, realtime 3d graphics, etc. Historically, demo effects have cheated as much as possible to gain more speed and more complexity, using low-precision math and masses of assembler code and building animation realtime are three common tricks, but use of special hardware to fake effects is a **Good Thing** on the demoscene (though this is becoming less common as platforms like the Amiga fade away).

Node:demogroup, Next:demon, Previous:demoeffect, Up:= D =

demogroup n.

[**demoscene**] A group of **demo** (sense 4) composers. Job titles within a group include coders (the ones who write programs), graphicians (the ones who painstakingly pixelate the fine art), musicians (the music composers), **sysop**s, traders/swappers (the ones who do the trading and other PR), and organizers (in larger groups). It is not uncommon for one person to do multiple jobs, but it has been observed that good coders are rarely good composers and vice versa. [How odd. Musical talent seems common among Internet/Unix hackers --ESR]

Node:demon, Next:demon dialer, Previous:demogroup, Up:= D =

demon n.

1. [MIT] A portion of a program that is not invoked explicitly, but that lies dormant waiting for some condition(s) to occur. See **daemon**. The distinction is that demons are usually processes within a program, while daemons are usually programs running on an operating system. 2. [outside MIT] Often used equivalently to **daemon** -- especially in the **Unix** world, where the latter spelling and pronunciation is considered mildly archaic.

Demons in sense 1 are particularly common in AI programs. For example, a knowledge-manipulation program might implement inference rules as demons. Whenever a new piece of knowledge was added, various demons would activate (which demons depends on the particular piece of data) and would create additional pieces of knowledge by applying their respective inference rules to the original piece. These new pieces could in turn activate more demons as the inferences filtered down through chains of logic. Meanwhile, the main program could continue with whatever its primary task was.

Node:demon dialer, Next:demoparty, Previous:demon, Up:= D =

demon dialer n.

A program which repeatedly calls the same telephone number. Demon dialing may be benign (as when a number of communications programs contend for legitimate access to a **BBS** line) or malign (that is, used

as a prank or denial-of-service attack). This term dates from the **blue box** days of the 1970s and early 1980s and is now semi-obsolescent among **phreaker**s; see **war dialer** for its contemporary progeny.

Node:demoparty, Next:demoscene, Previous:demon dialer, Up:= D =

demoparty n.

[**demoscene**] Aboveground descendant of the **copyparty**, with emphasis shifted away from software piracy and towards **compo**s. Smaller demoparties, for 100 persons or less, are held quite often, sometimes even once a month, and usually last for one to two days. On the other end of the scale, huge demo parties are held once a year (and four of these have grown very large and occur annually - Assembly in Finland, The Party in Denmark, The Gathering in Norway, and NAID somewhere in north America). These parties usually last for three to five days, have room for 3000-5000 people, and have a party network with connection to the internet.

Node:demoscene, Next:dentro, Previous:demoparty, Up:= D =

demoscene /dem'oh-seen/

[also `demo scene'] A culture of multimedia hackers located primarily in Scandinavia and northern Europe. Demoscene folklore recounts that when old-time **warez d00dz** cracked some piece of software they often added an advertisement of in the beginning, usually containing colorful **display hack**s with greetings to other cracking groups. The demoscene was born among people who decided building these display hacks is more interesting than hacking and began to build self-contained display hacks of considerable elaboration and beauty (within the culture such a hack is called a **demo**). The split seems to have happened at the end of the 1980s. As more of these **demogroup**s emerged, they started to have **compo**s at copying parties (see **copyparty**), which later evolved to standalone events (see **demoparty**). The demoscene has retained some traits from the **warez d00dz**, including their style of handles and group names and some of their jargon.

Traditionally demos were written in assembly language, with lots of smart tricks, self-modifying code, undocumented op-codes and the like. Some time around 1995, people started coding demos in C, and a couple of years after that, they also started using Java.

Ten years on (in 1998-1999), the demoscene is changing as its original platforms (C64, Amiga, Spectrum, Atari ST, IBM PC under DOS) die out and activity shifts towards Windows, Linux, and the Internet. While deeply underground in the past, demoscene is trying to get into the mainstream as accepted art form, and one symptom of this is the commercialization of bigger demoparties. Older demosceneers frown at this, but the majority think it's a good direction. Many demosceneers end up working in the computer game industry. Demoscene resource pages are available at http://www.oldskool.org/demos/explained/ and http://www.scene.org/.

Node:dentro, Next:depeditate, Previous:demoscene, Up:= D =

dentro /den'troh/

[**demoscene**] Combination of **demo** (sense 4) and **intro**. Other name mixings include intmo, dentmo etc. and are used usually when the authors are not quite sure whether the program is a **demo** or an **intro**. Special-purpose coinages like wedtro (some member of a group got married), invtro (invitation intro) etc. have also been sighted.

Node:depeditate, Next:deprecated, Previous:dentro, Up:= D =

depeditate /dee-ped'*-tayt/ n.

[by (faulty) analogy with `decapitate'] Humorously, to cut off the feet of. When one is using some computer-aided typesetting tools, careless placement of text blocks within a page or above a rule can result in chopped-off letter descenders. Such letters are said to have been depeditated.

Node:deprecated, Next:derf, Previous:depeditate, Up:= D =

deprecated adj.

Said of a program or feature that is considered obsolescent and in the process of being phased out, usually in favor of a specified replacement. Deprecated features can, unfortunately, linger on for many years. This term appears with distressing frequency in standards documents when the committees writing the documents realize that large amounts of extant (and presumably happily working) code depend on the feature(s) that have passed out of favor. See also **dusty deck**.

Node:derf, Next:deserves to lose, Previous:deprecated, Up:= D =

derf /derf/ v.,n.

[PLATO] The act of exploiting a terminal which someone else has absentmindedly left logged on, to use that person's account, especially to post articles intended to make an ass of the victim you're impersonating. It has been alleged that the term originated as a reversal of the name of the gentleman who most usually left himself vulnerable to it, who also happened to be the head of the department that handled PLATO at the University of Delaware.

Node:deserves to lose, Next:desk check, Previous:derf, Up:= D =

deserves to lose adj.

[common] Said of someone who willfully does the **Wrong Thing**; humorously, if one uses a feature known to be **marginal**. What is meant is that one deserves the consequences of one's **losing** actions. "Boy, anyone who tries to use **mess-dos** deserves to **lose**!" (**ITS** fans used to say the same thing of **Unix**; many still do.) See also **screw**, **chomp**, **bagbiter**.

Node:desk check, Next:despew, Previous:deserves to lose, Up:= D =

desk check n.,v.

To **grovel** over hardcopy of source code, mentally simulating the control flow; a method of catching bugs. No longer common practice in this age of on-screen editing, fast compiles, and sophisticated debuggers -- though some maintain stoutly that it ought to be. Compare **eyeball search**, **vdiff**, **vgrep**.

Node:despew, Next:Devil Book, Previous:desk check, Up:= D =

despew /d*-spyoo'/ v.

[Usenet] To automatically generate a large amount of garbage to the net, esp. from an automated posting program gone wild. See **ARMM**.

Node:Devil Book, Next:/dev/null, Previous:despew, Up:= D =

Devil Book n.

See **daemon book**, the term preferred by its authors.

Node:/dev/null, Next:dickless workstation, Previous:Devil Book, Up:= D =

/dev/null /dev-nuhl/ n.

[from the Unix null device, used as a data sink] A notional `black hole' in any information space being discussed, used, or referred to. A controversial posting, for example, might end "Kudos to rasputin@kremlin.org, flames to /dev/null". See **bit bucket**.

Node:dickless workstation, Next:dictionary flame, Previous:/dev/null, Up:= D =

dickless workstation n.

Extremely pejorative hackerism for `diskless workstation', a class of botches including the Sun 3/50 and other machines designed exclusively to network with an expensive central disk server. These combine all the disadvantages of time-sharing with all the disadvantages of distributed personal computers; typically, they cannot even **boot** themselves without help (in the form of some kind of **breath-of-life packet**) from the server.

Node:dictionary flame, Next:diddle, Previous:dickless workstation, Up:= D =

dictionary flame n.

[Usenet] An attempt to sidetrack a debate away from issues by insisting on meanings for key terms that presuppose a desired conclusion or smuggle in an implicit premise. A common tactic of people who prefer argument over definitions to disputes about reality. Compare **spelling flame**.

Node:diddle, Next:die, Previous:dictionary flame, Up:= D =

diddle

1. vt. To work with or modify in a not particularly serious manner. "I diddled a copy of **ADVENT** so it didn't double-space all the time." "Let's diddle this piece of code and see if the problem goes away." See **tweak** and **twiddle**. 2. n. The action or result of diddling. See also **tweak**, **twiddle**, **frob**.

Node:die, Next:die horribly, Previous:diddle, Up:= D =

die v.

Syn. **crash**. Unlike **crash**, which is used primarily of hardware, this verb is used of both hardware and software. See also **go flatline**, **casters-up mode**.

Node:die horribly, Next:diff, Previous:die, Up:= D =

die horribly v.

The software equivalent of **crash and burn**, and the preferred emphatic form of **die**. "The converter choked on an FF in its input and died horribly".

Node:diff, Next:digit, Previous:die horribly, Up:= D =

diff /dif/ n.

1. A change listing, especially giving differences between (and additions to) source code or documents (the term is often used in the plural `diffs'). "Send me your diffs for the Jargon File!" Compare **vdiff**. 2. Specifically, such a listing produced by the `diff(1)` command, esp. when used as specification input to the `patch(1)` utility (which can actually perform the modifications; see **patch**). This is a common method of distributing patches and source updates in the Unix/C world. 3. v. To compare (whether or not by use of automated tools on machine-readable files); see also **vdiff**, **mod**.

Node:digit, Next:dike, Previous:diff, Up:= D =

digit n.,obs.

An employee of Digital Equipment Corporation. See also **VAX**, **VMS**, **PDP-10**, **TOPS-10**, **field circus**.

Node:dike, Next:Dilbert, Previous:digit, Up:= D =

dike vt.

To remove or disable a portion of something, as a wire from a computer or a subroutine from a program. A standard slogan is "When in doubt, dike it out". (The implication is that it is usually more effective to attack software problems by reducing complexity than by increasing it.) The word `dikes' is widely used among mechanics and engineers to mean `diagonal cutters', esp. the heavy-duty metal-cutting version, but may also refer to a kind of wire-cutters used by electronics techs. To `dike something out' means to use such cutters to remove something. Indeed, the TMRC Dictionary defined dike as "to attack with dikes". Among hackers this term has been metaphorically extended to informational objects such as sections of code.

Node:Dilbert, Next:ding, Previous:dike, Up:= D =

Dilbert

n. Name and title character of a comic strip nationally syndicated in the U.S. and enormously popular among hackers. Dilbert is an archetypical engineer-nerd who works at an anonymous high-technology company; the strips present a lacerating satire of insane working conditions and idiotic **management** practices all too readily recognized by hackers. Adams, who spent nine years in **cube** 4S700R at Pacific

Bell (not **DEC** as often reported), often remarks that he has never been able to come up with a fictional management blunder that his correspondents didn't quickly either report to have actually happened or top with a similar but even more bizarre incident. In 1996 Adams distilled his insights into the collective psychology of businesses into an even funnier book, "The Dilbert Principle" (HarperCollins, ISBN 0-887-30787-6). See also **pointy-haired**, **rat dance**.

Node:ding, Next:dink, Previous:Dilbert, Up:= D =

ding n.,vi.

1. Synonym for **feep**. Usage: rare among hackers, but commoner in the **Real World**. 2. `dinged': What happens when someone in authority gives you a minor bitching about something, esp. something trivial. "I was dinged for having a messy desk."

Node:dink, Next:dinosaur, Previous:ding, Up:= D =

dink /dink/ adj.

Said of a machine that has the **bitty box** nature; a machine too small to be worth bothering with -- sometimes the system you're currently forced to work on. First heard from an MIT hacker working on a CP/M system with 64K, in reference to any 6502 system, then from fans of 32-bit architectures about 16-bit machines. "GNUMACS will never work on that dink machine." Probably derived from mainstream `dinky', which isn't sufficiently pejorative. See **macdink**.

Node:dinosaur, Next:dinosaur pen, Previous:dink, Up:= D =

dinosaur n.

1. Any hardware requiring raised flooring and special power. Used especially of old minis and mainframes, in contrast with newer microprocessor-based machines. In a famous quote from the 1988 Unix EXPO, Bill Joy compared the liquid-cooled mainframe in the massive IBM display with a grazing dinosaur "with a truck outside pumping its bodily fluids through it". IBM was not amused. Compare **big iron**; see also **mainframe**. 2. [IBM] A very conservative user; a **zipperhead**.

Node:dinosaur pen, Next:dinosaurs mating, Previous:dinosaur, Up:= D =

dinosaur pen n.

A traditional **mainframe** computer room complete with raised flooring, special power, its own ultra-heavy-duty air conditioning, and a side order of Halon fire extinguishers. See **boa**.

Node:dinosaurs mating, Next:dirtball, Previous:dinosaur pen, Up:= D =

dinosaurs mating n.

Said to occur when yet another **big iron** merger or buyout occurs; reflects a perception by hackers that these signal another stage in the long, slow dying of the **mainframe** industry. In its glory days of the 1960s, it was `IBM and the Seven Dwarves': Burroughs, Control Data, General Electric, Honeywell,

NCR, RCA, and Univac. RCA and GE sold out early, and it was `IBM and the Bunch' (Burroughs, Univac, NCR, Control Data, and Honeywell) for a while. Honeywell was bought out by Bull; Burroughs merged with Univac to form Unisys (in 1984 -- this was when the phrase `dinosaurs mating' was coined); and in 1991 AT&T absorbed NCR (but spat it back out a few years later). Control Data still exists but is no longer in the mainframe business. More such earth-shaking unions of doomed giants seem inevitable.

Node:dirtball, Next:dirty power, Previous:dinosaurs mating, Up:= D =

dirtball n.

[XEROX PARC] A small, perhaps struggling outsider; not in the major or even the minor leagues. For example, "Xerox is not a dirtball company".

[Outsiders often observe in the PARC culture an institutional arrogance which usage of this term exemplifies. The brilliance and scope of PARC's contributions to computer science have been such that this superior attitude is not much resented. --ESR]

Node:dirty power, Next:disclaimer, Previous:dirtball, Up:= D =

dirty power n.

Electrical mains voltage that is unfriendly to the delicate innards of computers. Spikes, **drop-outs**, average voltage significantly higher or lower than nominal, or just plain noise can all cause problems of varying subtlety and severity (these are collectively known as **power hit**s).

Node:disclaimer, Next:Discordianism, Previous:dirty power, Up:= D =

disclaimer n.

[Usenet] Statement ritually appended to many Usenet postings (sometimes automatically, by the posting software) reiterating the fact (which should be obvious, but is easily forgotten) that the article reflects its author's opinions and not necessarily those of the organization running the machine through which the article entered the network.

Node:Discordianism, Next:disk farm, Previous:disclaimer, Up:= D =

Discordianism /dis-kor'di-*n-ism/ n.

The veneration of **Eris**, a.k.a. Discordia; widely popular among hackers. Discordianism was popularized by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson's novel "**Illuminatus!**" as a sort of self-subverting Dada-Zen for Westerners -- it should on no account be taken seriously but is far more serious than most jokes. Consider, for example, the Fifth Commandment of the Pentabarf, from "Principia Discordia": "A Discordian is Prohibited of Believing What he Reads." Discordianism is usually connected with an elaborate conspiracy theory/joke involving millennia-long warfare between the anarcho-surrealist partisans of Eris and a malevolent, authoritarian secret society called the Illuminati. See **Religion** in Appendix B, **Church of the SubGenius**, and **ha ha only serious**.

Node:disk farm, Next:display hack, Previous:Discordianism, Up:= D =

disk farm n.

(also **laundromat**) A large room or rooms filled with disk drives (esp. **washing machine**s).

Node:display hack, Next:dispress, Previous:disk farm, Up:= D =

display hack n.

A program with the same approximate purpose as a kaleidoscope: to make pretty pictures. Famous display hacks include **munching squares**, **smoking clover**, the BSD Unix `rain(6)` program, `worms(6)` on miscellaneous Unixes, and the **X** `kaleid(1)` program. Display hacks can also be implemented by creating text files containing numerous escape sequences for interpretation by a video terminal; one notable example displayed, on any VT100, a Christmas tree with twinkling lights and a toy train circling its base. The **hack value** of a display hack is proportional to the esthetic value of the images times the cleverness of the algorithm divided by the size of the code. Syn. **psychedelicware**.

Node:dispress, Next:Dissociated Press, Previous:display hack, Up:= D =

dispress vt.

[contraction of `Dissociated Press' due to eight-character MS-DOS filenames] To apply the **Dissociated Press** algorithm to a block of text. The resultant output is also referred to as a 'dispression'.

Node:Dissociated Press, Next:distribution, Previous:dispress, Up:= D =

Dissociated Press n.

[play on `Associated Press'; perhaps inspired by a reference in the 1950 Bugs Bunny cartoon "What's Up, Doc?"] An algorithm for transforming any text into potentially humorous garbage even more efficiently than by passing it through a **marketroid**. The algorithm starts by printing any N consecutive words (or letters) in the text. Then at every step it searches for any random occurrence in the original text of the last N words (or letters) already printed and then prints the next word or letter. **EMACS** has a handy command for this. Here is a short example of word-based Dissociated Press applied to an earlier version of this Jargon File:

> wart: n. A small, crocky **feature** that sticks out of an array (C has no checks for this). This is relatively benign and easy to spot if the phrase is bent so as to be not worth paying attention to the medium in question.

Here is a short example of letter-based Dissociated Press applied to the same source:

> window sysIWYG: n. A bit was named aften /bee't*/ prefer to use the other guy's re, especially in every cast a chuckle on neithout getting into useful informash speech makes removing a featuring a move or usage actual abstractionsidered interj. Indeed spectace logic or problem!

A hackish idle pastime is to apply letter-based Dissociated Press to a random body of text and **vgrep** the output in hopes of finding an interesting new word. (In the preceding example, `window sysIWYG' and `informash' show some promise.) Iterated applications of Dissociated Press usually yield better results. Similar techniques called `travesty generators' have been employed with considerable satirical effect to the utterances of Usenet flamers; see **pseudo**.

Node:distribution, Next:disusered, Previous:Dissociated Press, Up:= D =

distribution n.

1. A software source tree packaged for distribution; but see **kit**. Since about 1996 unqualified use of this term often implies `**Linux** distribution'. 2. A vague term encompassing mailing lists and Usenet newsgroups (but not **BBS** **fora**); any topic-oriented message channel with multiple recipients. 3. An information-space domain (usually loosely correlated with geography) to which propagation of a Usenet message is restricted; a much-underutilized feature.

Node:disusered, Next:do protocol, Previous:distribution, Up:= D =

disusered adj.

[Usenet] Said of a person whose account on a computer has been removed, esp. for cause rather than through normal attrition. "He got disusered when they found out he'd been cracking through the school's Internet access." The verbal form `disuser' is live but less common. Both usages probably derive from the DISUSER account status flag on VMS; setting it disables the account. Compare **star out**.

Node:do protocol, Next:doc, Previous:disusered, Up:= D =

do protocol vi.

[from network protocol programming] To perform an interaction with somebody or something that follows a clearly defined procedure. For example, "Let's do protocol with the check" at a restaurant means to ask for the check, calculate the tip and everybody's share, collect money from everybody, generate change as necessary, and pay the bill. See **protocol**.

Node:doc, Next:documentation, Previous:do protocol, Up:= D =

doc /dok/ n.

Common spoken and written shorthand for `documentation'. Often used in the plural `docs' and in the construction `doc file' (i.e., documentation available on-line).

Node:documentation, Next:dodgy, Previous:doc, Up:= D =

documentation n.

The multiple kilograms of macerated, pounded, steamed, bleached, and pressed trees that accompany most modern software or hardware products (see also **tree-killer**). Hackers seldom read paper documentation and (too) often resist writing it; they prefer theirs to be terse and on-line. A common comment on this predilection is "You can't **grep** dead trees". See **drool-proof paper**, **verbiage**, **treeware**.

Node:dodgy, Next:dogcow, Previous:documentation, Up:= D =

dodgy adj.

Syn. with **flaky**. Preferred outside the U.S.

Node:dogcow, Next:dogfood, Previous:dodgy, Up:= D =

dogcow /dog'kow/ n.

See **Moof**. The dogcow is a semi-legendary creature that lurks in the depths of the Macintosh Technical Notes Hypercard stack V3.1. The full story of the dogcow is told in technical note #31 (the particular dogcow illustrated is properly named `Clarus'). Option-shift-click will cause it to emit a characteristic `Moof!' or `!fooM' sound. *Getting* to tech note 31 is the hard part; to discover how to do that, one must needs examine the stack script with a hackerly eye. Clue: **rot13** is involved. A dogcow also appears if you choose `Page Setup...' with a LaserWriter selected and click on the `Options' button. It also lurks in other Mac printer drivers, notably those for the now-discontinued Style Writers. Pointers to all things dogcowish can be found at http://developer.apple.com/dev/dts/dogcow.html.

Node:dogfood, Next:dogpile, Previous:dogcow, Up:= D =

dogfood n.

[Microsoft, Netscape] Interim software used internally for testing. "To eat one's own dogfood" (from which the slang noun derives) means to use the software one is developing, as part of one's everyday development environment (the phrase is used outside Microsoft and Netscape). The practice is normal in the Linux community and elsewhere, but the term `dogfood' is seldom used as open-source betas tend to be quite tasty and nourishing. The idea is that developers who are using their own software will quickly learn what's missing or broken. Dogfood is typically not even of **beta** quality.

Node:dogpile, Next:dogwash, Previous:dogfood, Up:= D =

dogpile v.

[Usenet: prob. fr. mainstream "puppy pile"] When many people post unfriendly responses in short order to a single posting, they are sometimes said to "dogpile" or "dogpile on" the person to whom they're responding. For example, when a religious missionary posts a simplistic appeal to *alt.atheism*, he can expect to be dogpiled. It has been suggested that this derives from U.S, football slang for a tackle involving three or more people.

Node:dogwash, Next:domainist, Previous:dogpile, Up:= D =

dogwash /dog'wosh/

[From a quip in the `urgency' field of a very optional software change request, ca. 1982. It was something like "Urgency: Wash your dog first".] 1. n. A project of minimal priority, undertaken as an escape from more serious work. 2. v. To engage in such a project. Many games and much **freeware** get written this way.

Node:domainist, Next:Don't do that then!, Previous:dogwash, Up:= D =

domainist /doh-mayn'ist/ adj.

1. [Usenet, by pointed analogy with "sexist", "racist", etc.] Someone who judges people by the domain of their email addresses; esp. someone who dismisses anyone who posts from a public internet provider. "What do you expect from an article posted from *aol.com*?" 2. Said of an **Internet address** (as opposed to a **bang path**) because the part to the right of the @ specifies a nested series of `domains'; for example, esr@snark.thyrsus.com specifies the machine called *snark* in the subdomain called *thyrsus* within the top-level domain called *com*. See also **big-endian**, sense 2.

The meaning of this term has drifted. At one time sense 2 was primary. In elder days it was also used of a site, mailer, or routing program which knew how to handle domainist addresses; or of a person (esp. a site admin) who preferred domain addressing, supported a domainist mailer, or proselytized for domainist addressing and disdained **bang path**s. These senses are now (1996) obsolete, as effectively all sites have converted.

Node:Don't do that then!, Next:dongle, Previous:domainist, Up:= D =

Don't do that then! imp.

[from an old doctor's office joke about a patient with a trivial complaint] Stock response to a user complaint. "When I type control-S, the whole system comes to a halt for thirty seconds." "Don't do that, then!" (or "So don't do that!"). Compare **RTFM**.

Node:dongle, Next:dongle-disk, Previous:Don't do that then!, Up:= D =

dongle /dong'gl/ n.

1. A security or **copy protection** device for proprietary software consisting of a serialized EPROM and some drivers in a D-25 connector shell, which must be connected to an I/O port of the computer while the program is run. Programs that use a dongle query the port at startup and at programmed intervals thereafter, and terminate if it does not respond with the dongle's programmed validation code. Thus, users can make as many copies of the program as they want but must pay for each dongle. The idea was clever, but it was initially a failure, as users disliked tying up a serial port this way. Almost all dongles on the market today (1993) will pass data through the port and monitor for **magic** codes (and combinations of status lines) with minimal if any interference with devices further down the line -- this innovation was necessary to allow daisy-chained dongles for multiple pieces of software. The devices are still not widely used, as the industry has moved away from copy-protection schemes in general. 2. By extension, any physical electronic key or transferable ID required for a program to function. Common variations on this theme have used parallel or even joystick ports. See **dongle-disk**.

[Note: in early 1992, advertising copy from Rainbow Technologies (a manufacturer of dongles) included a claim that the word derived from "Don Gall", allegedly the inventor of the device. The company's receptionist will cheerfully tell you that the story is a myth invented for the ad copy. Nevertheless, I expect it to haunt my life as a lexicographer for at least the next ten years. :-(--ESR]

Node:dongle-disk, Next:donuts, Previous:dongle, Up:= D =

dongle-disk /don'gl disk/ n.

A special floppy disk that is required in order to perform some task. Some contain special coding that allows an application to identify it uniquely, others *are* special code that does something that normally-

resident programs don't or can't. (For example, AT&T's "Unix PC" would only come up in **root mode** with a special boot disk.) Also called a `key disk'. See **dongle**.

Node:donuts, Next:doorstop, Previous:dongle-disk, Up:= D =

donuts n. obs.

A collective noun for any set of memory bits. This usage is extremely archaic and may no longer be live jargon; it dates from the days of ferrite-**core** memories in which each bit was implemented by a doughnut-shaped magnetic flip-flop.

Node:doorstop, Next:DoS attack, Previous:donuts, Up:= D =

doorstop n.

Used to describe equipment that is non-functional and halfway expected to remain so, especially obsolete equipment kept around for political reasons or ostensibly as a backup. "When we get another Wyse-50 in here, that ADM 3 will turn into a doorstop." Compare **boat anchor**.

Node:DoS attack, Next:dot file, Previous:doorstop, Up:= D =

DoS attack //

[Usenet; note that it's unrelated to `DOS' as name of an operating system] Abbreviation for Denial-Of-Service attack. This abbreviation is most often used of attempts to shut down newsgroups with floods of **spam**.

Node:dot file, Next:double bucky, Previous:DoS attack, Up:= D =

dot file [Unix] n.

A file that is not visible by default to normal directory-browsing tools (on Unix, files named with a leading dot are, by convention, not normally presented in directory listings). Many programs define one or more dot files in which startup or configuration information may be optionally recorded; a user can customize the program's behavior by creating the appropriate file in the current or home directory. (Therefore, dot files tend to **creep** -- with every nontrivial application program defining at least one, a user's home directory can be filled with scores of dot files, of course without the user's really being aware of it.) See also **profile** (sense 1), **rc file**.

Node:double bucky, Next:doubled sig, Previous:dot file, Up:= D =

double bucky adj.

Using both the CTRL and META keys. "The command to burn all LEDs is double bucky F."

This term originated on the Stanford extended-ASCII keyboard, and was later taken up by users of the **space-cadet keyboard** at MIT. A typical MIT comment was that the Stanford **bucky bits** (control and meta shifting keys) were nice, but there weren't enough of them; you could type only 512 different

characters on a Stanford keyboard. An obvious way to address this was simply to add more shifting keys, and this was eventually done; but a keyboard with that many shifting keys is hard on touch-typists, who don't like to move their hands away from the home position on the keyboard. It was half-seriously suggested that the extra shifting keys be implemented as pedals; typing on such a keyboard would be very much like playing a full pipe organ. This idea is mentioned in a parody of a very fine song by Jeffrey Moss called "Rubber Duckie", which was published in "The Sesame Street Songbook" (Simon and Schuster 1971, ISBN 0-671-21036-X). These lyrics were written on May 27, 1978, in celebration of the Stanford keyboard:

```
                    Double Bucky

Double bucky, you're the one!
You make my keyboard lots of fun.
    Double bucky, an additional bit or two:
(Vo-vo-de-o!)
Control and meta, side by side,
Augmented ASCII, nine bits wide!
    Double bucky!  Half a thousand glyphs, plus a few!
        Oh,
        I sure wish that I
        Had a couple of
            Bits more!
        Perhaps a
        Set of pedals to
        Make the number of
            Bits four:
        Double double bucky!
Double bucky, left and right
OR'd together, outta sight!
    Double bucky, I'd like a whole word of
    Double bucky, I'm happy I heard of
    Double bucky, I'd like a whole word of you!

--- The Great Quux (with apologies to Jeffrey Moss)
```

[This, by the way, is an excellent example of computer **filk** --ESR] See also **meta bit**, **cokebottle**, and **quadruple bucky**.

Node:doubled sig, Next:down, Previous:double bucky, Up:= D =

doubled sig [Usenet] n.

A **sig block** that has been included twice in a **Usenet** article or, less commonly, in an electronic mail message. An article or message with a doubled sig can be caused by improperly configured software. More often, however, it reveals the author's lack of experience in electronic communication. See **B1FF**, **pseudo**.

Node:down, Next:download, Previous:doubled sig, Up:= D =

down

1. adj. Not operating. "The up escalator is down" is considered a humorous thing to say (unless of course you were expecting to use it), and "The elevator is down" always means "The elevator isn't working" and never refers to what floor the elevator is on. With respect to computers, this term has passed into the mainstream; the extension to other kinds of machine is still confined to techies (e.g. boiler mechanics may

speak of a boiler being down). 2. `go down' vi. To stop functioning; usually said of the **system**. The message from the **console** that every hacker hates to hear from the operator is "System going down in 5 minutes". 3. `take down', `bring down' vt. To deactivate purposely, usually for repair work or **PM**. "I'm taking the system down to work on that bug in the tape drive." Occasionally one hears the word `down' by itself used as a verb in this vt. sense. See **crash**; oppose **up**.

Node:download, Next:DP, Previous:down, Up:= D =

download vt.

1. [techspeak] To transfer data or (esp.) code from a larger `host' system (esp. a **mainframe**) over a digital comm link to a smaller `client' system, esp. a microcomputer or specialized peripheral. Oppose **upload**. 2. [jargon] To fetch data (especially large relatively standalone pieces of data like files and images) over the wire from a remote location.

However, note that ground-to-space communications has its own usage rule for this term. Space-to-earth transmission is always `down' and the reverse `up' regardless of the relative size of the computers involved. So far the in-space machines have invariably been smaller; thus the upload/download distinction has been reversed from its usual sense.

Node:DP, Next:DPB, Previous:download, Up:= D =

DP /D-P/ n.

1. Data Processing. Listed here because, according to hackers, use of the term marks one immediately as a **suit**. See **DPer**. 2. Common abbrev for **Dissociated Press**.

Node:DPB, Next:DPer, Previous:DP, Up:= D =

DPB /d*-pib'/ vt.

[from the PDP-10 instruction set] To plop something down in the middle. Usage: silly. "DPB yourself into that couch there." The connotation would be that the couch is full except for one slot just big enough for one last person to sit in. DPB means `DePosit Byte', and was the name of a PDP-10 instruction that inserts some bits into the middle of some other bits. Hackish usage has been kept alive by the Common LISP function of the same name.

Node:DPer, Next:Dr. Fred Mbogo, Previous:DPB, Up:= D =

DPer /dee-pee-er/ n.

Data Processor. Hackers are absolutely amazed that **suit**s use this term self-referentially. *Computers* process data, not people! See **DP**.

Node:Dr. Fred Mbogo, Next:dragon, Previous:DPer, Up:= D =

Dr. Fred Mbogo /*m-boh'goh, dok'tr fred/ n.

[Stanford] The archetypal man you don't want to see about a problem, esp. an incompetent professional; a shyster. "Do you know a good eye doctor?" "Sure, try Mbogo Eye Care and Professional Dry Cleaning." The name comes from synergy between **bogus** and the original Dr. Mbogo, a witch doctor who was Gomez Addams' physician on the old "Addams Family" TV show. Interestingly enough, it turns out that under the rules for Swahili noun classes, `m-' is the characteristic prefix of "nouns referring to human beings". As such, "mbogo" is quite plausible as a Swahili coinage for a person having the nature of a **bogon**. Compare **Bloggs Family** and **J. Random Hacker**; see also **Fred Foobar** and **fred**.

Node:dragon, Next:Dragon Book, Previous:Dr. Fred Mbogo, Up:= D =

dragon n.

[MIT] A program similar to a **daemon**, except that it is not invoked at all, but is instead used by the system to perform various secondary tasks. A typical example would be an accounting program, which keeps track of who is logged in, accumulates load-average statistics, etc. Under ITS, many terminals displayed a list of people logged in, where they were, what they were running, etc., along with some random picture (such as a unicorn, Snoopy, or the Enterprise), which was generated by the `name dragon'. Usage: rare outside MIT -- under Unix and most other OSes this would be called a `background demon' or **daemon**. The best-known Unix example of a dragon is `cron(1)`. At SAIL, they called this sort of thing a `phantom'.

Node:Dragon Book, Next:drain, Previous:dragon, Up:= D =

Dragon Book n.

The classic text "Compilers: Principles, Techniques and Tools", by Alfred V. Aho, Ravi Sethi, and Jeffrey D. Ullman (Addison-Wesley 1986; ISBN 0-201-10088-6), so called because of the cover design featuring a dragon labeled `complexity of compiler design' and a knight bearing the lance `LALR parser generator' among his other trappings. This one is more specifically known as the `Red Dragon Book' (1986); an earlier edition, sans Sethi and titled "Principles Of Compiler Design" (Alfred V. Aho and Jeffrey D. Ullman; Addison-Wesley, 1977; ISBN 0-201-00022-9), was the `Green Dragon Book' (1977). (Also `New Dragon Book', `Old Dragon Book'.) The horsed knight and the Green Dragon were warily eying each other at a distance; now the knight is typing (wearing gauntlets!) at a terminal showing a video-game representation of the Red Dragon's head while the rest of the beast extends back in normal space. See also **book titles**.

Node:drain, Next:dread high-bit disease, Previous:Dragon Book, Up:= D =

drain v.

[IBM] Syn. for **flush** (sense 2). Has a connotation of finality about it; one speaks of draining a device before taking it offline.

Node:dread high-bit disease, Next:Dread Questionmark Disease, Previous:drain, Up:= D =

dread high-bit disease n.

A condition endemic to some now-obsolete computers and peripherals (including ASR-33 teletypes and PRIME minicomputers) that results in all characters having their high (0x80) bit forced on. This of course makes transporting files to other systems much more difficult, not to mention the problems these

machines have talking with true 8-bit devices.

This term was originally used specifically of PRIME (a.k.a. PR1ME) minicomputers. Folklore has it that PRIME adopted the reversed-8-bit convention in order to save 25 cents per serial line per machine; PRIME old-timers, on the other hand, claim they inherited the disease from Honeywell via customer NASA's compatibility requirements and struggled heroically to cure it. Whoever was responsible, this probably qualifies as one of the most **cretinous** design tradeoffs ever made. See **meta bit**.

Node:Dread Questionmark Disease, Next:DRECNET, Previous:dread high-bit disease, Up:= D =

Dread Questionmark Disease

n. The result of saving HTML from Microsoft Word or some other program that uses the nonstandard Microsoft variant of Latin-1; the symptom is that various of those nonstandard characters in positions 128-160 show up as questionmarks. The usual culprit is the misnamed `smart quotes' feature in Microsoft Word. For more details (and a program called `demoroniser' that cleans up the mess) see http://www.fourmilab.ch/webtools/demoroniser/.

Node:DRECNET, Next:driver, Previous:Dread Questionmark Disease, Up:= D =

DRECNET /drek'net/ n.

[from Yiddish/German `dreck', meaning filth] Deliberate distortion of DECNET, a networking protocol used in the **VMS** community. So called because **DEC** helped write the Ethernet specification and then (either stupidly or as a malignant customer-control tactic) violated that spec in the design of DRECNET in a way that made it incompatible. See also **connector conspiracy**.

Node:driver, Next:droid, Previous:DRECNET, Up:= D =

driver n.

1. The **main loop** of an event-processing program; the code that gets commands and dispatches them for execution. 2. [techspeak] In `device driver', code designed to handle a particular peripheral device such as a magnetic disk or tape unit. 3. In the TeX world and the computerized typesetting world in general, a program that translates some device-independent or other common format to something a real device can actually understand.

Node:droid, Next:drone, Previous:driver, Up:= D =

droid n.

[from `android', SF terminology for a humanoid robot of essentially biological (as opposed to mechanical/electronic) construction] A person (esp. a low-level bureaucrat or service-business employee) exhibiting most of the following characteristics: (a) naive trust in the wisdom of the parent organization or `the system'; (b) a blind-faith propensity to believe obvious nonsense emitted by authority figures (or computers!); (c) a rule-governed mentality, one unwilling or unable to look beyond the `letter of the law' in exceptional situations; (d) a paralyzing fear of official reprimand or worse if Procedures are not followed No Matter What; and (e) no interest in doing anything above or beyond the call of a very narrowly-interpreted duty, or in particular in fixing that which is broken; an "It's not my job, man" attitude.

Typical droid positions include supermarket checkout assistant and bank clerk; the syndrome is also endemic in low-level government employees. The implication is that the rules and official procedures constitute software that the droid is executing; problems arise when the software has not been properly debugged. The term `droid mentality' is also used to describe the mindset behind this behavior. Compare **suit**, **marketroid**; see **-oid**.

In England there is equivalent mainstream slang; a `jobsworth' is an obstructive, rule-following bureaucrat, often of the uniformed or suited variety. Named for the habit of denying a reasonable request by sucking his teeth and saying "Oh no, guv, sorry I can't help you: that's more than my job's worth".

Node:drone, Next:drool-proof paper, Previous:droid, Up:= D =

drone n.

Ignorant sales or customer service personnel in computer or electronics superstores. Characterized by a lack of even superficial knowledge about the products they sell, yet possessed of the conviction that they are more competent than their hacker customers. Usage: "That video board probably sucks, it was recommended by a drone at Fry's" In the year 2000, their natural habitats include Fry's Electronics, Best Buy, and CompUSA.

Node:drool-proof paper, Next:drop on the floor, Previous:drone, Up:= D =

drool-proof paper n.

Documentation that has been obsessively **dumbed down**, to the point where only a **cretin** could bear to read it, is said to have succumbed to the `drool-proof paper syndrome' or to have been `written on drool-proof paper'. For example, this is an actual quote from Apple's LaserWriter manual: "Do not expose your LaserWriter to open fire or flame."

Node:drop on the floor, Next:drop-ins, Previous:drool-proof paper, Up:= D =

drop on the floor vt.

To react to an error condition by silently discarding messages or other valuable data. "The gateway ran out of memory, so it just started dropping packets on the floor." Also frequently used of faulty mail and netnews relay sites that lose messages. See also **black hole**, **bit bucket**.

Node:drop-ins, Next:drop-outs, Previous:drop on the floor, Up:= D =

drop-ins n.

[prob. by analogy with **drop-outs**] Spurious characters appearing on a terminal or console as a result of line noise or a system malfunction of some sort. Esp. used when these are interspersed with one's own typed input. Compare **drop-outs**, sense 2.

Node:drop-outs, Next:drugged, Previous:drop-ins, Up:= D =

drop-outs n.

1. A variety of `power glitch' (see **glitch**); momentary 0 voltage on the electrical mains. 2. Missing characters in typed input due to software malfunction or system saturation (one cause of such behavior under Unix when a bad connection to a modem swamps the processor with spurious character interrupts; see **screaming tty**). 3. Mental glitches; used as a way of describing those occasions when the mind just seems to shut down for a couple of beats. See **glitch**, **fried**.

Node:drugged, Next:drum, Previous:drop-outs, Up:= D =

drugged adj.

(also `on drugs') 1. Conspicuously stupid, heading toward **brain-damaged**. Often accompanied by a pantomime of toking a joint. 2. Of hardware, very slow relative to normal performance.

Node:drum, Next:drunk mouse syndrome, Previous:drugged, Up:= D =

drum adj, n.

Ancient techspeak term referring to slow, cylindrical magnetic media that were once state-of-the-art storage devices. Under BSD Unix the disk partition used for swapping is still called `/dev/drum`; this has led to considerable humor and not a few straight-faced but utterly bogus `explanations' getting foisted on **newbie**s. See also "**The Story of Mel**" in Appendix A.

Node:drunk mouse syndrome, Next:dub dub dub, Previous:drum, Up:= D =

drunk mouse syndrome n.

(also `mouse on drugs') A malady exhibited by the mouse pointing device of some computers. The typical symptom is for the mouse cursor on the screen to move in random directions and not in sync with the motion of the actual mouse. Can usually be corrected by unplugging the mouse and plugging it back again. Another recommended fix for optical mice is to rotate your mouse pad 90 degrees.

At Xerox PARC in the 1970s, most people kept a can of copier cleaner (isopropyl alcohol) at their desks. When the steel ball on the mouse had picked up enough **cruft** to be unreliable, the mouse was doused in cleaner, which restored it for a while. However, this operation left a fine residue that accelerated the accumulation of cruft, so the dousings became more and more frequent. Finally, the mouse was declared `alcoholic' and sent to the clinic to be dried out in a CFC ultrasonic bath.

Node:dub dub dub, Next:Duff's device, Previous:drunk mouse syndrome, Up:= D =

dub dub dub

[common] Spoken-only shorthand for the "www" (double-u double-u double-u) in many web host names. Nothing to do with the style of reggae music called `dub'.

Node:Duff's device, Next:dumb terminal, Previous:dub dub dub, Up:= D =

Duff's device n.

The most dramatic use yet seen of **fall through** in C, invented by Tom Duff when he was at Lucasfilm. Trying to **bum** all the instructions he could out of an inner loop that copied data serially onto an output port, he decided to unroll it. He then realized that the unrolled version could be implemented by *interlacing* the structures of a switch and a loop:

```
register n = (count + 7) / 8;       /* count > 0 assumed */

switch (count % 8)
{
case 0:         do {   *to = *from++;
case 7:                *to = *from++;
case 6:                *to = *from++;
case 5:                *to = *from++;
case 4:                *to = *from++;
case 3:                *to = *from++;
case 2:                *to = *from++;
case 1:                *to = *from++;
                    } while (--n > 0);
}
```

Shocking though it appears to all who encounter it for the first time, the device is actually perfectly valid, legal C. C's default **fall through** in case statements has long been its most controversial single feature; Duff observed that "This code forms some sort of argument in that debate, but I'm not sure whether it's for or against." Duff has discussed the device in detail at http://www.lysator.liu.se/c/duffs-device.html. Note that the omission of postfix ++ from `*to` was intentional (though confusing). Duff's device can be used to implement memory copy, but the original aim was to copy values serially into a magic IO register.

[For maximal obscurity, the outermost pair of braces above could be actually be removed -- GLS]

Node:dumb terminal, Next:dumbass attack, Previous:Duff's device, Up:= D =

dumb terminal n.

A terminal that is one step above a **glass tty**, having a minimally addressable cursor but no on-screen editing or other features normally supported by a **smart terminal**. Once upon a time, when glass ttys were common and addressable cursors were something special, what is now called a dumb terminal could pass for a smart terminal.

Node:dumbass attack, Next:dumbed down, Previous:dumb terminal, Up:= D =

dumbass attack /duhm'as *-tak'/ n.

[Purdue] Notional cause of a novice's mistake made by the experienced, especially one made while running as **root** under Unix, e.g., typing `rm -r *` or `mkfs` on a mounted file system. Compare **adger**.

Node:dumbed down, Next:dump, Previous:dumbass attack, Up:= D =

dumbed down adj.

Simplified, with a strong connotation of *over*simplified. Often, a **marketroid** will insist that the interfaces and documentation of software be dumbed down after the designer has burned untold gallons of midnight

oil making it smart. This creates friction. See **user-friendly**.

Node:dump, Next:dumpster diving, Previous:dumbed down, Up:= D =

dump n.

1. An undigested and voluminous mass of information about a problem or the state of a system, especially one routed to the slowest available output device (compare **core dump**), and most especially one consisting of hex or octal **runes** describing the byte-by-byte state of memory, mass storage, or some file. In **elder days**, debugging was generally done by `groveling over' a dump (see **grovel**); increasing use of high-level languages and interactive debuggers has made such tedium uncommon, and the term `dump' now has a faintly archaic flavor. 2. A backup. This usage is typical only at large timesharing installations.

Node:dumpster diving, Next:dup killer, Previous:dump, Up:= D =

dumpster diving /dump'-ster di:'-ving/ n.

1. The practice of sifting refuse from an office or technical installation to extract confidential data, especially security-compromising information (`dumpster' is an Americanism for what is elsewhere called a `skip'). Back in AT&T's monopoly days, before paper shredders became common office equipment, phone phreaks (see **phreaking**) used to organize regular dumpster runs against phone company plants and offices. Discarded and damaged copies of AT&T internal manuals taught them much. The technique is still rumored to be a favorite of crackers operating against careless targets. 2. The practice of raiding the dumpsters behind buildings where producers and/or consumers of high-tech equipment are located, with the expectation (usually justified) of finding discarded but still-valuable equipment to be nursed back to health in some hacker's den. Experienced dumpster-divers not infrequently accumulate basements full of moldering (but still potentially useful) **cruft**.

Node:dup killer, Next:dup loop, Previous:dumpster diving, Up:= D =

dup killer /d[y]oop kill'r/ n.

[FidoNet] Software that is supposed to detect and delete duplicates of a message that may have reached the FidoNet system via different routes.

Node:dup loop, Next:dusty deck, Previous:dup killer, Up:= D =

dup loop /d[y]oop loop/ (also `dupe loop') n.

[FidoNet] An infinite stream of duplicated, near-identical messages on a FidoNet **echo**, the only difference being unique or mangled identification information applied by a faulty or incorrectly configured system or network gateway, thus rendering **dup killer**s ineffective. If such a duplicate message eventually reaches a system through which it has already passed (with the original identification information), all systems passed on the way back to that system are said to be involved in a **dup loop**.

Node:dusty deck, Next:DWIM, Previous:dup loop, Up:= D =

dusty deck n.

Old software (especially applications) which one is obliged to remain compatible with, or to maintain (**DP** types call this `legacy code', a term hackers consider smarmy and excessively reverent). The term implies that the software in question is a holdover from card-punch days. Used esp. when referring to old scientific and **number-crunching** software, much of which was written in FORTRAN and very poorly documented but is believed to be too expensive to replace. See **fossil**; compare **crawling horror**.

Node:DWIM, Next:dynner, Previous:dusty deck, Up:= D =

DWIM /dwim/

[acronym, `Do What I Mean'] 1. adj. Able to guess, sometimes even correctly, the result intended when bogus input was provided. 2. n. obs. The BBNLISP/INTERLISP function that attempted to accomplish this feat by correcting many of the more common errors. See **hairy**. 3. Occasionally, an interjection hurled at a balky computer, esp. when one senses one might be tripping over legalisms (see **legalese**). 4. Of a person, someone whose directions are incomprehensible and vague, but who nevertheless has the expectation that you will solve the problem using the specific method he/she has in mind.

Warren Teitelman originally wrote DWIM to fix his typos and spelling errors, so it was somewhat idiosyncratic to his style, and would often make hash of anyone else's typos if they were stylistically different. Some victims of DWIM thus claimed that the acronym stood for `Damn Warren's Infernal Machine!'.

In one notorious incident, Warren added a DWIM feature to the command interpreter used at Xerox PARC. One day another hacker there typed `delete *$` to free up some disk space. (The editor there named backup files by appending `$` to the original file name, so he was trying to delete any backup files left over from old editing sessions.) It happened that there weren't any editor backup files, so DWIM helpfully reported `*$ not found, assuming you meant 'delete *'.` It then started to delete all the files on the disk! The hacker managed to stop it with a **Vulcan nerve pinch** after only a half dozen or so files were lost.

The disgruntled victim later said he had been sorely tempted to go to Warren's office, tie Warren down in his chair in front of his workstation, and then type `delete *$` twice.

DWIM is often suggested in jest as a desired feature for a complex program; it is also occasionally described as the single instruction the ideal computer would have. Back when proofs of program correctness were in vogue, there were also jokes about `DWIMC' (Do What I Mean, Correctly). A related term, more often seen as a verb, is DTRT (Do The Right Thing); see **Right Thing**.

Node:dynner, Next:earthquake, Previous:DWIM, Up:= D =

dynner /din'r/ n.

32 bits, by analogy with **nybble** and **byte**. Usage: rare and extremely silly. See also **playte**, **tayste**, **crumb**. General discussion of such terms is under **nybble**.

Node:= E =, Next:= F =, Previous:= D =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= E =

- earthquake:

- Easter egg:
- Easter egging:
- eat flaming death:
- EBCDIC:
- echo:
- ECP:
- ed:
- egosurf:
- eighty-column mind:
- El Camino Bignum:
- elder days:
- elegant:
- elephantine:
- elevator controller:
- elite:
- ELIZA effect:
- elvish:
- EMACS:
- email:
- emoticon:
- EMP:
- empire:
- engine:
- English:
- enhancement:
- ENQ:
- EOF:
- EOL:
- EOU:
- epoch:
- epsilon:
- epsilon squared:
- era the:
- Eric Conspiracy:
- Eris:
- erotics:
- error 33:
- eurodemo:
- evil:
- evil and rude:
- Evil Empire:
- exa-:
- examining the entrails:
- EXCH:
- excl:
- EXE:
- exec:
- exercise left as an:
- Exon:
- Exploder:
- exploit:
- external memory:

- eye candy:
- eyeball search:

Node:earthquake, Next:Easter egg, Previous:dynner, Up:= E =

earthquake n.

[IBM] The ultimate real-world shock test for computer hardware. Hackish sources at IBM deny the rumor that the Bay Area quake of 1989 was initiated by the company to test quality-assurance procedures at its California plants.

Node:Easter egg, Next:Easter egging, Previous:earthquake, Up:= E =

Easter egg n.

[from the custom of the Easter Egg hunt observed in the U.S. and many parts of Europe] 1. A message hidden in the object code of a program as a joke, intended to be found by persons disassembling or browsing the code. 2. A message, graphic, or sound effect emitted by a program (or, on a PC, the BIOS ROM) in response to some undocumented set of commands or keystrokes, intended as a joke or to display program credits. One well-known early Easter egg found in a couple of OSes caused them to respond to the command `make love` with `not war?`. Many personal computers have much more elaborate eggs hidden in ROM, including lists of the developers' names, political exhortations, snatches of music, and (in one case) graphics images of the entire development team.

Node:Easter egging, Next:eat flaming death, Previous:Easter egg, Up:= E =

Easter egging n.

[IBM] The act of replacing unrelated components more or less at random in hopes that a malfunction will go away. Hackers consider this the normal operating mode of **field circus** techs and do not love them for it. See also the jokes under **field circus**. Compare **shotgun debugging**.

Node:eat flaming death, Next:EBCDIC, Previous:Easter egging, Up:= E =

eat flaming death imp.

A construction popularized among hackers by the infamous **CPU Wars** comic; supposedly derive from a famously turgid line in a WWII-era anti-Nazi propaganda comic that ran "Eat flaming death, non-Aryan mongrels!" or something of the sort (however, it is also reported that the Firesign Theatre's 1975 album "In The Next World, You're On Your Own" a character won the right to scream "Eat flaming death, fascist media pigs" in the middle of Oscar night on a game show; this may have been an influence). Used in humorously overblown expressions of hostility. "Eat flaming death, **EBCDIC** users!"

Node:EBCDIC, Next:echo, Previous:eat flaming death, Up:= E =

EBCDIC /eb's*-dik/, /eb'see`dik/, or /eb'k*-dik/ n.

[abbreviation, Extended Binary Coded Decimal Interchange Code] An alleged character set used on IBM

dinosaurs. It exists in at least six mutually incompatible versions, all featuring such delights as non-contiguous letter sequences and the absence of several ASCII punctuation characters fairly important for modern computer languages (exactly which characters are absent varies according to which version of EBCDIC you're looking at). IBM adapted EBCDIC from **punched card** code in the early 1960s and promulgated it as a customer-control tactic (see **connector conspiracy**), spurning the already established ASCII standard. Today, IBM claims to be an open-systems company, but IBM's own description of the EBCDIC variants and how to convert between them is still internally classified top-secret, burn-before-reading. Hackers blanch at the very *name* of EBCDIC and consider it a manifestation of purest **evil**. See also **fear and loathing**.

Node:echo, Next:ECP, Previous:EBCDIC, Up:= E =

echo [FidoNet] n.

A **topic group** on **FidoNet**'s echomail system. Compare **newsgroup**.

Node:ECP, Next:ed, Previous:echo, Up:= E =

ECP /E-C-P/ n.

See **spam** and **velveeta**.

Node:ed, Next:egosurf, Previous:ECP, Up:= E =

ed n.

"ed is the standard text editor." Line taken from original the **Unix** manual page on ed, an ancient line-oriented editor that is by now used only by a few **Real Programmer**s, and even then only for batch operations. The original line is sometimes uttered near the beginning of an emacs vs. vi holy war on **Usenet**, with the (vain) hope to quench the discussion before it really takes off. Often followed by a standard text describing the many virtues of ed (such as the small memory **footprint** on a Timex Sinclair, and the consistent (because nearly non-existent) user interface).

Node:egosurf, Next:eighty-column mind, Previous:ed, Up:= E =

egosurf vi.

To search the net for your name or links to your web pages. Perhaps connected to long-established SF-fan slang `egoscan', to search for one's name in a fanzine.

Node:eighty-column mind, Next:El Camino Bignum, Previous:egosurf, Up:= E =

eighty-column mind n.

[IBM] The sort said to be possessed by persons for whom the transition from **punched card** to tape was traumatic (nobody has dared tell them about disks yet). It is said that these people, including (according to an old joke) the founder of IBM, will be buried `face down, 9-edge first' (the 9-edge being the bottom of the card). This directive is inscribed on IBM's 1402 and 1622 card readers and is referenced in a famous

bit of doggerel called "The Last Bug", the climactic lines of which are as follows:

```
He died at the console
Of hunger and thirst.
Next day he was buried,
Face down, 9-edge first.
```

The eighty-column mind was thought by most hackers to dominate IBM's customer base and its thinking. This only began to change in the mid-1990s when IBM began to reinvent itself after the triumph of the **killer micro**. See **IBM**, **fear and loathing**, **card walloper**. A copy of "The Last Bug" lives on the the GNU site at http://www.gnu.org/fun/jokes/last.bug.html.

Node:El Camino Bignum, Next:elder days, Previous:eighty-column mind, Up:= E =

El Camino Bignum /el' k*-mee'noh big'nuhm/ n.

The road mundanely called El Camino Real, running along San Francisco peninsula. It originally extended all the way down to Mexico City; many portions of the old road are still intact. Navigation on the San Francisco peninsula is usually done relative to El Camino Real, which defines **logical** north and south even though it isn't really north-south in many places. El Camino Real runs right past Stanford University and so is familiar to hackers.

The Spanish word `real' (which has two syllables: /ray-ahl'/) means `royal'; El Camino Real is `the royal road'. In the FORTRAN language, a `real' quantity is a number typically precise to seven significant digits, and a `double precision' quantity is a larger floating-point number, precise to perhaps fourteen significant digits (other languages have similar `real' types).

When a hacker from MIT visited Stanford in 1976, he remarked what a long road El Camino Real was. Making a pun on `real', he started calling it `El Camino Double Precision' -- but when the hacker was told that the road was hundreds of miles long, he renamed it `El Camino Bignum', and that name has stuck. (See **bignum**.)

[GLS has since let slip that the unnamed hacker in this story was in fact himself --ESR]

In recent years, the synonym `El Camino Virtual' has been reported as an alternate at IBM and Amdahl sites in the Valley. Mathematically literate hackers in the Valley have also been heard to refer to some major cross-street intersecting El Camino Real as "El Camino Imaginary". One popular theory is that the intersection is located near Moffett Field - where they keep all those complex planes.

Node:elder days, Next:elegant, Previous:El Camino Bignum, Up:= E =

elder days n.

The heroic age of hackerdom (roughly, pre-1980); the era of the **PDP-10**, **TECO**, **ITS**, and the ARPANET. This term has been rather consciously adopted from J. R. R. Tolkien's fantasy epic "The Lord of the Rings". Compare **Iron Age**; see also **elvish** and **Great Worm**.

Node:elegant, Next:elephantine, Previous:elder days, Up:= E =

elegant adj.

[common; from mathematical usage] Combining simplicity, power, and a certain ineffable grace of

design. Higher praise than `clever', `winning', or even **cuspy**.

The French aviator, adventurer, and author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, probably best known for his classic children's book "The Little Prince", was also an aircraft designer. He gave us perhaps the best definition of engineering elegance when he said "A designer knows he has achieved perfection not when there is nothing left to add, but when there is nothing left to take away."

Node:elephantine, Next:elevator controller, Previous:elegant, Up:= E =

elephantine adj.

Used of programs or systems that are both conspicuous **hog**s (owing perhaps to poor design founded on **brute force and ignorance**) and exceedingly **hairy** in source form. An elephantine program may be functional and even friendly, but (as in the old joke about being in bed with an elephant) it's tough to have around all the same (and, like a pachyderm, difficult to maintain). In extreme cases, hackers have been known to make trumpeting sounds or perform expressive proboscatory mime at the mention of the offending program. Usage: semi-humorous. Compare `has the elephant nature' and the somewhat more pejorative **monstrosity**. See also **second-system effect** and **baroque**.

Node:elevator controller, Next:elite, Previous:elephantine, Up:= E =

elevator controller n.

An archetypal dumb embedded-systems application, like **toaster** (which superseded it). During one period (1983-84) in the deliberations of ANSI X3J11 (the C standardization committee) this was the canonical example of a really stupid, memory-limited computation environment. "You can't require `printf(3)` to be part of the default runtime library -- what if you're targeting an elevator controller?" Elevator controllers became important rhetorical weapons on both sides of several **holy wars**.

Node:elite, Next:ELIZA effect, Previous:elevator controller, Up:= E =

elite adj.

Clueful. Plugged-in. One of the cognoscenti. Also used as a general positive adjective. This term is not actually hacker slang in the strict sense; it is used primarily by crackers and **warez d00dz**, for which reason hackers use it only with heavy irony. The term used to refer to the folks allowed in to the "hidden" or "privileged" sections of BBSes in the early 1980s (which, typically, contained pirated software). Frequently, early boards would only let you post, or even see, a certain subset of the sections (or `boards') on a BBS. Those who got to the frequently legendary `triple super secret' boards were elite. Misspellings of this term in warez d00dz style abound; the forms `eleet', and `31337' (among others) have been sighted.

A true hacker would be more likely to use `wizardly'. Oppose **lamer**.

Node:ELIZA effect, Next:elvish, Previous:elite, Up:= E =

ELIZA effect /*-li:'z* *-fekt'/ n.

[AI community] The tendency of humans to attach associations to terms from prior experience. For example, there is nothing magic about the symbol + that makes it well-suited to indicate addition; it's just

that people associate it with addition. Using + or `plus' to mean addition in a computer language is taking advantage of the ELIZA effect.

This term comes from the famous ELIZA program by Joseph Weizenbaum, which simulated a Rogerian psychotherapist by rephrasing many of the patient's statements as questions and posing them to the patient. It worked by simple pattern recognition and substitution of key words into canned phrases. It was so convincing, however, that there are many anecdotes about people becoming very emotionally caught up in dealing with ELIZA. All this was due to people's tendency to attach to words meanings which the computer never put there. The ELIZA effect is a **Good Thing** when writing a programming language, but it can blind you to serious shortcomings when analyzing an Artificial Intelligence system. Compare **ad-hockery**; see also **AI-complete**. Sources for a clone of the original Eliza are available at ftp://ftp.cc.utexas.edu/pub/AI_ATTIC/Programs/Classic/Eliza/Eliza.c.

Node:elvish, Next:EMACS, Previous:ELIZA effect, Up:= E =

elvish n.

1. The Tengwar of Feanor, a table of letterforms resembling the beautiful Celtic half-uncial hand of the "Book of Kells". Invented and described by J. R. R. Tolkien in "The Lord of The Rings" as an orthography for his fictional `elvish' languages, this system (which is both visually and phonetically **elegant**) has long fascinated hackers (who tend to be intrigued by artificial languages in general). It is traditional for graphics printers, plotters, window systems, and the like to support a Feanorian typeface as one of their demo items. See also **elder days**. 2. By extension, any odd or unreadable typeface produced by a graphics device. 3. The typeface mundanely called `Böcklin', an art-Noveau display font.

Node:EMACS, Next:email, Previous:elvish, Up:= E =

EMACS /ee'maks/ n.

[from Editing MACroS] The ne plus ultra of hacker editors, a programmable text editor with an entire LISP system inside it. It was originally written by Richard Stallman in **TECO** under **ITS** at the MIT AI lab; AI Memo 554 described it as "an advanced, self-documenting, customizable, extensible real-time display editor". It has since been reimplemented any number of times, by various hackers, and versions exist that run under most major operating systems. Perhaps the most widely used version, also written by Stallman and now called "**GNU** EMACS" or **GNUMACS**, runs principally under Unix. (Its close relative XEmacs is the second most popular version.) It includes facilities to run compilation subprocesses and send and receive mail or news; many hackers spend up to 80% of their **tube time** inside it. Other variants include **GOSMACS**, CCA EMACS, UniPress EMACS, Montgomery EMACS, jove, epsilon, and MicroEMACS. (Though we use the original all-caps spelling here, it is nowadays very commonly `Emacs'.)

Some EMACS versions running under window managers iconify as an overflowing kitchen sink, perhaps to suggest the one feature the editor does not (yet) include. Indeed, some hackers find EMACS too **heavyweight** and **baroque** for their taste, and expand the name as `Escape Meta Alt Control Shift' to spoof its heavy reliance on keystrokes decorated with **bucky bits**. Other spoof expansions include `Eight Megabytes And Constantly Swapping' (from when that was a lot of **core**), `Eventually `malloc()`s All Computer Storage', and `EMACS Makes A Computer Slow' (see **recursive acronym**). See also **vi**.

Node:email, Next:emoticon, Previous:EMACS, Up:= E =

email /ee'mayl/

(also written `e-mail' and `E-mail') 1. n. Electronic mail automatically passed through computer networks and/or via modems over common-carrier lines. Contrast **snail-mail**, **paper-net**, **voice-net**. See **network address**. 2. vt. To send electronic mail.

Oddly enough, the word `emailed' is actually listed in the OED; it means "embossed (with a raised pattern) or perh. arranged in a net or open work". A use from 1480 is given. The word is probably derived from French `émaillé' (enameled) and related to Old French `emmailleüre' (network). A French correspondent tells us that in modern French, `email' is a hard enamel obtained by heating special paints in a furnace; an `emailleur' (no final e) is a craftsman who makes email (he generally paints some objects (like, say, jewelry) and cooks them in a furnace).

There are numerous spelling variants of this word. In Internet traffic up to 1995, `email' predominates, `e-mail' runs a not-too-distant second, and `E-mail' and `Email' are a distant third and fourth.

Node:emoticon, Next:EMP, Previous:email, Up:= E =

emoticon /ee-moh'ti-kon/ n.

[common] An ASCII glyph used to indicate an emotional state in email or news. Although originally intended mostly as jokes, emoticons (or some other explicit humor indication) are virtually required under certain circumstances in high-volume text-only communication forums such as Usenet; the lack of verbal and visual cues can otherwise cause what were intended to be humorous, sarcastic, ironic, or otherwise non-100%-serious comments to be badly misinterpreted (not always even by **newbie**s), resulting in arguments and **flame war**s.

Hundreds of emoticons have been proposed, but only a few are in common use. These include:

`:-)`

`smiley face' (for humor, laughter, friendliness, occasionally sarcasm)

`:-(`

`frowney face' (for sadness, anger, or upset)

`;-)`

`half-smiley' (**ha ha only serious**); also known as `semi-smiley' or `winkey face'.

`:-/`

`wry face'

(These may become more comprehensible if you tilt your head sideways, to the left.)

The first two listed are by far the most frequently encountered. Hyphenless forms of them are common on CompuServe, GEnie, and BIX; see also **bixie**. On **Usenet**, `smiley' is often used as a generic term synonymous with **emoticon**, as well as specifically for the happy-face emoticon.

It appears that the emoticon was invented by one Scott Fahlman on the CMU **bboard** systems sometime between early 1981 and mid-1982. He later wrote: "I wish I had saved the original post, or at least recorded the date for posterity, but I had no idea that I was starting something that would soon pollute all the world's communication channels." [GLS confirms that he remembers this original posting].

Note for the **newbie**: Overuse of the smiley is a mark of loserhood! More than one per paragraph is a fairly sure sign that you've gone over the line.

Node:EMP, Next:empire, Previous:emoticon, Up:= E =

EMP /E-M-P/

See **spam**.

Node:empire, Next:engine, Previous:EMP, Up:= E =

empire n.

Any of a family of military simulations derived from a game written by Peter Langston many years ago. A number of multi-player variants of varying degrees of sophistication exist, and one single-player version implemented for both Unix and VMS; the latter is even available as MS-DOS freeware. All are notoriously addictive. Of various commercial derivatives the best known is probably "Empire Deluxe" on PCs and Amigas.

Modern empire is a real-time wargame played over the internet by up to 120 players. Typical games last from 24 hours (blitz) to a couple of months (long term). The amount of sleep you can get while playing is a function of the rate at which updates occur and the number of co-rulers of your country. Empire server software is available for unix-like machines, and clients for Unix and other platforms. A comprehensive history of the game is available at http://empire.idlpaper.com/infopages/History.html. The Empire resource site is at http://empire.idlpaper.com/.

Node:engine, Next:English, Previous:empire, Up:= E =

engine n.

1. A piece of hardware that encapsulates some function but can't be used without some kind of **front end**. Today we have, especially, `print engine': the guts of a laser printer. 2. An analogous piece of software; notionally, one that does a lot of noisy crunching, such as a `database engine'.

The hacker senses of `engine' are actually close to its original, pre-Industrial-Revolution sense of a skill, clever device, or instrument (the word is cognate to `ingenuity'). This sense had not been completely eclipsed by the modern connotation of power-transducing machinery in Charles Babbage's time, which explains why he named the stored-program computer that he designed in 1844 the `Analytical Engine'.

Node:English, Next:enhancement, Previous:engine, Up:= E =

English

1. n. obs. The source code for a program, which may be in any language, as opposed to the linkable or executable binary produced from it by a compiler. The idea behind the term is that to a real hacker, a program written in his favorite programming language is at least as readable as English. Usage: mostly by old-time hackers, though recognizable in context. 2. The official name of the database language used by old the Pick Operating System, actually a sort of crufty, brain-damaged SQL with delusions of grandeur. The name permitted **marketroid**s to say "Yes, and you can program our computers in English!" to ignorant **suit**s without quite running afoul of the truth-in-advertising laws.

Node:enhancement, Next:ENQ, Previous:English, Up:= E =

enhancement n.

Common **marketroid**-speak for a bug **fix**. This abuse of language is a popular and time-tested way to turn incompetence into increased revenue. A hacker being ironic would instead call the fix a **feature** -- or perhaps save some effort by declaring the bug itself to be a feature.

Node:ENQ, Next:EOF, Previous:enhancement, Up:= E =

ENQ /enkw/ or /enk/

[from the ASCII mnemonic ENQuire for 0000101] An on-line convention for querying someone's availability. After opening a **talk mode** connection to someone apparently in heavy hack mode, one might type `SYN SYN ENQ?` (the SYNs representing notional synchronization bytes), and expect a return of **ACK** or **NAK** depending on whether or not the person felt interruptible. Compare **ping**, **finger**, and the usage of `FOO?` listed under **talk mode**.

Node:EOF, Next:EOL, Previous:ENQ, Up:= E =

EOF /E-O-F/ n.

[abbreviation, `End Of File'] 1. [techspeak] The **out-of-band** value returned by C's sequential character-input functions (and their equivalents in other environments) when end of file has been reached. This value is usually -1 under C libraries postdating V6 Unix, but was originally 0. DOS hackers think EOF is ^Z, and a few Amiga hackers think it's ^\. 2. [Unix] The keyboard character (usually control-D, the ASCII EOT (End Of Transmission) character) that is mapped by the terminal driver into an end-of-file condition. 3. Used by extension in non-computer contexts when a human is doing something that can be modeled as a sequential read and can't go further. "Yeah, I looked for a list of 360 mnemonics to post as a joke, but I hit EOF pretty fast; all the library had was a **JCL** manual." See also **EOL**.

Node:EOL, Next:EOU, Previous:EOF, Up:= E =

EOL /E-O-L/ n.

[End Of Line] Syn. for **newline**, derived perhaps from the original CDC6600 Pascal. Now rare, but widely recognized and occasionally used for brevity. Used in the example entry under **BNF**. See also **EOF**.

Node:EOU, Next:epoch, Previous:EOL, Up:= E =

EOU /E-O-U/ n.

The mnemonic of a mythical ASCII control character (End Of User) that would make an ASR-33 Teletype explode on receipt. This construction parodies the numerous obscure delimiter and control characters left in ASCII from the days when it was associated more with wire-service teletypes than computers (e.g., FS, GS, RS, US, EM, SUB, ETX, and esp. EOT). It is worth remembering that ASR-33s were big, noisy mechanical beasts with a lot of clattering parts; the notion that one might explode was

nowhere near as ridiculous as it might seem to someone sitting in front of a **tube** or flatscreen today.

Node:epoch, Next:epsilon, Previous:EOU, Up:= E =

epoch n.

[Unix: prob. from astronomical timekeeping] The time and date corresponding to 0 in an operating system's clock and timestamp values. Under most Unix versions the epoch is 00:00:00 GMT, January 1, 1970; under VMS, it's 00:00:00 of November 17, 1858 (base date of the U.S. Naval Observatory's ephemerides); on a Macintosh, it's the midnight beginning January 1 1904. System time is measured in seconds or **tick**s past the epoch. Weird problems may ensue when the clock wraps around (see **wrap around**), which is not necessarily a rare event; on systems counting 10 ticks per second, a signed 32-bit count of ticks is good only for 6.8 years. The 1-tick-per-second clock of Unix is good only until January 18, 2038, assuming at least some software continues to consider it signed and that word lengths don't increase by then. See also **wall time**. Microsoft Windows, on the other hand, has an epoch problem every 49.7 days - but this is seldom noticed as Windows is almost incapable of staying up continuously for that long.

Node:epsilon, Next:epsilon squared, Previous:epoch, Up:= E =

epsilon

[see **delta**] 1. n. A small quantity of anything. "The cost is epsilon." 2. adj. Very small, negligible; less than **marginal**. "We can get this feature for epsilon cost." 3. `within epsilon of': close enough to be indistinguishable for all practical purposes, even closer than being `within delta of'. "That's not what I asked for, but it's within epsilon of what I wanted." Alternatively, it may mean not close enough, but very little is required to get it there: "My program is within epsilon of working."

Node:epsilon squared, Next:era the, Previous:epsilon, Up:= E =

epsilon squared n.

A quantity even smaller than **epsilon**, as small in comparison to epsilon as epsilon is to something normal; completely negligible. If you buy a supercomputer for a million dollars, the cost of the thousand-dollar terminal to go with it is **epsilon**, and the cost of the ten-dollar cable to connect them is epsilon squared. Compare **lost in the underflow**, **lost in the noise**.

Node:era the, Next:Eric Conspiracy, Previous:epsilon squared, Up:= E =

era n.

Syn. **epoch**. Webster's Unabridged makes these words almost synonymous, but `era' more often connotes a span of time rather than a point in time, whereas the reverse is true for **epoch**. The **epoch** usage is recommended.

Node:Eric Conspiracy, Next:Eris, Previous:era the, Up:= E =

Eric Conspiracy n.

A shadowy group of mustachioed hackers named Eric first pinpointed as a sinister conspiracy by an infamous *talk.bizarre* posting ca. 1987; this was doubtless influenced by the numerous `Eric' jokes in the Monty Python oeuvre. There do indeed seem to be considerably more mustachioed Erics in hackerdom than the frequency of these three traits can account for unless they are correlated in some arcane way. Well-known examples include Eric Allman (he of the `Allman style' described under **indent style**) and Erik Fair (co-author of NNTP); your editor has heard from more than sixty others by email, and the organization line `Eric Conspiracy Secret Laboratories' now emanates regularly from more than one site. See the Eric Conspiracy Web Page at http://www.ccil.org/~esr/ecsl/ for full details.

Node:Eris, Next:erotics, Previous:Eric Conspiracy, Up:= E =

Eris /e'ris/ n.

The Greek goddess of Chaos, Discord, Confusion, and Things You Know Not Of; her name was latinized to Discordia and she was worshiped by that name in Rome. Not a very friendly deity in the Classical original, she was reinvented as a more benign personification of creative anarchy starting in 1959 by the adherents of **Discordianism** and has since been a semi-serious subject of veneration in several `fringe' cultures, including hackerdom. See **Discordianism**, **Church of the SubGenius**.

Node:erotics, Next:error 33, Previous:Eris, Up:= E =

erotics /ee-ro'tiks/ n.

[Helsinki University of Technology, Finland] n. English-language university slang for electronics. Often used by hackers in Helsinki, maybe because good electronics excites them and makes them warm.

Node:error 33, Next:eurodemo, Previous:erotics, Up:= E =

error 33 [XEROX PARC] n.

1. Predicating one research effort upon the success of another. 2. Allowing your own research effort to be placed on the critical path of some other project (be it a research effort or not).

Node:eurodemo, Next:evil, Previous:error 33, Up:= E =

eurodemo /yoor'o-dem`-o/

a **demo**, sense 4

Node:evil, Next:evil and rude, Previous:eurodemo, Up:= E =

evil adj.

As used by hackers, implies that some system, program, person, or institution is sufficiently maldesigned as to be not worth the bother of dealing with. Unlike the adjectives in the **cretinous**/**losing**/**brain-damaged** series, `evil' does not imply incompetence or bad design, but rather a set of goals or design criteria fatally incompatible with the speaker's. This usage is more an esthetic and engineering judgment than a moral one in the mainstream sense. "We thought about adding a **Blue Glue** interface but decided it

was too evil to deal with." "**TECO** is neat, but it can be pretty evil if you're prone to typos." Often pronounced with the first syllable lengthened, as /eeee'vil/. Compare **evil and rude**.

Node:evil and rude, Next:Evil Empire, Previous:evil, Up:= E =

evil and rude adj.

Both **evil** and **rude**, but with the additional connotation that the rudeness was due to malice rather than incompetence. Thus, for example: Microsoft's Windows NT is *evil* because it's a competent implementation of a bad design; it's *rude* because it's gratuitously incompatible with Unix in places where compatibility would have been as easy and effective to do; but it's *evil and rude* because the incompatibilities are apparently there not to fix design bugs in Unix but rather to lock hapless customers and developers into the Microsoft way. Hackish *evil and rude* is close to the mainstream sense of `evil'.

Node:Evil Empire, Next:exa-, Previous:evil and rude, Up:= E =

Evil Empire n.

[from Ronald Reagan's famous characterization of the communist Soviet Union] Formerly **IBM**, now Microsoft. Functionally, the company most hackers love to hate at any given time. Hackers like to see themselves as romantic rebels against the Evil Empire, and frequently adopt this role to the point of ascribing rather more power and malice to the Empire than it actually has. See also **Borg** and search for Evil Empire pages on the Web.

Node:exa-, Next:examining the entrails, Previous:Evil Empire, Up:= E =

exa- /ek's*/ pref.

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:examining the entrails, Next:EXCH, Previous:exa-, Up:= E =

examining the entrails n.

The process of **grovel**ling through a **core dump** or hex image in an attempt to discover the bug that brought a program or system down. The reference is to divination from the entrails of a sacrified animal. Compare **runes**, **incantation**, **black art**, **desk check**.

Node:EXCH, Next:excl, Previous:examining the entrails, Up:= E =

EXCH /eks'ch*/ or /eksch/ vt.

To exchange two things, each for the other; to swap places. If you point to two people sitting down and say "Exch!", you are asking them to trade places. EXCH, meaning EXCHange, was originally the name of a PDP-10 instruction that exchanged the contents of a register and a memory location. Many newer hackers are probably thinking instead of the **PostScript** exchange operator (which is usually written in lowercase).

Node:excl, Next:EXE, Previous:EXCH, Up:= E =

excl /eks'kl/ n.

Abbreviation for `exclamation point'. See **bang**, **shriek**, **ASCII**.

Node:EXE, Next:exec, Previous:excl, Up:= E =

EXE /eks'ee/ or /eek'see/ or /E-X-E/ n.

An executable binary file. Some operating systems (notably MS-DOS, VMS, and TWENEX) use the extension .EXE to mark such files. This usage is also occasionally found among Unix programmers even though Unix executables don't have any required suffix.

Node:exec, Next:exercise left as an, Previous:EXE, Up:= E =

exec /eg-zek'/ or /eks'ek/ vt., n.

1. [Unix: from `execute'] Synonym for **chain**, derives from the `exec(2)` call. 2. [from `executive'] obs. The command interpreter for an **OS** (see **shell**); term esp. used around mainframes, and prob. derived from UNIVAC's archaic EXEC 2 and EXEC 8 operating systems. 3. At IBM and VM/CMS shops, the equivalent of a shell command file (among VM/CMS users).

The mainstream `exec' as an abbreviation for (human) executive is *not* used. To a hacker, an `exec' is a always a program, never a person.

Node:exercise left as an, Next:Exon, Previous:exec, Up:= E =

exercise, left as an adj.

[from technical books] Used to complete a proof when one doesn't mind a **handwave**, or to avoid one entirely. The complete phrase is: "The proof [or `the rest'] is left as an exercise for the reader." This comment *has* occasionally been attached to unsolved research problems by authors possessed of either an evil sense of humor or a vast faith in the capabilities of their audiences.

Node:Exon, Next:Exploder, Previous:exercise left as an, Up:= E =

Exon /eks'on/ excl.

A generic obscenity that quickly entered wide use on the Internet and Usenet after **Black Thursday**. From the last name of Senator James Exon (Democrat-Nebraska), primary author of the **CDA**.

Node:Exploder, Next:exploit, Previous:Exon, Up:= E =

Exploder n.

Used within Microsoft to refer to the Windows Explorer, the interface component of Windows 95 and WinNT 4. Our spies report that most of the heavy guns at MS came from a Unix background and use command line utilities; even they are scornful of the over-gingerbreaded **WIMP environment**s that they have been called upon to create.

Node:exploit, Next:external memory, Previous:Exploder, Up:= E =

exploit n.

[originally cracker slang] 1. A vulnerability in software that can be used for breaking security or otherwise attacking an Internet host over the network. The **Ping O' Death** is a famous exploit. 2. More grammatically, a program that exploits an exploit in sense 1,

---

Node:external memory, Next:eye candy, Previous:exploit, Up:= E =

external memory n.

A memo pad, palmtop computer, or written notes. "Hold on while I write that to external memory". The analogy is with store or DRAM versus nonvolatile disk storage on computers.

Node:eye candy, Next:eyeball search, Previous:external memory, Up:= E =

eye candy /i:' kand`ee/ n.

[from mainstream slang "ear candy"] A display of some sort that's presented to **luser**s to keep them distracted while the program performs necessary background tasks. "Give 'em some eye candy while the back-end **slurp**s that **BLOB** into core." Reported as mainstream usage among players of graphics-heavy computer games. We're also told this term is mainstream slang for soft pornography, but that sense does not appear to be live among hackers.

Node:eyeball search, Next:face time, Previous:eye candy, Up:= E =

eyeball search n.,v.

To look for something in a mass of code or data with one's own native optical sensors, as opposed to using some sort of pattern matching software like **grep** or any other automated search tool. Also called a **vgrep**; compare **vdiff**, **desk check**.

Node:= F =, Next:= G =, Previous:= E =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= F =

- face time:
- factor:
- fairings:
- fall over:

- fall through:
- fan:
- fandango on core:
- FAQ:
- FAQ list:
- FAQL:
- faradize:
- farkled:
- farming:
- fascist:
- fat electrons:
- fat-finger:
- faulty:
- fd leak:
- fear and loathing:
- feature:
- feature creature:
- feature creep:
- feature key:
- feature shock:
- featurectomy:
- feep:
- feeper:
- feeping creature:
- feeping creaturism:
- feetch feetch:
- fence:
- fencepost error:
- FidoNet:
- field circus:
- field servoid:
- Fight-o-net:
- File Attach:
- File Request:
- file signature:
- filk:
- film at 11:
- filter:
- Finagle's Law:
- fine:
- finger:
- finger trouble:
- finger-pointing syndrome:
- finn:
- firebottle:
- firefighting:
- firehose syndrome:
- firewall code:
- firewall machine:
- fireworks mode:
- firmware:
- firmy:

- fish:
- FISH queue:
- FITNR:
- fix:
- FIXME:
- flag:
- flag day:
- flaky:
- flamage:
- flame:
- flame bait:
- flame on:
- flame war:
- flamer:
- flap:
- flarp:
- flat:
- flat-ASCII:
- flat-file:
- flatten:
- flavor:
- flavorful:
- flippy:
- flood:
- flowchart:
- flower key:
- flush:
- flypage:
- Flyspeck 3:
- flytrap:
- FM:
- fnord:
- FOAF:
- FOD:
- fold case:
- followup:
- fontology:
- foo:
- foobar:
- fool:
- fool file:
- Foonly:
- footprint:
- for free:
- for the rest of us:
- for values of:
- fora:
- foreground:
- fork bomb:
- forked:
- Fortrash:
- fortune cookie:

- forum:
- fossil:
- four-color glossies:
- frag:
- fragile:
- fred:
- Fred Foobar:
- frednet:
- free software:
- freeware:
- freeze:
- fried:
- frink:
- friode:
- fritterware:
- frob:
- frobnicate:
- frobnitz:
- frog:
- frogging:
- front end:
- frotz:
- frotzed:
- frowney:
- FRS:
- fry:
- fscking:
- FSF:
- FTP:
- FUBAR:
- fuck me harder:
- FUD:
- FUD wars:
- fudge:
- fudge factor:
- fuel up:
- Full Monty:
- fum:
- functino:
- funky:
- funny money:
- furrfu:
- fuzzball:

Node:face time, Next:factor, Previous:eyeball search, Up:= F =

face time n.

[common] Time spent interacting with somebody face-to-face (as opposed to via electronic links). "Oh, yeah, I spent some face time with him at the last Usenix."

Node:factor, Next:fairings, Previous:face time, Up:= F =

factor n.

See **coefficient of X**.

Node:fairings, Next:fall over, Previous:factor, Up:= F =

fairings n. /fer'ingz/

[FreeBSD; orig. a typo for `fairness'] A term thrown out in discussion whenever a completely and transparently nonsensical argument in one's favor(?) seems called for, e,g. at the end of a really long thread for which the outcome is no longer even cared about since everyone is now so sick of it; or in rebuttal to another nonsensical argument ("Change the loader to look for /kernel.pl? What about fairings?")

Node:fall over, Next:fall through, Previous:fairings, Up:= F =

fall over vi.

[IBM] Yet another synonym for **crash** or **lose**. `Fall over hard' equates to **crash and burn**.

Node:fall through, Next:fan, Previous:fall over, Up:= F =

fall through v.

(n. `fallthrough', var. `fall-through') 1. To exit a loop by exhaustion, i.e., by having fulfilled its exit condition rather than via a break or exception condition that exits from the middle of it. This usage appears to be *really* old, dating from the 1940s and 1950s. 2. To fail a test that would have passed control to a subroutine or some other distant portion of code. 3. In C, `fall-through' occurs when the flow of execution in a switch statement reaches a `case` label other than by jumping there from the switch header, passing a point where one would normally expect to find a `break`. A trivial example:

```
switch (color)
{
case GREEN:
   do_green();
   break;
case PINK:
   do_pink();
   /* FALL THROUGH */
case RED:
   do_red();
   break;
default:
   do_blue();
   break;
}
```

The variant spelling `/* FALL THRU */` is also common.

The effect of the above code is to `do_green()` when color is `GREEN`, `do_red()` when color is `RED`, `do_blue()` on any other color other than `PINK`, and (and this is the important part) `do_pink()` *and*

then `do_red()` when color is `PINK`. Fall-through is **considered harmful** by some, though there are contexts (such as the coding of state machines) in which it is natural; it is generally considered good practice to include a comment highlighting the fall-through where one would normally expect a break. See also **Duff's device**.

Node:fan, Next:fandango on core, Previous:fall through, Up:= F =

fan n.

Without qualification, indicates a fan of science fiction, especially one who goes to **con**s and tends to hang out with other fans. Many hackers are fans, so this term has been imported from fannish slang; however, unlike much fannish slang it is recognized by most non-fannish hackers. Among SF fans the plural is correctly `fen', but this usage is not automatic to hackers. "Laura reads the stuff occasionally but isn't really a fan."

Node:fandango on core, Next:FAQ, Previous:fan, Up:= F =

fandango on core n.

[Unix/C hackers, from the Iberian dance] In C, a wild pointer that runs out of bounds, causing a **core dump**, or corrupts the `malloc(3)` **arena** in such a way as to cause mysterious failures later on, is sometimes said to have `done a fandango on core'. On low-end personal machines without an MMU (or Windows boxes, which have an MMU but use it incompetently), this can corrupt the OS itself, causing massive lossage. Other frenetic dances such as the cha-cha or the watusi, may be substituted. See **aliasing bug**, **precedence lossage**, **smash the stack**, **memory leak**, **memory smash**, **overrun screw**, **core**.

Node:FAQ, Next:FAQ list, Previous:fandango on core, Up:= F =

FAQ /F-A-Q/ or /fak/ n.

[Usenet] 1. A Frequently Asked Question. 2. A compendium of accumulated lore, posted periodically to high-volume newsgroups in an attempt to forestall such questions. Some people prefer the term `FAQ list' or `FAQL' /fa'kl/, reserving `FAQ' for sense 1.

This lexicon itself serves as a good example of a collection of one kind of lore, although it is far too big for a regular FAQ posting. Examples: "What is the proper type of NULL?" and "What's that funny name for the # character?" are both Frequently Asked Questions. Several FAQs refer readers to this file.

Node:FAQ list, Next:FAQL, Previous:FAQ, Up:= F =

FAQ list /F-A-Q list/ or /fak list/ n.

[common; Usenet] Syn **FAQ**, sense 2.

Node:FAQL, Next:faradize, Previous:FAQ list, Up:= F =

FAQL /fa'kl/ n.

Syn. **FAQ list**.

Node:faradize, Next:farkled, Previous:FAQL, Up:= F =

faradize /far'*-di:z/ v.

[US Geological Survey] To start any hyper-addictive process or trend, or to continue adding current to such a trend. Telling one user about a new octo-tetris game you compiled would be a faradizing act -- in two weeks you might find your entire department playing the faradic game.

Node:farkled, Next:farming, Previous:faradize, Up:= F =

farkled /far'kld/ adj.

[DeVry Institute of Technology, Atlanta] Syn. **hosed**. Poss. owes something to Yiddish `farblondjet' and/or the `Farkle Family' skits on "Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In", a popular comedy show of the late 1960s.

Node:farming, Next:fascist, Previous:farkled, Up:= F =

farming n.

[Adelaide University, Australia] What the heads of a disk drive are said to do when they plow little furrows in the magnetic media. Associated with a **crash**. Typically used as follows: "Oh no, the machine has just crashed; I hope the hard drive hasn't gone **farming** again." No longer common; modern drives automatically park their heads in a safe zone on power-down, so it takes a real mechanical problem to induce this.

Node:fascist, Next:fat electrons, Previous:farming, Up:= F =

fascist adj.

1. [common] Said of a computer system with excessive or annoying security barriers, usage limits, or access policies. The implication is that said policies are preventing hackers from getting interesting work done. The variant `fascistic' seems to have been preferred at MIT, poss. by analogy with `touristic' (see **tourist** or under the influence of German/Yiddish `faschistisch'). 2. In the design of languages and other software tools, `the fascist alternative' is the most restrictive and structured way of capturing a particular function; the implication is that this may be desirable in order to simplify the implementation or provide tighter error checking. Compare **bondage-and-discipline language**, although that term is global rather than local.

Node:fat electrons, Next:fat-finger, Previous:fascist, Up:= F =

fat electrons n.

Old-time hacker David Cargill's theory on the causation of computer glitches. Your typical electric utility draws its line current out of the big generators with a pair of coil taps located near the top of the dynamo. When the normal tap brushes get dirty, they take them off line to clean them up, and use special auxiliary

taps on the *bottom* of the coil. Now, this is a problem, because when they do that they get not ordinary or `thin' electrons, but the fat'n'sloppy electrons that are heavier and so settle to the bottom of the generator. These flow down ordinary wires just fine, but when they have to turn a sharp corner (as in an integrated-circuit via), they're apt to get stuck. This is what causes computer glitches. [Fascinating. Obviously, fat electrons must gain mass by **bogon** absorption --ESR] Compare **bogon**, **magic smoke**.

Node:fat-finger, Next:faulty, Previous:fat electrons, Up:= F =

fat-finger vt.

1. To introduce a typo while editing in such a way that the resulting manglification of a configuration file does something useless, damaging, or wildly unexpected. "NSI fat-fingered their DNS zone file and took half the net down again." 2. More generally, any typo that produces dramatically bad results.

Node:faulty, Next:fd leak, Previous:fat-finger, Up:= F =

faulty adj.

Non-functional; buggy. Same denotation as **bletcherous**, **losing**, q.v., but the connotation is much milder.

Node:fd leak, Next:fear and loathing, Previous:faulty, Up:= F =

fd leak /F-D leek/ n.

A kind of programming bug analogous to a **core leak**, in which a program fails to close file descriptors (`fd's) after file operations are completed, and thus eventually runs out of them. See **leak**.

Node:fear and loathing, Next:feature, Previous:fd leak, Up:= F =

fear and loathing n.

[from Hunter S. Thompson] A state inspired by the prospect of dealing with certain real-world systems and standards that are totally **brain-damaged** but ubiquitous -- Intel 8086s, or **COBOL**, or **EBCDIC**, or any **IBM** machine bigger than a workstation. "Ack! They want PCs to be able to talk to the AI machine. Fear and loathing time!"

Node:feature, Next:feature creature, Previous:fear and loathing, Up:= F =

feature n.

1. [common] A good property or behavior (as of a program). Whether it was intended or not is immaterial. 2. [common] An intended property or behavior (as of a program). Whether it is good or not is immaterial (but if bad, it is also a **misfeature**). 3. A surprising property or behavior; in particular, one that is purposely inconsistent because it works better that way -- such an inconsistency is therefore a **feature** and not a **bug**. This kind of feature is sometimes called a **miswart**; see that entry for a classic example. 4. A property or behavior that is gratuitous or unnecessary, though perhaps also impressive or cute. For example, one feature of Common LISP's `format` function is the ability to print numbers in two different Roman-numeral formats (see **bells whistles and gongs**). 5. A property or behavior that was put in to help

someone else but that happens to be in your way. 6. [common] A bug that has been documented. To call something a feature sometimes means the author of the program did not consider the particular case, and that the program responded in a way that was unexpected but not strictly incorrect. A standard joke is that a bug can be turned into a **feature** simply by documenting it (then theoretically no one can complain about it because it's in the manual), or even by simply declaring it to be good. "That's not a bug, that's a feature!" is a common catchphrase. See also **feetch feetch**, **creeping featurism**, **wart**, **green lightning**.

The relationship among bugs, features, misfeatures, warts, and miswarts might be clarified by the following hypothetical exchange between two hackers on an airliner:

A: "This seat doesn't recline."

B: "That's not a bug, that's a feature. There is an emergency exit door built around the window behind you, and the route has to be kept clear."

A: "Oh. Then it's a misfeature; they should have increased the spacing between rows here."

B: "Yes. But if they'd increased spacing in only one section it would have been a wart -- they would've had to make nonstandard-length ceiling panels to fit over the displaced seats."

A: "A miswart, actually. If they increased spacing throughout they'd lose several rows and a chunk out of the profit margin. So unequal spacing would actually be the Right Thing."

B: "Indeed."

`Undocumented feature' is a common, allegedly humorous euphemism for a **bug**. There's a related joke that is sometimes referred to as the "one-question geek test". You say to someone "I saw a Volkswagen Beetle today with a vanity license plate that read FEATURE". If he/she laughs, he/she is a geek (see **computer geek**, sense 2).

Node:feature creature, Next:feature creep, Previous:feature, Up:= F =

feature creature n.

[poss. fr. slang `creature feature' for a horror movie] 1. One who loves to add features to designs or programs, perhaps at the expense of coherence, concision, or **taste**. 2. Alternately, a mythical being that induces otherwise rational programmers to perpetrate such crocks. See also **feeping creaturism**, **creeping featurism**.

Node:feature creep, Next:feature key, Previous:feature creature, Up:= F =

feature creep n.

[common] The result of **creeping featurism**, as in "Emacs has a bad case of feature creep".

Node:feature key, Next:feature shock, Previous:feature creep, Up:= F =

feature key n.

[common] The Macintosh key with the cloverleaf graphic on its keytop; sometimes referred to as `flower', `pretzel', `clover', `propeller', `beanie' (an apparent reference to the major feature of a propeller beanie),

splat, `open-apple' or (officially, in Mac documentation) the `command key'. In French, the term `papillon' (butterfly) has been reported. The proliferation of terms for this creature may illustrate one subtle peril of iconic interfaces.

Many people have been mystified by the cloverleaf-like symbol that appears on the feature key. Its oldest name is `cross of St. Hannes', but it occurs in pre-Christian Viking art as a decorative motif. Throughout Scandinavia today the road agencies use it to mark sites of historical interest. Apple picked up the symbol from an early Mac developer who happened to be Swedish. Apple documentation gives the translation "interesting feature"!

There is some dispute as to the proper (Swedish) name of this symbol. It technically stands for the word `sevärdhet' (thing worth seeing); many of these are old churches. Some Swedes report as an idiom for the sign the word `kyrka', cognate to English `church' and pronounced (roughly) /chur'ka/ in modern Swedish. Others say this is nonsense. Other idioms reported for the sign are `runa' (rune) or `runsten' /roon'stn/ (runestone), derived from the fact that many of the interesting features are Viking rune-stones. The term `fornminne' /foorn'min'*/ (relic of antiquity, ancient monument) is also reported, especially among those who think that the Mac itself is a relic of antiquity.

Node:feature shock, Next:featurectomy, Previous:feature key, Up:= F =

feature shock n.

[from Alvin Toffler's book title "Future Shock"] A user's (or programmer's!) confusion when confronted with a package that has too many features and poor introductory material.

Node:featurectomy, Next:feep, Previous:feature shock, Up:= F =

featurectomy /fee`ch*r-ek't*-mee/ n.

The act of removing a feature from a program. Featurectomies come in two flavors, the `righteous' and the `reluctant'. Righteous featurectomies are performed because the remover believes the program would be more elegant without the feature, or there is already an equivalent and better way to achieve the same end. (Doing so is not quite the same thing as removing a **misfeature**.) Reluctant featurectomies are performed to satisfy some external constraint such as code size or execution speed.

Node:feep, Next:feeper, Previous:featurectomy, Up:= F =

feep /feep/

1. n. The soft electronic `bell' sound of a display terminal (except for a VT-52); a beep (in fact, the microcomputer world seems to prefer **beep**). 2. vi. To cause the display to make a feep sound. ASR-33s (the original TTYs) do not feep; they have mechanical bells that ring. Alternate forms: **beep**, `bleep', or just about anything suitably onomatopoeic. (Jeff MacNelly, in his comic strip "Shoe", uses the word `eep' for sounds made by computer terminals and video games; this is perhaps the closest written approximation yet.) The term `breedle' was sometimes heard at SAIL, where the terminal bleepers are not particularly soft (they sound more like the musical equivalent of a raspberry or Bronx cheer; for a close approximation, imagine the sound of a Star Trek communicator's beep lasting for five seconds). The `feeper' on a VT-52 has been compared to the sound of a '52 Chevy stripping its gears. See also **ding**.

Node:feeper, Next:feeping creature, Previous:feep, Up:= F =

feeper /fee'pr/ n.

The device in a terminal or workstation (usually a loudspeaker of some kind) that makes the **feep** sound.

Node:feeping creature, Next:feeping creaturism, Previous:feeper, Up:= F =

feeping creature n.

[from **feeping creaturism**] An unnecessary feature; a bit of **chrome** that, in the speaker's judgment, is the camel's nose for a whole horde of new features.

Node:feeping creaturism, Next:feetch feetch, Previous:feeping creature, Up:= F =

feeping creaturism /fee'ping kree`ch*r-izm/ n.

A deliberate spoonerism for **creeping featurism**, meant to imply that the system or program in question has become a misshapen creature of hacks. This term isn't really well defined, but it sounds so neat that most hackers have said or heard it. It is probably reinforced by an image of terminals prowling about in the dark making their customary noises.

Node:feetch feetch, Next:fence, Previous:feeping creaturism, Up:= F =

feetch feetch /feech feech/ interj.

If someone tells you about some new improvement to a program, you might respond: "Feetch, feetch!" The meaning of this depends critically on vocal inflection. With enthusiasm, it means something like "Boy, that's great! What a great hack!" Grudgingly or with obvious doubt, it means "I don't know; it sounds like just one more unnecessary and complicated thing". With a tone of resignation, it means, "Well, I'd rather keep it simple, but I suppose it has to be done".

Node:fence, Next:fencepost error, Previous:feetch feetch, Up:= F =

fence n. 1.

A sequence of one or more distinguished (**out-of-band**) characters (or other data items), used to delimit a piece of data intended to be treated as a unit (the computer-science literature calls this a `sentinel'). The NUL (ASCII 0000000) character that terminates strings in C is a fence. Hex FF is also (though slightly less frequently) used this way. See **zigamorph**. 2. An extra data value inserted in an array or other data structure in order to allow some normal test on the array's contents also to function as a termination test. For example, a highly optimized routine for finding a value in an array might artificially place a copy of the value to be searched for after the last slot of the array, thus allowing the main search loop to search for the value without having to check at each pass whether the end of the array had been reached. 3. [among users of optimizing compilers] Any technique, usually exploiting knowledge about the compiler, that blocks certain optimizations. Used when explicit mechanisms are not available or are overkill. Typically a hack: "I call a dummy procedure there to force a flush of the optimizer's register-coloring info" can be expressed by the shorter "That's a fence procedure".

Node:fencepost error, Next:FidoNet, Previous:fence, Up:= F =

fencepost error n.

1. [common] A problem with the discrete equivalent of a boundary condition, often exhibited in programs by iterative loops. From the following problem: "If you build a fence 100 feet long with posts 10 feet apart, how many posts do you need?" (Either 9 or 11 is a better answer than the obvious 10.) For example, suppose you have a long list or array of items, and want to process items m through n; how many items are there? The obvious answer is n - m, but that is off by one; the right answer is n - m + 1. A program that used the `obvious' formula would have a fencepost error in it. See also **zeroth** and **off-by-one error**, and note that not all off-by-one errors are fencepost errors. The game of Musical Chairs involves a catastrophic off-by-one error where N people try to sit in N - 1 chairs, but it's not a fencepost error. Fencepost errors come from counting things rather than the spaces between them, or vice versa, or by neglecting to consider whether one should count one or both ends of a row. 2. [rare] An error induced by unexpected regularities in input values, which can (for instance) completely thwart a theoretically efficient binary tree or hash table implementation. (The error here involves the difference between expected and worst case behaviors of an algorithm.)

Node:FidoNet, Next:field circus, Previous:fencepost error, Up:= F =

FidoNet n.

A worldwide hobbyist network of personal computers which exchanges mail, discussion groups, and files. Founded in 1984 and originally consisting only of IBM PCs and compatibles, FidoNet now includes such diverse machines as Apple][s, Ataris, Amigas, and Unix systems. For years FidoNet actually grew faster than Usenet, but the advent of cheap Internet access probably means its days are numbered. In early 1999 Fidonet has approximately 30,000 nodes, down from 38K in 1996.

Node:field circus, Next:field servoid, Previous:FidoNet, Up:= F =

field circus n.

[a derogatory pun on `field service'] The field service organization of any hardware manufacturer, but originally **DEC**. There is an entire genre of jokes about field circus engineers:

```
Q: How can you recognize a field circus engineer
   with a flat tire?
A: He's changing one tire at a time to see which one is flat.

Q: How can you recognize a field circus engineer
   who is out of gas?
A: He's changing one tire at a time to see which one is flat.

Q: How can you tell it's your field circus engineer?
A: The spare is flat, too.
```

[See **Easter egging** for additional insight on these jokes.]

There is also the `Field Circus Cheer' (from the old **plan file** for DEC on MIT-AI):

```
Maynard! Maynard!
Don't mess with us!
We're mean and we're tough!
If you get us confused
We'll screw up your stuff.
```

(DEC's service HQ, still extant under the Compaq regime, is located in Maynard, Massachusetts.)

Node:field servoid, Next:Fight-o-net, Previous:field circus, Up:= F =

field servoid [play on `android'] /fee'ld ser'voyd/ n.

Representative of a field service organization (see **field circus**). This has many of the implications of **droid**.

Node:Fight-o-net, Next:File Attach, Previous:field servoid, Up:= F =

Fight-o-net n.

[FidoNet] Deliberate distortion of **FidoNet**, often applied after a flurry of **flamage** in a particular **echo**, especially the SYSOP echo or Fidonews (see **'Snooze**).

Node:File Attach, Next:File Request, Previous:Fight-o-net, Up:= F =

File Attach [FidoNet]

1. n. A file sent along with a mail message from one FidoNet to another. 2. vt. Sending someone a file by using the File Attach option in a FidoNet mailer.

Node:File Request, Next:file signature, Previous:File Attach, Up:= F =

File Request [FidoNet]

1. n. The **FidoNet** equivalent of **FTP**, in which one FidoNet system automatically dials another and **snarf**s one or more files. Often abbreviated `FReq'; files are often announced as being "available for FReq" in the same way that files are announced as being "available for/by anonymous FTP" on the Internet. 2. vt. The act of getting a copy of a file by using the File Request option of the FidoNet mailer.

Node:file signature, Next:filk, Previous:File Request, Up:= F =

file signature n.

A **magic number**, sense 3.

Node:filk, Next:film at 11, Previous:file signature, Up:= F =

filk /filk/ n.,v.

[from SF fandom, where a typo for `folk' was adopted as a new word] A popular or folk song with lyrics revised or completely new lyrics and/or music, intended for humorous effect when read, and/or to be sung late at night at SF conventions. There is a flourishing subgenre of these called `computer filks', written by hackers and often containing rather sophisticated technical humor. See **double bucky** for an example. Compare **grilf**, **hing**, **pr0n**, and **newsfroup**.

Node:film at 11, Next:filter, Previous:filk, Up:= F =

film at 11

[MIT: in parody of TV newscasters] 1. Used in conversation to announce ordinary events, with a sarcastic implication that these events are earth-shattering. "**ITS** crashes; film at 11." "Bug found in scheduler; film at 11." 2. Also widely used outside MIT to indicate that additional information will be available at some future time, *without* the implication of anything particularly ordinary about the referenced event. For example, "The mail file server died this morning; we found garbage all over the root directory. Film at 11." would indicate that a major failure had occurred but that the people working on it have no additional information about it as yet; use of the phrase in this way suggests gently that the problem is liable to be fixed more quickly if the people doing the fixing can spend time doing the fixing rather than responding to questions, the answers to which will appear on the normal "11:00 news", if people will just be patient.

The variant "MPEGs at 11" has recently been cited (MPEG is a digital-video format.)

Node:filter, Next:Finagle's Law, Previous:film at 11, Up:= F =

filter n.

[very common; orig. **Unix**, now also in **MS-DOS**] A program that processes an input data stream into an output data stream in some well-defined way, and does no I/O to anywhere else except possibly on error conditions; one designed to be used as a stage in a `pipeline' (see **plumbing**). Compare **sponge**.

Node:Finagle's Law, Next:fine, Previous:filter, Up:= F =

Finagle's Law n.

The generalized or `folk' version of **Murphy's Law**, fully named "Finagle's Law of Dynamic Negatives" and usually rendered "Anything that can go wrong, will". One variant favored among hackers is "The perversity of the Universe tends towards a maximum" (but see also **Hanlon's Razor**). The label `Finagle's Law' was popularized by SF author Larry Niven in several stories depicting a frontier culture of asteroid miners; this `Belter' culture professed a religion and/or running joke involving the worship of the dread god Finagle and his mad prophet Murphy. Some technical and scientific cultures (e.g., paleontologists) know it under the name `Sod's Law'; this usage may be more common in Great Britain.

Node:fine, Next:finger, Previous:Finagle's Law, Up:= F =

fine adj.

[WPI] Good, but not good enough to be **cuspy**. The word `fine' is used elsewhere, of course, but without the implicit comparison to the higher level implied by **cuspy**.

Node:finger, Next:finger trouble, Previous:fine, Up:= F =

finger

[WAITS, via BSD Unix] 1. n. A program that displays information about a particular user or all users logged on the system, or a remote system. Typically shows full name, last login time, idle time, terminal line, and terminal location (where applicable). May also display a **plan file** left by the user (see also

Hacking X for Y). 2. vt. To apply finger to a username. 3. vt. By extension, to check a human's current state by any means. "Foodp?" "T!" "OK, finger Lisa and see if she's idle." 4. Any picture (composed of ASCII characters) depicting `the finger'. Originally a humorous component of one's plan file to deter the curious fingerer (sense 2), it has entered the arsenal of some **flamer**s.

Node:finger trouble, Next:finger-pointing syndrome, Previous:finger, Up:= F =

finger trouble n.

Mistyping, typos, or generalized keyboard incompetence (this is surprisingly common among hackers, given the amount of time they spend at keyboards). "I keep putting colons at the end of statements instead of semicolons", "Finger trouble again, eh?".

Node:finger-pointing syndrome, Next:finn, Previous:finger trouble, Up:= F =

finger-pointing syndrome n.

All-too-frequent result of bugs, esp. in new or experimental configurations. The hardware vendor points a finger at the software. The software vendor points a finger at the hardware. All the poor users get is the finger.

Node:finn, Next:firebottle, Previous:finger-pointing syndrome, Up:= F =

finn v.

[IRC] To pull rank on somebody based on the amount of time one has spent on **IRC**. The term derives from the fact that IRC was originally written in Finland in 1987. There may be some influence from the `Finn' character in William Gibson's seminal cyberpunk novel "Count Zero", who at one point says to another (much younger) character "I have a pair of shoes older than you are, so shut up!"

Node:firebottle, Next:firefighting, Previous:finn, Up:= F =

firebottle n.obs.

A large, primitive, power-hungry active electrical device, similar in function to a FET but constructed out of glass, metal, and vacuum. Characterized by high cost, low density, low reliability, high-temperature operation, and high power dissipation. Sometimes mistakenly called a `tube' in the U.S. or a `valve' in England; another hackish term is **glassfet**.

Node:firefighting, Next:firehose syndrome, Previous:firebottle, Up:= F =

firefighting n.

1. What sysadmins have to do to correct sudden operational problems. An opposite of hacking. "Been hacking your new newsreader?" "No, a power glitch hosed the network and I spent the whole afternoon fighting fires." 2. The act of throwing lots of manpower and late nights at a project, esp. to get it out before deadline. See also **gang bang**, **Mongolian Hordes technique**; however, the term `firefighting' connotes that the effort is going into chasing bugs rather than adding features.

Node:firehose syndrome, Next:firewall code, Previous:firefighting, Up:= F =

firehose syndrome n.

In mainstream folklore it is observed that trying to drink from a firehose can be a good way to rip your lips off. On computer networks, the absence or failure of flow control mechanisms can lead to situations in which the sending system sprays a massive flood of packets at an unfortunate receiving system, more than it can handle. Compare **overrun**, **buffer overflow**.

Node:firewall code, Next:firewall machine, Previous:firehose syndrome, Up:= F =

firewall code n.

1. The code you put in a system (say, a telephone switch) to make sure that the users can't do any damage. Since users always want to be able to do everything but never want to suffer for any mistakes, the construction of a firewall is a question not only of defensive coding but also of interface presentation, so that users don't even get curious about those corners of a system where they can burn themselves. 2. Any sanity check inserted to catch a **can't happen** error. Wise programmers often change code to fix a bug twice: once to fix the bug, and once to insert a firewall which would have arrested the bug before it did quite as much damage.

Node:firewall machine, Next:fireworks mode, Previous:firewall code, Up:= F =

firewall machine n.

A dedicated gateway machine with special security precautions on it, used to service outside network connections and dial-in lines. The idea is to protect a cluster of more loosely administered machines hidden behind it from **cracker**s. The typical firewall is an inexpensive micro-based Unix box kept clean of critical data, with a bunch of modems and public network ports on it but just one carefully watched connection back to the rest of the cluster. The special precautions may include threat monitoring, callback, and even a complete **iron box** keyable to particular incoming IDs or activity patterns. Syn. **flytrap**, **Venus flytrap**.

[When first coined in the mid-1980s this term was pure jargon. Now (1999) it is techspeak, and has been retained only as an example of uptake --ESR]

Node:fireworks mode, Next:firmware, Previous:firewall machine, Up:= F =

fireworks mode n.

1. The mode a machine is sometimes said to be in when it is performing a **crash and burn** operation. 2. There is (or was) a more specific meaning of this term in the Amiga community. The word fireworks described the effects of a particularly serious crash which prevented the video pointer(s) from getting reset at the start of the vertical blank. This caused the DAC to scroll through the entire contents of CHIP (video or video+CPU) memory. Since each bit plane would scroll separately this was quite a spectacular effect.

Node:firmware, Next:firmy, Previous:fireworks mode, Up:= F =

firmware /ferm'weir/ n.

Embedded software contained in EPROM or flash memory. It isn't quite hardware, but at least doesn't have to be loaded from a disk like regular software. Hacker usage differs from straight techspeak in that hackers don't normally apply it to stuff that you can't possibly get at, such as the program that runs a pocket calculator. Instead, it implies that the firmware could be changed, even if doing so would mean opening a box and plugging in a new chip. A computer's BIOS is the classic example, although nowadays there is firmware in disk controllers, modems, video cards and even CD-ROM drives.

Node:firmy, Next:fish, Previous:firmware, Up:= F =

firmy /fer'mee/ n.

Syn. **stiffy** (a 3.5-inch floppy disk).

Node:fish, Next:FISH queue, Previous:firmy, Up:= F =

fish n.

[Adelaide University, Australia] 1. Another **metasyntactic variable**. See **foo**. Derived originally from the Monty Python skit in the middle of "The Meaning of Life" entitled "Find the Fish". 2. A pun for `microfiche'. A microfiche file cabinet may be referred to as a `fish tank'.

Node:FISH queue, Next:FITNR, Previous:fish, Up:= F =

FISH queue n.

[acronym, by analogy with FIFO (First In, First Out)] `First In, Still Here'. A joking way of pointing out that processing of a particular sequence of events or requests has stopped dead. Also `FISH mode' and `FISHnet'; the latter may be applied to any network that is running really slowly or exhibiting extreme flakiness.

Node:FITNR, Next:fix, Previous:FISH queue, Up:= F =

FITNR // adj.

[Thinking Machines, Inc.] Fixed In The Next Release. A written-only notation attached to bug reports. Often wishful thinking.

Node:fix, Next:FIXME, Previous:FITNR, Up:= F =

fix n.,v.

What one does when a problem has been reported too many times to be ignored.

Node:FIXME, Next:flag, Previous:fix, Up:= F =

FIXME imp.

[common] A standard tag often put in C comments near a piece of code that needs work. The point of doing so is that a `grep` or a similar pattern-matching tool can find all such places quickly.

```
/* FIXME: note this is common in GNU code. */
```

Compare **XXX**.

Node:flag, Next:flag day, Previous:FIXME, Up:= F =

flag n.

[very common] A variable or quantity that can take on one of two values; a bit, particularly one that is used to indicate one of two outcomes or is used to control which of two things is to be done. "This flag controls whether to clear the screen before printing the message." "The program status word contains several flag bits." Used of humans analogously to **bit**. See also **hidden flag**, **mode bit**.

Node:flag day, Next:flaky, Previous:flag, Up:= F =

flag day n.

A software change that is neither forward- nor backward-compatible, and which is costly to make and costly to reverse. "Can we install that without causing a flag day for all users?" This term has nothing to do with the use of the word **flag** to mean a variable that has two values. It came into use when a massive change was made to the **Multics** timesharing system to convert from the short-lived 1965 version of the ASCII code to the 1967 version (in draft at the time); this was scheduled for Flag Day (a U.S. holiday), June 14, 1966. See also **backward combatability**.

Node:flaky, Next:flamage, Previous:flag day, Up:= F =

flaky adj.

(var sp. `flakey') Subject to frequent **lossage**. This use is of course related to the common slang use of the word to describe a person as eccentric, crazy, or just unreliable. A system that is flaky is working, sort of -- enough that you are tempted to try to use it -- but fails frequently enough that the odds in favor of finishing what you start are low. Commonwealth hackish prefers **dodgy** or **wonky**.

Node:flamage, Next:flame, Previous:flaky, Up:= F =

flamage /flay'm*j/ n.

[very common] Flaming verbiage, esp. high-noise, low-signal postings to **Usenet** or other electronic **fora**. Often in the phrase `the usual flamage'. `Flaming' is the act itself; `flamage' the content; a `flame' is a single flaming message. See **flame**, also **dahmum**.

Node:flame, Next:flame bait, Previous:flamage, Up:= F =

flame

[at MIT, orig. from the phrase `flaming asshole'] 1. vi. To post an email message intended to insult and provoke. 2. vi. To speak incessantly and/or rabidly on some relatively uninteresting subject or with a patently ridiculous attitude. 3. vt. Either of senses 1 or 2, directed with hostility at a particular person or people. 4. n. An instance of flaming. When a discussion degenerates into useless controversy, one might tell the participants "Now you're just flaming" or "Stop all that flamage!" to try to get them to cool down (so to speak).

The term may have been independently invented at several different places. It has been reported from MIT, Carleton College and RPI (among many other places) from as far back as 1969, and from the University of Virginia in the early 1960s.

It is possible that the hackish sense of `flame' is much older than that. The poet Chaucer was also what passed for a wizard hacker in his time; he wrote a treatise on the astrolabe, the most advanced computing device of the day. In Chaucer's "Troilus and Cressida", Cressida laments her inability to grasp the proof of a particular mathematical theorem; her uncle Pandarus then observes that it's called "the fleminge of wrecches." This phrase seems to have been intended in context as "that which puts the wretches to flight" but was probably just as ambiguous in Middle English as "the flaming of wretches" would be today. One suspects that Chaucer would feel right at home on Usenet.

Node:flame bait, Next:flame on, Previous:flame, Up:= F =

flame bait n.

[common] A posting intended to trigger a **flame war**, or one that invites flames in reply. See also **troll**.

Node:flame on, Next:flame war, Previous:flame bait, Up:= F =

flame on vi.,interj.

1. To begin to **flame**. The punning reference to Marvel Comics's Human Torch is no longer widely recognized. 2. To continue to flame. See **rave**, **burble**.

Node:flame war, Next:flamer, Previous:flame on, Up:= F =

flame war n.

[common] (var. `flamewar') An acrimonious dispute, especially when conducted on a public electronic forum such as **Usenet**.

Node:flamer, Next:flap, Previous:flame war, Up:= F =

flamer n.

[common] One who habitually **flame**s. Said esp. of obnoxious **Usenet** personalities.

Node:flap, Next:flarp, Previous:flamer, Up:= F =

flap vt.

1. [obs.] To unload a DECtape (so it goes flap, flap, flap...). Old-time hackers at MIT tell of the days when the disk was device 0 and DEC microtapes were 1, 2,... and attempting to flap device 0 would instead start a motor banging inside a cabinet near the disk. 2. By extension, to unload any magnetic tape. See also **macrotape**. Modern cartridge tapes no longer actually flap, but the usage has remained. (The term could well be re-applied to DEC's TK50 cartridge tape drive, a spectacularly misengineered contraption which makes a loud flapping sound, almost like an old reel-type lawnmower, in one of its many tape-eating failure modes.)

Node:flarp, Next:flat, Previous:flap, Up:= F =

flarp /flarp/ n.

[Rutgers University] Yet another **metasyntactic variable** (see **foo**). Among those who use it, it is associated with a legend that any program not containing the word `flarp' somewhere will not work. The legend is discreetly silent on the reliability of programs which *do* contain the magic word.

Node:flat, Next:flat-ASCII, Previous:flarp, Up:= F =

flat adj.

1. [common] Lacking any complex internal structure. "That **bitty box** has only a flat filesystem, not a hierarchical one." The verb form is **flatten**. 2. Said of a memory architecture (like that of the VAX or 680x0) that is one big linear address space (typically with each possible value of a processor register corresponding to a unique core address), as opposed to a `segmented' architecture (like that of the 80x86) in which addresses are composed from a base-register/offset pair (segmented designs are generally considered **cretinous**).

Note that sense 1 (at least with respect to filesystems) is usually used pejoratively, while sense 2 is a **Good Thing**.

Node:flat-ASCII, Next:flat-file, Previous:flat, Up:= F =

flat-ASCII adj.

[common] Said of a text file that contains only 7-bit ASCII characters and uses only ASCII-standard control characters (that is, has no embedded codes specific to a particular text formatter markup language, or output device, and no **meta**-characters). Syn. **plain-ASCII**. Compare **flat-file**.

Node:flat-file, Next:flatten, Previous:flat-ASCII, Up:= F =

flat-file adj.

A **flatten**ed representation of some database or tree or network structure as a single file from which the structure could implicitly be rebuilt, esp. one in **flat-ASCII** form. See also **sharchive**.

Node:flatten, Next:flavor, Previous:flat-file, Up:= F =

flatten vt.

[common] To remove structural information, esp. to filter something with an implicit tree structure into a simple sequence of leaves; also tends to imply mapping to **flat-ASCII**. "This code flattens an expression with parentheses into an equivalent **canonical** form."

Node:flavor, Next:flavorful, Previous:flatten, Up:= F =

flavor n.

1. [common] Variety, type, kind. "DDT commands come in two flavors." "These lights come in two flavors, big red ones and small green ones." "Linux is a flavor of Unix" See **vanilla**. 2. The attribute that causes something to be **flavorful**. Usually used in the phrase "yields additional flavor". "This convention yields additional flavor by allowing one to print text either right-side-up or upside-down." See **vanilla**. This usage was certainly reinforced by the terminology of quantum chromodynamics, in which quarks (the constituents of, e.g., protons) come in six flavors (up, down, strange, charm, top, bottom) and three colors (red, blue, green) -- however, hackish use of `flavor' at MIT predated QCD. 3. The term for `class' (in the object-oriented sense) in the LISP Machine Flavors system. Though the Flavors design has been superseded (notably by the Common LISP CLOS facility), the term `flavor' is still used as a general synonym for `class' by some LISP hackers.

Node:flavorful, Next:flippy, Previous:flavor, Up:= F =

flavorful adj.

Full of **flavor** (sense 2); esthetically pleasing. See **random** and **losing** for antonyms. See also the entries for **taste** and **elegant**.

Node:flippy, Next:flood, Previous:flavorful, Up:= F =

flippy /flip'ee/ n.

A single-sided floppy disk altered for double-sided use by addition of a second write-notch, so called because it must be flipped over for the second side to be accessible. No longer common.

Node:flood, Next:flowchart, Previous:flippy, Up:= F =

flood v.

[common; IRC] To dump large amounts of text onto an **IRC** channel. This is especially rude when the text is uninteresting and the other users are trying to carry on a serious conversation. Also used in a similar sense on Usenet.

Node:flowchart, Next:flower key, Previous:flood, Up:= F =

flowchart n.

[techspeak] An archaic form of visual control-flow specification employing arrows and `speech balloons'

of various shapes. Hackers never use flowcharts, consider them extremely silly, and associate them with **COBOL** programmers, **card wallopers**, and other lower forms of life. This attitude follows from the observations that flowcharts (at least from a hacker's point of view) are no easier to read than code, are less precise, and tend to fall out of sync with the code (so that they either obfuscate it rather than explaining it, or require extra maintenance effort that doesn't improve the code). See also **PDL**, sense 1.

Node:flower key, Next:flush, Previous:flowchart, Up:= F =

flower key n.

[Mac users] See **feature key**.

Node:flush, Next:flypage, Previous:flower key, Up:= F =

flush v.

1. [common] To delete something, usually superfluous, or to abort an operation. "All that nonsense has been flushed." 2. [Unix/C] To force buffered I/O to disk, as with an `fflush(3)` call. This is *not* an abort or deletion as in sense 1, but a demand for early completion! 3. To leave at the end of a day's work (as opposed to leaving for a meal). "I'm going to flush now." "Time to flush." 4. To exclude someone from an activity, or to ignore a person.

`Flush' was standard ITS terminology for aborting an output operation; one spoke of the text that would have been printed, but was not, as having been flushed. It is speculated that this term arose from a vivid image of flushing unwanted characters by hosing down the internal output buffer, washing the characters away before they could be printed. The Unix/C usage, on the other hand, was propagated by the `fflush(3)` call in C's standard I/O library (though it is reported to have been in use among BLISS programmers at **DEC** and on Honeywell and IBM machines as far back as 1965). Unix/C hackers found the ITS usage confusing, and vice versa.

Node:flypage, Next:Flyspeck 3, Previous:flush, Up:= F =

flypage /fli:'payj/ n.

(alt. `fly page') A **banner**, sense 1.

Node:Flyspeck 3, Next:flytrap, Previous:flypage, Up:= F =

Flyspeck 3 n.

Standard name for any font that is so tiny as to be unreadable (by analogy with names like `Helvetica 10' for 10-point Helvetica). Legal boilerplate is usually printed in Flyspeck 3.

Node:flytrap, Next:FM, Previous:Flyspeck 3, Up:= F =

flytrap n.

[rare] See **firewall machine**.

Node:FM, Next:fnord, Previous:flytrap, Up:= F =

FM /F-M/ n.

1. [common] *Not* `Frequency Modulation' but rather an abbreviation for `Fucking Manual', the back-formation from **RTFM**. Used to refer to the manual itself in the **RTFM**. "Have you seen the Networking FM lately?" 2. Abbreviation for "Fucking Magic", used in the sense of **black magic**.

Node:fnord, Next:FOAF, Previous:FM, Up:= F =

fnord n.

[from the "Illuminatus Trilogy"] 1. A word used in email and news postings to tag utterances as surrealist mind-play or humor, esp. in connection with **Discordianism** and elaborate conspiracy theories. "I heard that David Koresh is sharing an apartment in Argentina with Hitler. (Fnord.)" "Where can I fnord get the Principia Discordia from?" 2. A **metasyntactic variable**, commonly used by hackers with ties to **Discordianism** or the **Church of the SubGenius**.

Node:FOAF, Next:FOD, Previous:fnord, Up:= F =

FOAF // n.

[Usenet; common] Acronym for `Friend Of A Friend'. The source of an unverified, possibly untrue story. This term was not originated by hackers (it is used in Jan Brunvand's books on urban folklore), but is much better recognized on Usenet and elsewhere than in mainstream English.

Node:FOD, Next:fold case, Previous:FOAF, Up:= F =

FOD /fod/ v.

[Abbreviation for `Finger of Death', originally a spell-name from fantasy gaming] To terminate with extreme prejudice and with no regard for other people. From **MUD**s where the wizard command `FOD <player>' results in the immediate and total death of <player>, usually as punishment for obnoxious behavior. This usage migrated to other circumstances, such as "I'm going to fod the process that is burning all the cycles." Compare **gun**.

In aviation, FOD means Foreign Object Damage, e.g., what happens when a jet engine sucks up a rock on the runway or a bird in flight. Finger of Death is a distressingly apt description of what this generally does to the engine.

Node:fold case, Next:followup, Previous:FOD, Up:= F =

fold case v.

See **smash case**. This term tends to be used more by people who don't mind that their tools smash case. It also connotes that case is ignored but case distinctions in data processed by the tool in question aren't destroyed.

Node:followup, Next:fontology, Previous:fold case, Up:= F =

followup n.

[common] On Usenet, a **posting** generated in response to another posting (as opposed to a **reply**, which goes by email rather than being broadcast). Followups include the ID of the **parent message** in their headers; smart news-readers can use this information to present Usenet news in `conversation' sequence rather than order-of-arrival. See **thread**.

Node:fontology, Next:foo, Previous:followup, Up:= F =

fontology n.

[XEROX PARC] The body of knowledge dealing with the construction and use of new fonts (e.g., for window systems and typesetting software). It has been said that fontology recapitulates file-ogeny.

[Unfortunately, this reference to the embryological dictum that "Ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny" is not merely a joke. On the Macintosh, for example, System 7 has to go through contortions to compensate for an earlier design error that created a whole different set of abstractions for fonts parallel to `files' and `folders' --ESR]

Node:foo, Next:foobar, Previous:fontology, Up:= F =

foo /foo/

1. interj. Term of disgust. 2. [very common] Used very generally as a sample name for absolutely anything, esp. programs and files (esp. scratch files). 3. First on the standard list of **metasyntactic variable**s used in syntax examples. See also **bar**, **baz**, **qux**, **quux**, **corge**, **grault**, **garply**, **waldo**, **fred**, **plugh**, **xyzzy**, **thud**.

When `foo' is used in connection with `bar' it has generally traced to the WWII-era Army slang acronym **FUBAR** (`Fucked Up Beyond All Repair'), later modified to **foobar**. Early versions of the Jargon File interpreted this change as a post-war bowdlerization, but it it now seems more likely that FUBAR was itself a derivative of `foo' perhaps influenced by German `furchtbar' (terrible) - `foobar' may actually have been the *original* form.

For, it seems, the word `foo' itself had an immediate prewar history in comic strips and cartoons. The earliest documented uses were in the "Smokey Stover" comic strip popular in the 1930s, which frequently included the word "foo". Bill Holman, the author of the strip, filled it with odd jokes and personal contrivances, including other nonsense phrases such as "Notary Sojac" abd "1506 nix nix". According to the Warner Brothers Cartoon Companion Holman claimed to have found the word "foo" on the bottom of a Chinese figurine. This is plausible; Chinese statuettes often have apotropaic inscriptions, and this may have been the Chinese word `fu' (sometimes transliterated `foo'), which can mean "happiness" when spoken with the proper tone (the lion-dog guardians flanking the steps of many Chinese restaurants are properly called "fu dogs"). English speakers' reception of Holman's `foo' nonsense word was undoubtedly influenced by Yiddish `feh' and English `fooey' and `fool'.

Holman's strip featured a firetruck called the Foomobile that rode on two wheels. The comic strip was tremendously popular in the late 1930s, and legend has it that a manufacturer in Indiana even produced an operable version of Holman's Foomobile. According to the Encyclopedia of American Comics, `Foo' fever swept the U.S., finding its way into popular songs and generating over 500 `Foo Clubs.' The fad left

`foo' references embedded in popular culture (including a couple of appearances in Warner Brothers cartoons of 1938-39) but with their origins rapidly forgotten.

One place they are known to have remained live is in the U.S. military during the WWII years. In 1944-45, the term `foo fighters' was in use by radar operators for the kind of mysterious or spurious trace that would later be called a UFO (the older term resurfaced in popular American usage in 1995 via the name of one of the better grunge-rock bands). Informants connected the term to the Smokey Stover strip.

The U.S. and British militaries frequently swapped slang terms during the war (see **kluge** and **kludge** for another important example) Period sources reported that `FOO' became a semi-legendary subject of WWII British-army graffiti more or less equivalent to the American Kilroy. Where British troops went, the graffito "FOO was here" or something similar showed up. Several slang dictionaries aver that FOO probably came from Forward Observation Officer, but this (like the contemporaneous "FUBAR") was probably a **backronym** . Forty years later, Paul Dickson's excellent book "Words" (Dell, 1982, ISBN 0-440-52260-7) traced "Foo" to an unspecified British naval magazine in 1946, quoting as follows: "Mr. Foo is a mysterious Second World War product, gifted with bitter omniscience and sarcasm."

Earlier versions of this entry suggested the possibility that hacker usage actually sprang from "FOO, Lampoons and Parody", the title of a comic book first issued in September 1958, a joint project of Charles and Robert Crumb. Though Robert Crumb (then in his mid-teens) later became one of the most important and influential artists in underground comics, this venture was hardly a success; indeed, the brothers later burned most of the existing copies in disgust. The title FOO was featured in large letters on the front cover. However, very few copies of this comic actually circulated, and students of Crumb's `oeuvre' have established that this title was a reference to the earlier Smokey Stover comics. The Crumbs may also have been influenced by a short-lived Canadian parody magazine named `Foo' published in 1951-52.

An old-time member reports that in the 1959 "Dictionary of the TMRC Language", compiled at **TMRC**, there was an entry that went something like this:

> FOO: The first syllable of the sacred chant phrase "FOO MANE PADME HUM." Our first obligation is to keep the foo counters turning.

(For more about the legendary foo counters, see **TMRC**.) This definition used Bill Holman's nonsense word, only then two decades old and demonstrably still live in popular culture and slang, to a **ha ha only serious** analogy with esoteric Tibetan Buddhism. Today's hackers would find it difficulty to resist elaborating a joke like that, and it would be hard to believe 1959's were any less susceptible. Almost the entire staff of what later became the MIT AI Lab was involved with TMRC, and the word spread from there.

Node:foobar, Next:fool, Previous:foo, Up:= F =

foobar n.

[very common] Another widely used **metasyntactic variable**; see **foo** for etymology. Probably originally propagated through DECsystem manuals by Digital Equipment Corporation (**DEC**) in 1960s and early 1970s; confirmed sightings there go back to 1972. Hackers do *not* generally use this to mean **FUBAR** in either the slang or jargon sense. See also **Fred Foobar**. In RFC1639, "FOOBAR" was made an abbreviation for "FTP Operation Over Big Address Records", but this was an obvious **backronym**.

Node:fool, Next:fool file, Previous:foobar, Up:= F =

fool n.

As used by hackers, specifically describes a person who habitually reasons from obviously or demonstrably incorrect premises and cannot be persuaded by evidence to do otherwise; it is not generally used in its other senses, i.e., to describe a person with a native incapacity to reason correctly, or a clown. Indeed, in hackish experience many fools are capable of reasoning all too effectively in executing their errors. See also **cretin**, **loser**, **fool file**.

The Algol 68-R compiler used to initialize its storage to the character string "F00LF00LF00LF00L..." because as a pointer or as a floating point number it caused a crash, and as an integer or a character string it was very recognizable in a dump. Sadly, one day a very senior professor at Nottingham University wrote a program that called him a fool. He proceeded to demonstrate the correctness of this assertion by lobbying the university (not quite successfully) to forbid the use of Algol on its computers. See also **DEADBEEF**.

Node:fool file, Next:Foonly, Previous:fool, Up:= F =

fool file n.

[Usenet] A notional repository of all the most dramatically and abysmally stupid utterances ever. An entire subgenre of **sig block**s consists of the header "From the fool file:" followed by some quote the poster wishes to represent as an immortal gem of dimwittery; for this usage to be really effective, the quote has to be so obviously wrong as to be laughable. More than one Usenetter has achieved an unwanted notoriety by being quoted in this way.

Node:Foonly, Next:footprint, Previous:fool file, Up:= F =

Foonly n.

1. The **PDP-10** successor that was to have been built by the Super Foonly project at the Stanford Artificial Intelligence Laboratory along with a new operating system. (The name itself came from FOO NLI, an error message emitted by a PDP-10 assembler at SAIL meaning "FOO is Not a Legal Identifier". The intention was to leapfrog from the old **DEC** timesharing system SAIL was then running to a new generation, bypassing TENEX which at that time was the ARPANET standard. ARPA funding for both the Super Foonly and the new operating system was cut in 1974. Most of the design team went to DEC and contributed greatly to the design of the PDP-10 model KL10. 2. The name of the company formed by Dave Poole, one of the principal Super Foonly designers, and one of hackerdom's more colorful personalities. Many people remember the parrot which sat on Poole's shoulder and was a regular companion. 3. Any of the machines built by Poole's company. The first was the F-1 (a.k.a. Super Foonly), which was the computational engine used to create the graphics in the movie "TRON". The F-1 was the fastest PDP-10 ever built, but only one was ever made. The effort drained Foonly of its financial resources, and the company turned towards building smaller, slower, and much less expensive machines. Unfortunately, these ran not the popular **TOPS-20** but a TENEX variant called Foonex; this seriously limited their market. Also, the machines shipped were actually wire-wrapped engineering prototypes requiring individual attention from more than usually competent site personnel, and thus had significant reliability problems. Poole's legendary temper and unwillingness to suffer fools gladly did not help matters. By the time of the Jupiter project cancellation in 1983, Foonly's proposal to build another F-1 was eclipsed by the **Mars**, and the company never quite recovered. See the **Mars** entry for the continuation and moral of this story.

Node:footprint, Next:for free, Previous:Foonly, Up:= F =

footprint n.

1. The floor or desk area taken up by a piece of hardware. 2. [IBM] The audit trail (if any) left by a crashed program (often in plural, `footprints'). See also **toeprint**. 3. RAM footprint: The minimum amount of RAM which an OS or other program takes; this figure gives one an idea of how much will be left for other applications. How actively this RAM is used is another matter entirely. Recent tendencies to featuritis and software bloat can expand the RAM footprint of an OS to the point of making it nearly unusable in practice. [This problem is, thankfully, limited to operating systems so stupid that they don't do virtual memory - ESR]

Node:for free, Next:for the rest of us, Previous:footprint, Up:= F =

for free adj.

[common] Said of a capability of a programming language or hardware that is available by its design without needing cleverness to implement: "In APL, we get the matrix operations for free." "And owing to the way revisions are stored in this system, you get revision trees for free." The term usually refers to a serendipitous feature of doing things a certain way (compare **big win**), but it may refer to an intentional but secondary feature.

Node:for the rest of us, Next:for values of, Previous:for free, Up:= F =

for the rest of us adj.

[from the Mac slogan "The computer for the rest of us"] 1. Used to describe a **spiffy** product whose affordability shames other comparable products, or (more often) used sarcastically to describe **spiffy** but very overpriced products. 2. Describes a program with a limited interface, deliberately limited capabilities, non-orthogonality, inability to compose primitives, or any other limitation designed to not `confuse' a naive user. This places an upper bound on how far that user can go before the program begins to get in the way of the task instead of helping accomplish it. Used in reference to Macintosh software which doesn't provide obvious capabilities because it is thought that the poor lusers might not be able to handle them. Becomes `the rest of *them*' when used in third-party reference; thus, "Yes, it is an attractive program, but it's designed for The Rest Of Them" means a program that superficially looks neat but has no depth beyond the surface flash. See also **WIMP environment**, **Macintrash**, **point-and-drool interface**, **user-friendly**.

Node:for values of, Next:fora, Previous:for the rest of us, Up:= F =

for values of

[MIT] A common rhetorical maneuver at MIT is to use any of the canonical **random numbers** as placeholders for variables. "The max function takes 42 arguments, for arbitrary values of 42." "There are 69 ways to leave your lover, for 69 = 50." This is especially likely when the speaker has uttered a random number and realizes that it was not recognized as such, but even `non-random' numbers are occasionally used in this fashion. A related joke is that pi equals 3 -- for small values of pi and large values of 3.

Historical note: at MIT this usage has traditionally been traced to the programming language MAD (Michigan Algorithm Decoder), an Algol-58-like language that was the most common choice among mainstream (non-hacker) users at MIT in the mid-60s. It inherited from Algol-58 a control structure FOR VALUES OF X = 3, 7, 99 DO ... that would repeat the indicated instructions for each value in the list (unlike the usual FOR that only works for arithmetic sequences of values). MAD is long extinct, but similar for-constructs still flourish (e.g., in Unix's shell languages).

Node:fora, Next:foreground, Previous:for values of, Up:= F =

fora pl.n.

Plural of **forum**.

Node:foreground, Next:fork bomb, Previous:fora, Up:= F =

foreground vt.

[Unix; common] To bring a task to the top of one's **stack** for immediate processing, and hackers often use it in this sense for non-computer tasks. "If your presentation is due next week, I guess I'd better foreground writing up the design document."

Technically, on a time-sharing system, a task executing in foreground is one able to accept input from and return output to the user; oppose **background**. Nowadays this term is primarily associated with **Unix**, but it appears first to have been used in this sense on OS/360. Normally, there is only one foreground task per terminal (or terminal window); having multiple processes simultaneously reading the keyboard is a good way to **lose**.

Node:fork bomb, Next:forked, Previous:foreground, Up:= F =

fork bomb n.

[Unix] A particular species of **wabbit** that can be written in one line of C (`main() {for(;;)fork();}`) or shell (`$0 & $0 &`) on any Unix system, or occasionally created by an egregious coding bug. A fork bomb process `explodes' by recursively spawning copies of itself (using the Unix system call `fork(2)`). Eventually it eats all the process table entries and effectively wedges the system. Fortunately, fork bombs are relatively easy to spot and kill, so creating one deliberately seldom accomplishes more than to bring the just wrath of the gods down upon the perpetrator. See also **logic bomb**.

Node:forked, Next:Fortrash, Previous:fork bomb, Up:= F =

forked adj.

[Unix; prob. influenced by a mainstream expletive] Terminally slow, or dead. Originated when one system was slowed to a snail's pace by an inadvertent **fork bomb**.

Node:Fortrash, Next:fortune cookie, Previous:forked, Up:= F =

Fortrash /for'trash/ n.

Hackerism for the FORTRAN (FORmula TRANslator) language, referring to its primitive design, gross and irregular syntax, limited control constructs, and slippery, exception-filled semantics.

Node:fortune cookie, Next:forum, Previous:Fortrash, Up:= F =

fortune cookie n.

[WAITS, via Unix; common] A random quote, item of trivia, joke, or maxim printed to the user's tty at login time or (less commonly) at logout time. Items from this lexicon have often been used as fortune cookies. See **cookie file**.

Node:forum, Next:fossil, Previous:fortune cookie, Up:= F =

forum n.

[Usenet, GEnie, CI$; pl. `fora' or `forums'] Any discussion group accessible through a dial-in **BBS**, a **mailing list**, or a **newsgroup** (see **the network**). A forum functions much like a bulletin board; users submit **posting**s for all to read and discussion ensues. Contrast real-time chat via **talk mode** or point-to-point personal **email**.

Node:fossil, Next:four-color glossies, Previous:forum, Up:= F =

fossil n.

1. In software, a misfeature that becomes understandable only in historical context, as a remnant of times past retained so as not to break compatibility. Example: the retention of octal as default base for string escapes in **C**, in spite of the better match of hexadecimal to ASCII and modern byte-addressable architectures. See **dusty deck**. 2. More restrictively, a feature with past but no present utility. Example: the force-all-caps (LCASE) bits in the V7 and **BSD** Unix tty driver, designed for use with monocase terminals. (In a perversion of the usual backward-compatibility goal, this functionality has actually been expanded and renamed in some later **USG Unix** releases as the IUCLC and OLCUC bits.) 3. The FOSSIL (Fido/Opus/Seadog Standard Interface Level) driver specification for serial-port access to replace the **brain-dead** routines in the IBM PC ROMs. Fossils are used by most MS-DOS **BBS** software in preference to the `supported' ROM routines, which do not support interrupt-driven operation or setting speeds above 9600; the use of a semistandard FOSSIL library is preferable to the **bare metal** serial port programming otherwise required. Since the FOSSIL specification allows additional functionality to be hooked in, drivers that use the **hook** but do not provide serial-port access themselves are named with a modifier, as in `video fossil'.

Node:four-color glossies, Next:frag, Previous:fossil, Up:= F =

four-color glossies n.

1. Literature created by **marketroid**s that allegedly contains technical specs but which is in fact as superficial as possible without being totally **content-free**. "Forget the four-color glossies, give me the tech ref manuals." Often applied as an indication of superficiality even when the material is printed on ordinary paper in black and white. Four-color-glossy manuals are *never* useful for solving a problem. 2. [rare] Applied by extension to manual pages that don't contain enough information to diagnose why the program doesn't produce the expected or desired output.

Node:frag, Next:fragile, Previous:four-color glossies, Up:= F =

frag n.,v.

[from Vietnam-era U.S. military slang via the games Doom and Quake] 1. To kill another player's **avatar**

in a multiuser game. "I hold the office Quake record with 40 frags." 2. To completely ruin something. "Forget that power supply, the lightning strike fragged it.

Node:fragile, Next:fred, Previous:frag, Up:= F =

fragile adj.

Syn **brittle**.

Node:fred, Next:Fred Foobar, Previous:fragile, Up:= F =

fred n.

1. The personal name most frequently used as a **metasyntactic variable** (see **foo**). Allegedly popular because it's easy for a non-touch-typist to type on a standard QWERTY keyboard. In Great Britain, `fred', `jim' and `sheila' are common metasyntactic variables because their uppercase versions were *official* names given to the 3 memory areas that held I/O status registers on the lovingly-remembered BBC Microcomputer! (It is reported that SHEILA was poked the most often.) Unlike **J. Random Hacker** or `J. Random Loser', the name `fred' has no positive or negative loading (but see **Dr. Fred Mbogo**). See also **barney**. 2. An acronym for `Flipping Ridiculous Electronic Device'; other F-verbs may be substituted for `flipping'.

Node:Fred Foobar, Next:frednet, Previous:fred, Up:= F =

Fred Foobar n.

J. Random Hacker's cousin. Any typical human being, more or less synomous with `someone' except that Fred Foobar can be **backreference**d by name later on. "So Fred Foobar will enter his phone number into the database, and it'll be archived with the others. Months later, when Fred searches..." See also **Bloggs Family** and **Dr. Fred Mbogo**

Node:frednet, Next:free software, Previous:Fred Foobar, Up:= F =

frednet /fred'net/ n.

Used to refer to some **random** and uncommon protocol encountered on a network. "We're implementing bridging in our router to solve the frednet problem."

Node:free software, Next:freeware, Previous:frednet, Up:= F =

free software n.

As defined by Richard M. Stallman and used by the Free Software movement, this means software that gives users enough freedom to be used by the free software community. Specifically, users must be free to modify the software for their private use, and free to redistribute it either with or without modifications, either commercially or noncommercially, either gratis or charging a distribution fee. Free software has existed since the dawn of computing; Free Software as a movement began in 1984 with the GNU Project. See also **open source**.

Node:freeware, Next:freeze, Previous:free software, Up:= F =

freeware n.

[common] Free software, often written by enthusiasts and distributed by users' groups, or via electronic mail, local bulletin boards, **Usenet**, or other electronic media. At one time, `freeware' was a trademark of Andrew Fluegelman, the author of the well-known MS-DOS comm program PC-TALK III. It wasn't enforced after his mysterious disappearance and presumed death in 1984. See **shareware**, **FRS**.

Node:freeze, Next:fried, Previous:freeware, Up:= F =

freeze v.

To lock an evolving software distribution or document against changes so it can be released with some hope of stability. Carries the strong implication that the item in question will `unfreeze' at some future date. "OK, fix that bug and we'll freeze for release."

There are more specific constructions on this term. A `feature freeze', for example, locks out modifications intended to introduce new features but still allows bugfixes and completion of existing features; a `code freeze' connotes no more changes at all. At Sun Microsystems and elsewhere, one may also hear references to `code slush' -- that is, an almost-but-not-quite frozen state.

Node:fried, Next:frink, Previous:freeze, Up:= F =

fried adj.

1. [common] Non-working due to hardware failure; burnt out. Especially used of hardware brought down by a `power glitch' (see **glitch**), **drop-outs**, a short, or some other electrical event. (Sometimes this literally happens to electronic circuits! In particular, resistors can burn out and transformers can melt down, emitting noxious smoke -- see **friode**, **SED** and **LER**. However, this term is also used metaphorically.) Compare **frotzed**. 2. [common] Of people, exhausted. Said particularly of those who continue to work in such a state. Often used as an explanation or excuse. "Yeah, I know that fix destroyed the file system, but I was fried when I put it in." Esp. common in conjunction with `brain': "My brain is fried today, I'm very short on sleep."

Node:frink, Next:friode, Previous:fried, Up:= F =

frink /frink/ v.

The unknown ur-verb, fill in your own meaning. Found esp. on the Usenet newsgroup *alt.fan.lemurs*, where it is said that the lemurs know what `frink' means, but they aren't telling. Compare **gorets**.

Node:friode, Next:fritterware, Previous:frink, Up:= F =

friode /fri:'ohd/ n.

[TMRC] A reversible (that is, fused or blown) diode. Compare **fried**; see also **SED**, **LER**.

Node:fritterware, Next:frob, Previous:friode, Up:= F =

fritterware n.

An excess of capability that serves no productive end. The canonical example is font-diddling software on the Mac (see **macdink**); the term describes anything that eats huge amounts of time for quite marginal gains in function but seduces people into using it anyway. See also **window shopping**.

Node:frob, Next:frobnicate, Previous:fritterware, Up:= F =

frob /frob/ 1. n.

[MIT; very common] The **TMRC** definition was "FROB = a protruding arm or trunnion"; by metaphoric extension, a `frob' is any random small thing; an object that you can comfortably hold in one hand; something you can frob (sense 2). See **frobnitz**. 2. vt. Abbreviated form of **frobnicate**. 3. [from the **MUD** world] A command on some MUDs that changes a player's experience level (this can be used to make wizards); also, to request **wizard** privileges on the `professional courtesy' grounds that one is a wizard elsewhere. The command is actually `frobnicate' but is universally abbreviated to the shorter form.

Node:frobnicate, Next:frobnitz, Previous:frob, Up:= F =

frobnicate /frob'ni-kayt/ vt.

[Poss. derived from **frobnitz**, and usually abbreviated to **frob**, but `frobnicate' is recognized as the official full form.] To manipulate or adjust, to tweak. One frequently frobs bits or other 2-state devices. Thus: "Please frob the light switch" (that is, flip it), but also "Stop frobbing that clasp; you'll break it". One also sees the construction `to frob a frob'. See **tweak** and **twiddle**.

Usage: frob, twiddle, and tweak sometimes connote points along a continuum. `Frob' connotes aimless manipulation; `twiddle' connotes gross manipulation, often a coarse search for a proper setting; `tweak' connotes fine-tuning. If someone is turning a knob on an oscilloscope, then if he's carefully adjusting it, he is probably tweaking it; if he is just turning it but looking at the screen, he is probably twiddling it; but if he's just doing it because turning a knob is fun, he's frobbing it. The variant `frobnosticate' has been recently reported.

Node:frobnitz, Next:frog, Previous:frobnicate, Up:= F =

frobnitz /frob'nits/, pl. `frobnitzem' /frob'nit-zm/ or `frobni' /frob'ni:/ n.

[TMRC] An unspecified physical object, a widget. Also refers to electronic black boxes. This rare form is usually abbreviated to `frotz', or more commonly to **frob**. Also used are `frobnule' (/frob'n[y]ool/) and `frobule' (/frob'yool/). Starting perhaps in 1979, `frobozz' /fr*-boz'/ (plural: `frobbotzim' /fr*-bot'zm/) has also become very popular, largely through its exposure as a name via **Zork**. These variants can also be applied to nonphysical objects, such as data structures.

Pete Samson, compiler of the original **TMRC** lexicon, adds, "Under the TMRC [railroad] layout were many storage boxes, managed (in 1958) by David R. Sawyer. Several had fanciful designations written on them, such as `Frobnitz Coil Oil'. Perhaps DRS intended Frobnitz to be a proper name, but the name was quickly taken for the thing". This was almost certainly the origin of the term.

Node:frog, Next:frogging, Previous:frobnitz, Up:= F =

frog alt. `phrog'

1. interj. Term of disgust (we seem to have a lot of them). 2. Used as a name for just about anything. See **foo**. 3. n. Of things, a crock. 4. n. Of people, somewhere in between a turkey and a toad. 5. `froggy': adj. Similar to **bagbiting**, but milder. "This froggy program is taking forever to run!"

Node:frogging, Next:front end, Previous:frog, Up:= F =

frogging [University of Waterloo] v.

1. Partial corruption of a text file or input stream by some bug or consistent glitch, as opposed to random events like line noise or media failures. Might occur, for example, if one bit of each incoming character on a tty were stuck, so that some characters were correct and others were not. See **terminak** for a historical example and compare **dread high-bit disease**. 2. By extension, accidental display of text in a mode where the output device emits special symbols or mnemonics rather than conventional ASCII. This often happens, for example, when using a terminal or comm program on a device like an IBM PC with a special `high-half' character set and with the bit-parity assumption wrong. A hacker sufficiently familiar with ASCII bit patterns might be able to read the display anyway.

Node:front end, Next:frotz, Previous:frogging, Up:= F =

front end n.

1. An intermediary computer that does set-up and filtering for another (usually more powerful but less friendly) machine (a `back end'). 2. What you're talking to when you have a conversation with someone who is making replies without paying attention. "Look at the dancing elephants!" "Uh-huh." "Do you know what I just said?" "Sorry, you were talking to the front end." 3. Software that provides an interface to another program `behind' it, which may not be as user-friendly. Probably from analogy with hardware front-ends (see sense 1) that interfaced with mainframes.

Node:frotz, Next:frotzed, Previous:front end, Up:= F =

frotz /frots/

1. n. See **frobnitz**. 2. `mumble frotz': An interjection of mildest disgust.

Node:frotzed, Next:frowney, Previous:frotz, Up:= F =

frotzed /frotst/ adj.

down because of hardware problems. Compare **fried**. A machine that is merely frotzed may be fixable without replacing parts, but a fried machine is more seriously damaged.

Node:frowney, Next:FRS, Previous:frotzed, Up:= F =

frowney n.

(alt. `frowney face') See **emoticon**.

Node:FRS, Next:fry, Previous:frowney, Up:= F =

FRS // n.,obs.

Abbreviation for "Freely Redistributable Software" which entered general use on the Internet in 1995 after years of low-level confusion over what exactly to call software written to be passed around and shared (contending terms including **freeware**, **shareware**, and `sourceware' were never universally felt to be satisfactory for various subtle reasons). The first formal conference on freely redistributable software was held in Cambridge, Massachussetts, in February 1996 (sponsored by the Free Software Foundation). The conference organizers used the FRS abbreviation heavily in its calls for papers and other literature during 1995. The term was in steady though not common use until 1998 and the invention of **open source**.

Node:fry, Next:fscking, Previous:FRS, Up:= F =

fry

1. vi. To fail. Said especially of smoke-producing hardware failures. More generally, to become non-working. Usage: never said of software, only of hardware and humans. See **fried**, **magic smoke**. 2. vt. To cause to fail; to **roach**, **toast**, or **hose** a piece of hardware. Never used of software or humans, but compare **fried**.

Node:fscking, Next:FSF, Previous:fry, Up:= F =

fscking /fus'-king/ or /eff'-seek-ing/ adj.

[Usenet; common] Fucking, in the expletive sense (it refers to the Unix filesystem-repair command fsck(1), of which it can be said that if you have to use it at all you are having a bad day). Originated on **scary devil monastery** and the *bofh.net* newsgroups, but became much more widespread following the passage of **CDA**. Also occasionally seen in the variant "What the fsck?"

Node:FSF, Next:FTP, Previous:fscking, Up:= F =

FSF /F-S-F/ abbrev.

Common abbreviation (both spoken and written) for the name of the Free Software Foundation, a nonprofit educational association formed to support the **GNU** project.

Node:FTP, Next:FUBAR, Previous:FSF, Up:= F =

FTP /F-T-P/, *not* /fit'ip/

1. [techspeak] n. The File Transfer Protocol for transmitting files between systems on the Internet. 2. vt. To **beam** a file using the File Transfer Protocol. 3. Sometimes used as a generic even for file transfers not

using **FTP**. "Lemme get a copy of "Wuthering Heights" ftp'd from uunet."

Node:FUBAR, Next:fuck me harder, Previous:FTP, Up:= F =

FUBAR n.

The Failed UniBus Address Register in a VAX. A good example of how jargon can occasionally be snuck past the **suit**s; see **foobar**, and **foo** for a fuller etymology.

Node:fuck me harder, Next:FUD, Previous:FUBAR, Up:= F =

fuck me harder excl.

Sometimes uttered in response to egregious misbehavior, esp. in software, and esp. of misbehaviors which seem unfairly persistent (as though designed in by the imp of the perverse). Often theatrically elaborated: "Aiighhh! Fuck me with a piledriver and 16 feet of curare-tipped wrought-iron fence *and no lubricants*!" The phrase is sometimes heard abbreviated `FMH' in polite company.

[This entry is an extreme example of the hackish habit of coining elaborate and evocative terms for lossage. Here we see a quite self-conscious parody of mainstream expletives that has become a running gag in part of the hacker culture; it illustrates the hackish tendency to turn any situation, even one of extreme frustration, into an intellectual game (the point being, in this case, to creatively produce a long-winded description of the most anatomically absurd mental image possible -- the short forms implicitly allude to all the ridiculous long forms ever spoken). Scatological language is actually relatively uncommon among hackers, and there was some controversy over whether this entry ought to be included at all. As it reflects a live usage recognizably peculiar to the hacker culture, we feel it is in the hackish spirit of truthfulness and opposition to all forms of censorship to record it here. --ESR & GLS]

Node:FUD, Next:FUD wars, Previous:fuck me harder, Up:= F =

FUD /fuhd/ n.

Defined by Gene Amdahl after he left IBM to found his own company: "FUD is the fear, uncertainty, and doubt that IBM sales people instill in the minds of potential customers who might be considering [Amdahl] products." The idea, of course, was to persuade them to go with safe IBM gear rather than with competitors' equipment. This implicit coercion was traditionally accomplished by promising that Good Things would happen to people who stuck with IBM, but Dark Shadows loomed over the future of competitors' equipment or software. See **IBM**. After 1990 the term FUD was associated increasingly frequently with **Microsoft**, and has become generalized to refer to any kind of disinformation used as a competitive weapon.

Node:FUD wars, Next:fudge, Previous:FUD, Up:= F =

FUD wars /fuhd worz/ n.

[from **FUD**] Political posturing engaged in by hardware and software vendors ostensibly committed to standardization but actually willing to fragment the market to protect their own shares. The Unix International vs. OSF conflict about Unix standards was one outstanding example; Microsoft vs. Netscape vs. W3C about HTML standards is another.

Node:fudge, Next:fudge factor, Previous:FUD wars, Up:= F =

fudge

1. vt. To perform in an incomplete but marginally acceptable way, particularly with respect to the writing of a program. "I didn't feel like going through that pain and suffering, so I fudged it -- I'll fix it later." 2. n. The resulting code.

Node:fudge factor, Next:fuel up, Previous:fudge, Up:= F =

fudge factor n.

[common] A value or parameter that is varied in an ad hoc way to produce the desired result. The terms `tolerance' and **slop** are also used, though these usually indicate a one-sided leeway, such as a buffer that is made larger than necessary because one isn't sure exactly how large it needs to be, and it is better to waste a little space than to lose completely for not having enough. A fudge factor, on the other hand, can often be tweaked in more than one direction. A good example is the `fuzz' typically allowed in floating-point calculations: two numbers being compared for equality must be allowed to differ by a small amount; if that amount is too small, a computation may never terminate, while if it is too large, results will be needlessly inaccurate. Fudge factors are frequently adjusted incorrectly by programmers who don't fully understand their import. See also **coefficient of X**.

Node:fuel up, Next:Full Monty, Previous:fudge factor, Up:= F =

fuel up vi.

To eat or drink hurriedly in order to get back to hacking. "Food-p?" "Yeah, let's fuel up." "Time for a **great-wall**!" See also **oriental food**.

Node:Full Monty, Next:fum, Previous:fuel up, Up:= F =

Full Monty n.

See **monty**, sense 2.

Node:fum, Next:functino, Previous:Full Monty, Up:= F =

fum n.

[XEROX PARC] At PARC, often the third of the standard **metasyntactic variable**s (after **foo** and **bar**). Competes with **baz**, which is more common outside PARC.

Node:functino, Next:funky, Previous:fum, Up:= F =

functino n.

[uncommon, U.K.; originally a serendipitous typo in 1994] A pointer to a function in C and C++. By association with sub-atomic particles such as the neutrino, it accurately conveys an impression of smallness (one pointer is four bytes on most systems) and speed (hackers can and do use arrays of functinos to replace a switch() statement).

Node:funky, Next:funny money, Previous:functino, Up:= F =

funky adj.

Said of something that functions, but in a slightly strange, klugey way. It does the job and would be difficult to change, so its obvious non-optimality is left alone. Often used to describe interfaces. The more bugs something has that nobody has bothered to fix because workarounds are easier, the funkier it is. **TECO** and UUCP are funky. The Intel i860's exception handling is extraordinarily funky. Most standards acquire funkiness as they age. "The new mailer is installed, but is still somewhat funky; if it bounces your mail for no reason, try resubmitting it." "This UART is pretty funky. The data ready line is active-high in interrupt mode and active-low in DMA mode."

Node:funny money, Next:furrfu, Previous:funky, Up:= F =

funny money n.

1. Notional `dollar' units of computing time and/or storage handed to students at the beginning of a computer course; also called `play money' or `purple money' (in implicit opposition to real or `green' money). In New Zealand and Germany the odd usage `paper money' has been recorded; in Germany, the particularly amusing synonym `transfer ruble' commemmorates the funny money used for trade between COMECON countries back when the Soviet Bloc still existed. When your funny money ran out, your account froze and you needed to go to a professor to get more. Fortunately, the plunging cost of timesharing cycles has made this less common. The amounts allocated were almost invariably too small, even for the non-hackers who wanted to slide by with minimum work. In extreme cases, the practice led to small-scale black markets in bootlegged computer accounts. 2. By extension, phantom money or quantity tickets of any kind used as a resource-allocation hack within a system. Antonym: `real money'.

Node:furrfu, Next:fuzzball, Previous:funny money, Up:= F =

furrfu // excl.

[Usenet] Written-only equivalent of "Sheesh!"; it is, in fact, "sheesh" modified by **rot13**. Evolved in mid-1992 as a response to notably silly postings repeating urban myths on the Usenet newsgroup *alt.folklore.urban*, after some posters complained that "Sheesh!" as a response to **newbie**s was being overused. See also **FOAF**.

Node:fuzzball, Next:G, Previous:furrfu, Up:= F =

fuzzball n.

[TCP/IP hackers] A DEC LSI-11 running a particular suite of homebrewed software written by Dave Mills and assorted co-conspirators, used in the early 1980s for Internet protocol testbedding and experimentation. These were used as NSFnet backbone sites in its early 56kb-line days; a few were still active on the Internet as late as mid-1993, doing odd jobs such as network time service.

= G =

- G:
- g-file:
- gabriel:
- gag:
- gang bang:
- garbage collect:
- garply:
- gas:
- gaseous:
- gawble:
- GC:
- GCOS:
- GECOS:
- gedanken:
- geef:
- geek code:
- geek out:
- gen:
- gender mender:
- General Public Virus:
- generate:
- Genius From Mars Technique:
- gensym:
- Get a life!:
- Get a real computer!:
- GFR:
- GIFs at 11:
- gig:
- giga-:
- GIGO:
- gilley:
- gillion:
- GIPS:
- glark:
- glass:
- glass tty:
- glassfet:
- glitch:
- glob:
- glork:
- glue:
- gnarly:
- GNU:
- gnubie:
- GNUMACS:
- go flatline:

- go root:
- go-faster stripes:
- GoAT:
- gobble:
- Godwin's Law:
- Godzillagram:
- golden:
- golf-ball printer:
- gonk:
- gonkulator:
- gonzo:
- Good Thing:
- gopher:
- gopher hole:
- gorets:
- gorilla arm:
- gorp:
- GOSMACS:
- Gosperism:
- gotcha:
- GPL:
- GPV:
- grault:
- gray goo:
- Great Renaming:
- Great Runes:
- Great Worm:
- great-wall:
- Green Book:
- green bytes:
- green card:
- green lightning:
- green machine:
- Green's Theorem:
- greenbar:
- grep:
- gribble:
- grilf:
- grind:
- grind crank:
- gripenet:
- gritch:
- grok:
- gronk:
- gronk out:
- gronked:
- grovel:
- grue:
- grunge:
- gubbish:
- Guido:
- guiltware:

- gumby:
- gun:
- gunch:
- gunpowder chicken:
- gurfle:
- guru:
- guru meditation:
- gweep:

Node:G, Next:g-file, Previous:fuzzball, Up:= G =

G pref.,suff.

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:g-file, Next:gabriel, Previous:G, Up:= G =

g-file n.

[Commodore BBS culture] Any file that is written with the intention of being read by a human rather than a machine, such as the Jargon File, documentation, humor files, hacker lore, and technical materials.

This term survives from the nearly forgotten Commodore 64 underground and BBS community. In the early 80s, C-Net had emerged as the most popular C64 BBS software for systems which encouraged messaging (as opposed to file transfer). There were three main options for files: Program files (p-files), which served the same function as `doors' in today's systems, UD files (the user upload/download section), and g-files. Anything that was meant to be read was included in g-files.

Node:gabriel, Next:gag, Previous:g-file, Up:= G =

gabriel /gay'bree-*l/ n.

[for Dick Gabriel, SAIL LISP hacker and volleyball fanatic] An unnecessary (in the opinion of the opponent) stalling tactic, e.g., tying one's shoelaces or combing one's hair repeatedly, asking the time, etc. Also used to refer to the perpetrator of such tactics. Also, `pulling a Gabriel', `Gabriel mode'.

Node:gag, Next:gang bang, Previous:gabriel, Up:= G =

gag vi.

Equivalent to **choke**, but connotes more disgust. "Hey, this is FORTRAN code. No wonder the C compiler gagged." See also **barf**.

Node:gang bang, Next:garbage collect, Previous:gag, Up:= G =

gang bang n.

The use of large numbers of loosely coupled programmers in an attempt to wedge a great many features into a product in a short time. Though there have been memorable gang bangs (e.g., that over-the-weekend assembler port mentioned in Steven Levy's "Hackers"), most are perpetrated by large companies trying to meet deadlines; the inevitable result is enormous buggy masses of code entirely lacking in **orthogonal**ity. When market-driven managers make a list of all the features the competition has and assign one programmer to implement each, the probability of maintaining a coherent (or even functional) design goes infinitesimal. See also **firefighting**, **Mongolian Hordes technique**, **Conway's Law**.

Node:garbage collect, Next:garply, Previous:gang bang, Up:= G =

garbage collect vi.

(also `garbage collection', n.) See **GC**.

Node:garply, Next:gas, Previous:garbage collect, Up:= G =

garply /gar'plee/ n.

[Stanford] Another metasyntactic variable (see **foo**); once popular among SAIL hackers.

Node:gas, Next:gaseous, Previous:garply, Up:= G =

gas

[as in `gas chamber'] 1. interj. A term of disgust and hatred, implying that gas should be dispensed in generous quantities, thereby exterminating the source of irritation. "Some loser just reloaded the system for no reason! Gas!" 2. interj. A suggestion that someone or something ought to be flushed out of mercy. "The system's getting **wedged** every few minutes. Gas!" 3. vt. To **flush** (sense 1). "You should gas that old crufty software." 4. [IBM] n. Dead space in nonsequentially organized files that was occupied by data that has since been deleted; the compression operation that removes it is called `degassing' (by analogy, perhaps, with the use of the same term in vacuum technology). 5. [IBM] n. Empty space on a disk that has been clandestinely allocated against future need.

Node:gaseous, Next:gawble, Previous:gas, Up:= G =

gaseous adj.

Deserving of being **gas**sed. Disseminated by Geoff Goodfellow while at SRI; became particularly popular after the Moscone-Milk killings in San Francisco, when it was learned that the defendant Dan White (a politician who had supported Proposition 7) would get the gas chamber under Proposition 7 if convicted of first-degree murder (he was eventually convicted of manslaughter).

Node:gawble, Next:GC, Previous:gaseous, Up:= G =

gawble /gaw'bl/ n.

See **chawmp**.

Node:GC, Next:GCOS, Previous:gawble, Up:= G =

GC /G-C/

[from LISP terminology; `Garbage Collect'] 1. vt. To clean up and throw away useless things. "I think I'll GC the top of my desk today." When said of files, this is equivalent to **GFR**. 2. vt. To recycle, reclaim, or put to another use. 3. n. An instantiation of the garbage collector process.

`Garbage collection' is computer-science techspeak for a particular class of strategies for dynamically but transparently reallocating computer memory (i.e., without requiring explicit allocation and deallocation by higher-level software). One such strategy involves periodically scanning all the data in memory and determining what is no longer accessible; useless data items are then discarded so that the memory they occupy can be recycled and used for another purpose. Implementations of the LISP language usually use garbage collection.

In jargon, the full phrase is sometimes heard but the **abbrev** GC is more frequently used because it is shorter. Note that there is an ambiguity in usage that has to be resolved by context: "I'm going to garbage-collect my desk" usually means to clean out the drawers, but it could also mean to throw away or recycle the desk itself.

Node:GCOS, Next:GECOS, Previous:GC, Up:= G =

GCOS /jee'kohs/ n.

A **quick-and-dirty** **clone** of System/360 DOS that emerged from GE around 1970; originally called GECOS (the General Electric Comprehensive Operating System). Later kluged to support primitive timesharing and transaction processing. After the buyout of GE's computer division by Honeywell, the name was changed to General Comprehensive Operating System (GCOS). Other OS groups at Honeywell began referring to it as `God's Chosen Operating System', allegedly in reaction to the GCOS crowd's uninformed and snotty attitude about the superiority of their product. All this might be of zero interest, except for two facts: (1) The GCOS people won the political war, and this led in the orphaning and eventual death of Honeywell **Multics**, and (2) GECOS/GCOS left one permanent mark on Unix. Some early Unix systems at Bell Labs used GCOS machines for print spooling and various other services; the field added to `/etc/passwd` to carry GCOS ID information was called the `GECOS field' and survives today as the `pw_gecos` member used for the user's full name and other human-ID information. GCOS later played a major role in keeping Honeywell a dismal also-ran in the mainframe market, and was itself mostly ditched for Unix in the late 1980s when Honeywell began to retire its aging **big iron** designs.

Node:GECOS, Next:gedanken, Previous:GCOS, Up:= G =

GECOS /jee'kohs/ n.

See **GCOS**.

Node:gedanken, Next:geef, Previous:GECOS, Up:= G =

gedanken /g*-dahn'kn/ adj.

Ungrounded; impractical; not well-thought-out; untried; untested.

`Gedanken' is a German word for `thought'. A thought experiment is one you carry out in your head. In physics, the term `gedanken experiment' is used to refer to an experiment that is impractical to carry out, but useful to consider because it can be reasoned about theoretically. (A classic gedanken experiment of relativity theory involves thinking about a man in an elevator accelerating through space.) Gedanken experiments are very useful in physics, but must be used with care. It's too easy to idealize away some important aspect of the real world in constructing the `apparatus'.

Among hackers, accordingly, the word has a pejorative connotation. It is typically used of a project, especially one in artificial intelligence research, that is written up in grand detail (typically as a Ph.D. thesis) without ever being implemented to any great extent. Such a project is usually perpetrated by people who aren't very good hackers or find programming distasteful or are just in a hurry. A `gedanken thesis' is usually marked by an obvious lack of intuition about what is programmable and what is not, and about what does and does not constitute a clear specification of an algorithm. See also **AI-complete**, **DWIM**.

Node:geef, Next:geek code, Previous:gedanken, Up:= G =

geef v.

[ostensibly from `gefingerpoken'] vt. Syn. **mung**. See also **blinkenlights**.

Node:geek code, Next:geek out, Previous:geef, Up:= G =

geek code n.

(also "Code of the Geeks"). A set of codes commonly used in **sig block**s to broadcast the interests, skills, and aspirations of the poster. Features a G at the left margin followed by numerous letter codes, often suffixed with plusses or minuses. Because many net users are involved in computer science, the most common prefix is `GCS'. To see a copy of the current code, browse http://www.geekcode.com. Here is a sample geek code (that of Robert Hayden, the code's inventor) from that page:

```
-----BEGIN GEEK CODE BLOCK-----
Version: 3.1
GED/J d-- s:++>: a- C++(++++)$ ULUO++ P+>+++ L++ !E---- W+(---) N+++
o+ K+++ w+(---) O- M+$>++ V-- PS++(+++)>$ PE++(+)>$ Y++ PGP++ t- 5+++
X++ R+++>$ tv+ b+ DI+++ D+++ G+++++>$ e++$>++++ h r-- y+**
------END GEEK CODE BLOCK------
```

The geek code originated in 1993; it was inspired (according to the inventor) by previous "bear", "smurf" and "twink" style-and-sexual-preference codes from lesbian and gay **newsgroup**s. It has in turn spawned imitators; there is now even a "Saturn geek code" for owners of the Saturn car. See also **computer geek**.

Node:geek out, Next:gen, Previous:geek code, Up:= G =

geek out vi.

To temporarily enter techno-nerd mode while in a non-hackish context, for example at parties held near computer equipment. Especially used when you need to do or say something highly technical and don't have time to explain: "Pardon me while I geek out for a moment." See **computer geek**; see also **propeller head**.

Node:gen, Next:gender mender, Previous:geek out, Up:= G =

gen /jen/ n.,v.

Short for **generate**, used frequently in both spoken and written contexts.

Node:gender mender, Next:General Public Virus, Previous:gen, Up:= G =

gender mender n.

[common] A cable connector shell with either two male or two female connectors on it, used to correct the mismatches that result when some **loser** didn't understand the RS232C specification and the distinction between DTE and DCE. Used esp. for RS-232C parts in either the original D-25 or the IBM PC's bogus D-9 format. Also called `gender bender', `gender blender', `sex changer', and even `homosexual adapter;' however, there appears to be some confusion as to whether a `male homosexual adapter' has pins on both sides (is doubly male) or sockets on both sides (connects two males).

Node:General Public Virus, Next:generate, Previous:gender mender, Up:= G =

General Public Virus n.

Pejorative name for some versions of the **GNU** project **copyleft** or General Public License (GPL), which requires that any tools or **app**s incorporating copylefted code must be source-distributed on the same anti-proprietary terms as GNU stuff. Thus it is alleged that the copyleft `infects' software generated with GNU tools, which may in turn infect other software that reuses any of its code. The Free Software Foundation's official position as of January 1991 is that copyright law limits the scope of the GPL to "programs textually incorporating significant amounts of GNU code", and that the `infection' is not passed on to third parties unless actual GNU source is transmitted. Nevertheless, widespread suspicion that the **copyleft** language is `boobytrapped' has caused many developers to avoid using GNU tools and the GPL. Changes in the language of the version 2.0 GPL did not eliminate this problem.

Node:generate, Next:Genius From Mars Technique, Previous:General Public Virus, Up:= G =

generate vt.

To produce something according to an algorithm or program or set of rules, or as a (possibly unintended) side effect of the execution of an algorithm or program. The opposite of **parse**. This term retains its mechanistic connotations (though often humorously) when used of human behavior. "The guy is rational most of the time, but mention nuclear energy around him and he'll generate **infinite** flamage."

Node:Genius From Mars Technique, Next:gensym, Previous:generate, Up:= G =

Genius From Mars Technique n.

[TMRC] A visionary quality which enables one to ignore the standard approach and come up with a totally unexpected new algorithm. An attack on a problem from an offbeat angle that no one has ever thought of before, but that in retrospect makes total sense. Compare **grok**, **zen**.

Node:gensym, Next:Get a life!, Previous:Genius From Mars Technique, Up:= G =

gensym /jen'sim/

[from MacLISP for `generated symbol'] 1. v. To invent a new name for something temporary, in such a way that the name is almost certainly not in conflict with one already in use. 2. n. The resulting name. The canonical form of a gensym is `Gnnnn' where nnnn represents a number; any LISP hacker would recognize G0093 (for example) as a gensym. 3. A freshly generated data structure with a gensymmed name. Gensymmed names are useful for storing or uniquely identifying crufties (see **cruft**).

Node:Get a life!, Next:Get a real computer!, Previous:gensym, Up:= G =

Get a life! imp.

Hacker-standard way of suggesting that the person to whom it is directed has succumbed to terminal geekdom (see **computer geek**). Often heard on **Usenet**, esp. as a way of suggesting that the target is taking some obscure issue of **theology** too seriously. This exhortation was popularized by William Shatner on a "Saturday Night Live" episode in a speech that ended "Get a *life*!", but some respondents believe it to have been in use before then. It was certainly in wide use among hackers for at least five years before achieving mainstream currency in early 1992.

Node:Get a real computer!, Next:GFR, Previous:Get a life!, Up:= G =

Get a real computer! imp.

Typical hacker response to news that somebody is having trouble getting work done on a system that (a) is single-tasking, (b) has no hard disk, or (c) has an address space smaller than 16 megabytes. This is as of early 1996; note that the threshold for `real computer' rises with time. See **bitty box** and **toy**.

Node:GFR, Next:GIFs at 11, Previous:Get a real computer!, Up:= G =

GFR /G-F-R/ vt.

[ITS: from `Grim File Reaper', an ITS and LISP Machine utility] To remove a file or files according to some program-automated or semi-automatic manual procedure, especially one designed to reclaim mass storage space or reduce name-space clutter (the original GFR actually moved files to tape). Often generalized to pieces of data below file level. "I used to have his phone number, but I guess I **GFR**ed it." See also **prowler**, **reaper**. Compare **GC**, which discards only provably worthless stuff.

Node:GIFs at 11, Next:gig, Previous:GFR, Up:= G =

GIFs at 11

[Fidonet] Fidonet alternative to **film at 11**, especially in echoes (Fidonet topic areas) where uuencoded GIFs are permitted. Other formats, especially JPEG and MPEG, may be referenced instead.

Node:gig, Next:giga-, Previous:GIFs at 11, Up:= G =

gig /jig/ or /gig/ n.

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:giga-, Next:GIGO, Previous:gig, Up:= G =

giga- /ji'ga/ or /gi'ga/ pref.

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:GIGO, Next:gilley, Previous:giga-, Up:= G =

GIGO /gi:'goh/ [acronym]

1. `Garbage In, Garbage Out' -- usually said in response to **luser**s who complain that a program didn't "do the right thing" when given imperfect input or otherwise mistreated in some way. Also commonly used to describe failures in human decision making due to faulty, incomplete, or imprecise data. 2. `Garbage In, Gospel Out': this more recent expansion is a sardonic comment on the tendency human beings have to put excessive trust in `computerized' data.

Node:gilley, Next:gillion, Previous:GIGO, Up:= G =

gilley n.

[Usenet] The unit of analogical **bogosity**. According to its originator, the standard for one gilley was "the act of bogotoficiously comparing the shutting down of 1000 machines for a day with the killing of one person". The milligilley has been found to suffice for most normal conversational exchanges.

Node:gillion, Next:GIPS, Previous:gilley, Up:= G =

gillion /gil'y*n/ or /jil'y*n/ n.

[formed from **giga-** by analogy with mega/million and tera/trillion] 10^9. Same as an American billion or a British `milliard'. How one pronounces this depends on whether one speaks **giga-** with a hard or soft `g'.

Node:GIPS, Next:glark, Previous:gillion, Up:= G =

GIPS /gips/ or /jips/ n.

[analogy with **MIPS**] Giga-Instructions per Second (also possibly `Gillions of Instructions per Second'; see **gillion**). In 1991, this is used of only a handful of highly parallel machines, but this is expected to change. Compare **KIPS**.

Node:glark, Next:glass, Previous:GIPS, Up:= G =

glark /glark/ vt.

To figure something out from context. "The System III manuals are pretty poor, but you can generally glark the meaning from context." Interestingly, the word was originally `glork'; the context was "This gubblick contains many nonsklarkish English flutzpahs, but the overall pluggandisp can be glorked [sic] from context" (David Moser, quoted by Douglas Hofstadter in his "Metamagical Themas" column in the January 1981 "Scientific American"). It is conjectured that hacker usage mutated the verb to `glark' because **glork** was already an established jargon term (some hackers do report using the original term). Compare **grok**, **zen**.

Node:glass, Next:glass tty, Previous:glark, Up:= G =

glass n.

[IBM] Synonym for **silicon**.

Node:glass tty, Next:glassfet, Previous:glass, Up:= G =

glass tty /glas T-T-Y/ or /glas ti'tee/ n.

A terminal that has a display screen but which, because of hardware or software limitations, behaves like a teletype or some other printing terminal, thereby combining the disadvantages of both: like a printing terminal, it can't do fancy display hacks, and like a display terminal, it doesn't produce hard copy. An example is the early `dumb' version of Lear-Siegler ADM 3 (without cursor control). See **tube**, **tty**; compare **dumb terminal**, **smart terminal**. See "**TV Typewriters**" (Appendix A) for an interesting true story about a glass tty.

Node:glassfet, Next:glitch, Previous:glass tty, Up:= G =

glassfet /glas'fet/ n.

[by analogy with MOSFET, the acronym for `Metal-Oxide-Semiconductor Field-Effect Transistor'] Syn. **firebottle**, a humorous way to refer to a vacuum tube.

Node:glitch, Next:glob, Previous:glassfet, Up:= G =

glitch /glich/

[very common; from German `glitschig' to slip, via Yiddish `glitshen', to slide or skid] 1. n. A sudden interruption in electric service, sanity, continuity, or program function. Sometimes recoverable. An interruption in electric service is specifically called a `power glitch' (also **power hit**), of grave concern because it usually crashes all the computers. In jargon, though, a hacker who got to the middle of a sentence and then forgot how he or she intended to complete it might say, "Sorry, I just glitched". 2. vi. To commit a glitch. See **gritch**. 3. vt. [Stanford] To scroll a display screen, esp. several lines at a time. **WAITS** terminals used to do this in order to avoid continuous scrolling, which is distracting to the eye. 4. obs. Same as **magic cookie**, sense 2.

All these uses of `glitch' derive from the specific technical meaning the term has in the electronic hardware world, where it is now techspeak. A glitch can occur when the inputs of a circuit change, and the outputs change to some **random** value for some very brief time before they settle down to the correct value. If another circuit inspects the output at just the wrong time, reading the random value, the results can be very wrong and very hard to debug (a glitch is one of many causes of electronic **heisenbug**s).

Node:glob, Next:glork, Previous:glitch, Up:= G =

glob /glob/, *not* /glohb/ v.,n.

[Unix; common] To expand special characters in a wildcarded name, or the act of so doing (the action is also called `globbing'). The Unix conventions for filename wildcarding have become sufficiently pervasive that many hackers use some of them in written English, especially in email or news on technical topics. Those commonly encountered include the following:

`*`
: wildcard for any string (see also **UN*X**)

`?`
: wildcard for any single character (generally read this way only at the beginning or in the middle of a word)

`[]`
: delimits a wildcard matching any of the enclosed characters

`{}`
: alternation of comma-separated alternatives; thus, `foo{baz,qux}' would be read as `foobaz' or `fooqux'

Some examples: "He said his name was [KC]arl" (expresses ambiguity). "I don't read talk.politics.*" (any of the talk.politics subgroups on **Usenet**). Other examples are given under the entry for **X**. Note that glob patterns are similar, but not identical, to those used in **regexp**s.

Historical note: The jargon usage derives from `glob`, the name of a subprogram that expanded wildcards in archaic pre-Bourne versions of the Unix shell.

Node:glork, Next:glue, Previous:glob, Up:= G =

glork /glork/

1. interj. Term of mild surprise, usually tinged with outrage, as when one attempts to save the results of two hours of editing and finds that the system has just crashed. 2. Used as a name for just about anything. See **foo**. 3. vt. Similar to **glitch**, but usually used reflexively. "My program just glorked itself." 4. Syn. for **glark**, which see.

Node:glue, Next:gnarly, Previous:glork, Up:= G =

glue n.

Generic term for any interface logic or protocol that connects two component blocks. For example, **Blue Glue** is IBM's SNA protocol, and hardware designers call anything used to connect large VLSI's or

circuit blocks `glue logic'.

Node:gnarly, Next:GNU, Previous:glue, Up:= G =

gnarly /nar'lee/ adj.

Both **obscure** and **hairy** (sense 1). "**Yow!** -- the tuned assembler implementation of BitBlt is really gnarly!" From a similar but less specific usage in surfer slang.

Node:GNU, Next:gnubie, Previous:gnarly, Up:= G =

GNU /gnoo/, *not* /noo/

1. [acronym: `GNU's Not Unix!', see **recursive acronym**] A Unix-workalike development effort of the Free Software Foundation headed by Richard Stallman <rms@gnu.ai.mit.edu>. GNU EMACS and the GNU C compiler, two tools designed for this project, have become very popular in hackerdom and elsewhere. The GNU project was designed partly to proselytize for RMS's position that information is community property and all software source should be shared. One of its slogans is "Help stamp out software hoarding!" Though this remains controversial (because it implicitly denies any right of designers to own, assign, and sell the results of their labors), many hackers who disagree with RMS have nevertheless cooperated to produce large amounts of high-quality software for free redistribution under the Free Software Foundation's imprimatur. The GNU project has a web page at http://www.gnu.org. See **EMACS**, **copyleft**, **General Public Virus**, **Linux**. 2. Noted Unix hacker John Gilmore <gnu@toad.com>, founder of Usenet's anarchic alt.* hierarchy.

Node:gnubie, Next:GNUMACS, Previous:GNU, Up:= G =

gnubie /noo'bee/ n.

Written-only variant of **newbie** in common use on IRC channels, which implies specifically someone who is new to the Linux/open source/free software world.

Node:GNUMACS, Next:go flatline, Previous:gnubie, Up:= G =

GNUMACS /gnoo'maks/ n.

[contraction of `GNU EMACS'] Often-heard abbreviated name for the **GNU** project's flagship tool, **EMACS**. Used esp. in contrast with **GOSMACS**.

Node:go flatline, Next:go root, Previous:GNUMACS, Up:= G =

go flatline v.

[from cyberpunk SF, refers to flattening of EEG traces upon brain-death] (also adjectival `flatlined'). 1. To **die**, terminate, or fail, esp. irreversibly. In hacker parlance, this is used of machines only, human death being considered somewhat too serious a matter to employ jargon-jokes about. 2. To go completely quiescent; said of machines undergoing controlled shutdown. "You can suffer file damage if you shut down Unix but power off before the system has gone flatline." 3. Of a video tube, to fail by losing vertical

scan, so all one sees is a bright horizontal line bisecting the screen.

Node:go root, Next:go-faster stripes, Previous:go flatline, Up:= G =

go root vi.

[Unix; common] To temporarily enter **root mode** in order to perform a privileged operation. This use is deprecated in Australia, where v. `root' is a synonym for "fuck".

Node:go-faster stripes, Next:GoAT, Previous:go root, Up:= G =

go-faster stripes n.

[UK] Syn. **chrome**. Mainstream in some parts of UK.

Node:GoAT, Next:gobble, Previous:go-faster stripes, Up:= G =

GoAT //

[Usenet] Abbreviation: "Go Away, Troll". See **troll**.

Node:gobble, Next:Godwin's Law, Previous:GoAT, Up:= G =

gobble vt.

1. To consume, usu. used with `up'. "The output spy gobbles characters out of a **tty** output buffer." 2. To obtain, usu. used with `down'. "I guess I'll gobble down a copy of the documentation tomorrow." See also **snarf**.

Node:Godwin's Law, Next:Godzillagram, Previous:gobble, Up:= G =

Godwin's Law prov.

[Usenet] "As a Usenet discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches one." There is a tradition in many groups that, once this occurs, that thread is over, and whoever mentioned the Nazis has automatically lost whatever argument was in progress. Godwin's Law thus practically guarantees the existence of an upper bound on thread length in those groups.

Node:Godzillagram, Next:golden, Previous:Godwin's Law, Up:= G =

Godzillagram /god-zil'*-gram/ n.

[from Japan's national hero] 1. A network packet that in theory is a broadcast to every machine in the universe. The typical case is an IP datagram whose destination IP address is [255.255.255.255]. Fortunately, few gateways are foolish enough to attempt to implement this case! 2. A network packet of maximum size. An IP Godzillagram has 65,536 octets. Compare **super source quench**, **Christmas tree**

packet, **martian**.

Node:golden, Next:golf-ball printer, Previous:Godzillagram, Up:= G =

golden adj.

[prob. from folklore's `golden egg'] When used to describe a magnetic medium (e.g., `golden disk', `golden tape'), describes one containing a tested, up-to-spec, ready-to-ship software version. Compare **platinum-iridium**.

Node:golf-ball printer, Next:gonk, Previous:golden, Up:= G =

golf-ball printer n. obs.

The IBM 2741, a slow but letter-quality printing device and terminal based on the IBM Selectric typewriter. The `golf ball' was a little spherical frob bearing reversed embossed images of 88 different characters arranged on four parallels of latitude; one could change the font by swapping in a different golf ball. The print element spun and jerked alarmingly in action and when in motion was sometimes described as an `infuriated golf ball'. This was the technology that enabled APL to use a non-EBCDIC, non-ASCII, and in fact completely non-standard character set. This put it 10 years ahead of its time -- where it stayed, firmly rooted, for the next 20, until character displays gave way to programmable bit-mapped devices with the flexibility to support other character sets.

Node:gonk, Next:gonkulator, Previous:golf-ball printer, Up:= G =

gonk /gonk/ vi.,n.

1. To prevaricate or to embellish the truth beyond any reasonable recognition. In German the term is (mythically) `gonken'; in Spanish the verb becomes `gonkar'. "You're gonking me. That story you just told me is a bunch of gonk." In German, for example, "Du gonkst mich" (You're pulling my leg). See also **gonkulator**. 2. [British] To grab some sleep at an odd time; compare **gronk out**.

Node:gonkulator, Next:gonzo, Previous:gonk, Up:= G =

gonkulator /gon'kyoo-lay-tr/ n.

[common; from the 1960s "Hogan's Heroes" TV series] A pretentious piece of equipment that actually serves no useful purpose. Usually used to describe one's least favorite piece of computer hardware. See **gonk**.

Node:gonzo, Next:Good Thing, Previous:gonkulator, Up:= G =

gonzo /gon'zoh/ adj.

[from Hunter S. Thompson] 1. With total commitment, total concentration, and a mad sort of panache. (Thompson's original sense.) 2. More loosely: Overwhelming; outrageous; over the top; very large, esp. used of collections of source code, source files, or individual functions. Has some of the connotations of **moby** and **hairy**, but without the implication of obscurity or complexity.

Node:Good Thing, Next:gopher, Previous:gonzo, Up:= G =

Good Thing n.,adj.

[very common; often capitalized; always pronounced as if capitalized.] 1. Self-evidently wonderful to anyone in a position to notice: "A language that manages dynamic memory automatically for you is a Good Thing." 2. Something that can't possibly have any ill side-effects and may save considerable grief later: "Removing the self-modifying code from that shared library would be a Good Thing." 3. When said of software tools or libraries, as in "YACC is a Good Thing", specifically connotes that the thing has drastically reduced a programmer's work load. Oppose **Bad Thing**.

Node:gopher, Next:gopher hole, Previous:Good Thing, Up:= G =

gopher n.

A type of Internet service first floated around 1991 and obsolesced around 1995 by the World Wide Web. Gopher presents a menuing interface to a tree or graph of links; the links can be to documents, runnable programs, or other gopher menus arbitrarily far across the net.

Some claim that the gopher software, which was originally developed at the University of Minnesota, was named after the Minnesota Gophers (a sports team). Others claim the word derives from American slang `gofer' (from "go for", dialectal "go fer"), one whose job is to run and fetch things. Finally, observe that gophers dig long tunnels, and the idea of tunneling through the net to find information was a defining metaphor for the developers. Probably all three things were true, but with the first two coming first and the gopher-tunnel metaphor serendipitously adding flavor and impetus to the project as it developed out of its concept stage.

Node:gopher hole, Next:gorets, Previous:gopher, Up:= G =

gopher hole n.

1. Any access to a **gopher**. 2. [Amateur Packet Radio] The terrestrial analog of a **wormhole** (sense 2), from which this term was coined. A gopher hole links two amateur packet relays through some non-ham radio medium.

Node:gorets, Next:gorilla arm, Previous:gopher hole, Up:= G =

gorets /gor'ets/ n.

The unknown ur-noun, fill in your own meaning. Found esp. on the Usenet newsgroup *alt.gorets*, which seems to be a running contest to redefine the word by implication in the funniest and most peculiar way, with the understanding that no definition is ever final. [A correspondent from the Former Soviet Union informs me that `gorets' is Russian for `mountain dweller'. Another from France informs me that `goret' is archaic French for a young pig --ESR] Compare **frink**.

Node:gorilla arm, Next:gorp, Previous:gorets, Up:= G =

gorilla arm n.

The side-effect that destroyed touch-screens as a mainstream input technology despite a promising start in the early 1980s. It seems the designers of all those **spiffy** touch-menu systems failed to notice that humans aren't designed to hold their arms in front of their faces making small motions. After more than a very few selections, the arm begins to feel sore, cramped, and oversized -- the operator looks like a gorilla while using the touch screen and feels like one afterwards. This is now considered a classic cautionary tale to human-factors designers; "Remember the gorilla arm!" is shorthand for "How is this going to fly in *real* use?".

Node:gorp, Next:GOSMACS, Previous:gorilla arm, Up:= G =

gorp /gorp/ n.

[CMU: perhaps from the canonical hiker's food, Good Old Raisins and Peanuts] Another **metasyntactic variable**, like **foo** and **bar**.

Node:GOSMACS, Next:Gosperism, Previous:gorp, Up:= G =

GOSMACS /goz'maks/ n.

[contraction of `Gosling EMACS'] The first **EMACS**-in-C implementation, predating but now largely eclipsed by **GNUMACS**. Originally freeware; a commercial version was modestly popular as `UniPress EMACS' during the 1980s. The author, James Gosling, went on to invent **NeWS** and the programming language Java; the latter earned him **demigod** status.

Node:Gosperism, Next:gotcha, Previous:GOSMACS, Up:= G =

Gosperism /gos'p*r-izm/ n.

A hack, invention, or saying due to **elder days** arch-hacker R. William (Bill) Gosper. This notion merits its own term because there are so many of them. Many of the entries in **HAKMEM** are Gosperisms; see also **life**.

Node:gotcha, Next:GPL, Previous:Gosperism, Up:= G =

gotcha n.

A **misfeature** of a system, especially a programming language or environment, that tends to breed bugs or mistakes because it both enticingly easy to invoke and completely unexpected and/or unreasonable in its outcome. For example, a classic gotcha in **C** is the fact that `if (a=b) {code;}` is syntactically valid and sometimes even correct. It puts the value of `b` into `a` and then executes `code` if `a` is non-zero. What the programmer probably meant was `if (a==b) {code;}`, which executes `code` if `a` and `b` are equal.

Node:GPL, Next:GPV, Previous:gotcha, Up:= G =

GPL /G-P-L/ n.

Abbreviation for `General Public License' in widespread use; see **copyleft**, **General Public Virus**.

Node:GPV, Next:grault, Previous:GPL, Up:= G =

GPV /G-P-V/ n.

Abbrev. for **General Public Virus** in widespread use.

Node:grault, Next:gray goo, Previous:GPV, Up:= G =

grault /grawlt/ n.

Yet another **metasyntactic variable**, invented by Mike Gallaher and propagated by the **GOSMACS** documentation. See **corge**.

Node:gray goo, Next:Great Renaming, Previous:grault, Up:= G =

gray goo n.

A hypothetical substance composed of **sagan**s of sub-micron-sized self-replicating robots programmed to make copies of themselves out of whatever is available. The image that goes with the term is one of the entire biosphere of Earth being eventually converted to robot goo. This is the simplest of the **nanotechnology** disaster scenarios, easily refuted by arguments from energy requirements and elemental abundances. Compare **blue goo**.

Node:Great Renaming, Next:Great Runes, Previous:gray goo, Up:= G =

Great Renaming n.

The **flag day** in 1987 on which all of the non-local groups on the **Usenet** had their names changed from the net.- format to the current multiple-hierarchies scheme. Used esp. in discussing the history of newsgroup names. "The oldest sources group is *comp.sources.misc*; before the Great Renaming, it was *net.sources*." There is a Great Renaming FAQ on the Web.

Node:Great Runes, Next:Great Worm, Previous:Great Renaming, Up:= G =

Great Runes n.

Uppercase-only text or display messages. Some archaic operating systems still emit these. See also **runes**, **smash case**, **fold case**.

There is a widespread legend (repeated by earlier versions of this entry, though tagged as folklore) that the uppercase-only support of various old character codes and I/O equipment was chosen by a religious person in a position of power at the Teletype Company because supporting both upper and lower cases was too expensive and supporting lower case only would have made it impossible to spell `God' correctly. Not true; the upper-case interpretation of teleprinter codes was well established by 1870, long before Teletype was even founded.

Node:Great Worm, Next:great-wall, Previous:Great Runes, Up:= G =

Great Worm n.

The 1988 Internet **worm** perpetrated by **RTM**. This is a play on Tolkien (compare **elvish**, **elder days**). In the fantasy history of his Middle Earth books, there were dragons powerful enough to lay waste to entire regions; two of these (Scatha and Glaurung) were known as "the Great Worms". This usage expresses the connotation that the RTM crack was a sort of devastating watershed event in hacker history; certainly it did more to make non-hackers nervous about the Internet than anything before or since.

Node:great-wall, Next:Green Book, Previous:Great Worm, Up:= G =

great-wall vi.,n.

[from SF fandom] A mass expedition to an oriental restaurant, esp. one where food is served family-style and shared. There is a common heuristic about the amount of food to order, expressed as "Get N - 1 entrees"; the value of N, which is the number of people in the group, can be inferred from context (see **N**). See **oriental food**, **ravs**, **stir-fried random**.

Node:Green Book, Next:green bytes, Previous:great-wall, Up:= G =

Green Book n.

1. One of the three standard **PostScript** references: "PostScript Language Program Design", bylined `Adobe Systems' (Addison-Wesley, 1988; QA76.73.P67P66 ISBN 0-201-14396-8); see also **Red Book**, **Blue Book**, and the **White Book** (sense 2). 2. Informal name for one of the three standard references on SmallTalk: "Smalltalk-80: Bits of History, Words of Advice", by Glenn Krasner (Addison-Wesley, 1983; QA76.8.S635S58; ISBN 0-201-11669-3) (this, too, is associated with blue and red books). 3. The "X/Open Compatibility Guide", which defines an international standard **Unix** environment that is a proper superset of POSIX/SVID; also includes descriptions of a standard utility toolkit, systems administrations features, and the like. This grimoire is taken with particular seriousness in Europe. See **Purple Book**. 4. The IEEE 1003.1 POSIX Operating Systems Interface standard has been dubbed "The Ugly Green Book". 5. Any of the 1992 standards issued by the CCITT's tenth plenary assembly. These include, among other things, the X.400 email standard and the Group 1 through 4 fax standards. See also **book titles**.

Node:green bytes, Next:green card, Previous:Green Book, Up:= G =

green bytes n.

(also `green words') 1. Meta-information embedded in a file, such as the length of the file or its name; as opposed to keeping such information in a separate description file or record. The term comes from an IBM user's group meeting (ca. 1962) at which these two approaches were being debated and the diagram of the file on the blackboard had the `green bytes' drawn in green. 2. By extension, the non-data bits in any self-describing format. "A GIF file contains, among other things, green bytes describing the packing method for the image." Compare **out-of-band**, **zigamorph**, **fence** (sense 1).

Node:green card, Next:green lightning, Previous:green bytes, Up:= G =

green card n.

[after the "IBM System/360 Reference Data" card] A summary of an assembly language, even if the color is not green and not a card. Less frequently used now because of the decrease in the use of assembly language. "I'll go get my green card so I can check the addressing mode for that instruction."

The original green card became a yellow card when the System/370 was introduced, and later a yellow booklet. An anecdote from IBM refers to a scene that took place in a programmers' terminal room at Yorktown in 1978. A **luser** overheard one of the programmers ask another "Do you have a green card?" The other grunted and passed the first a thick yellow booklet. At this point the luser turned a delicate shade of olive and rapidly left the room, never to return.

Node:green lightning, Next:green machine, Previous:green card, Up:= G =

green lightning n.

[IBM] 1. Apparently random flashing streaks on the face of 3278-9 terminals while a new symbol set is being downloaded. This hardware bug was left deliberately unfixed, as some genius within IBM suggested it would let the user know that `something is happening'. That, it certainly does. Later microprocessor-driven IBM color graphics displays were actually *programmed* to produce green lightning! 2. [proposed] Any bug perverted into an alleged feature by adroit rationalization or marketing. "Motorola calls the CISC cruft in the 88000 architecture `compatibility logic', but I call it green lightning". See also **feature** (sense 6).

Node:green machine, Next:Green's Theorem, Previous:green lightning, Up:= G =

green machine n.

A computer or peripheral device that has been designed and built to military specifications for field equipment (that is, to withstand mechanical shock, extremes of temperature and humidity, and so forth). Comes from the olive-drab `uniform' paint used for military equipment.

Node:Green's Theorem, Next:greenbar, Previous:green machine, Up:= G =

Green's Theorem prov.

[TMRC] For any story, in any group of people there will be at least one person who has not heard the story. A refinement of the theorem states that there will be *exactly* one person (if there were more than one, it wouldn't be as bad to re-tell the story). [The name of this theorem is a play on a fundamental theorem in calculus. --ESR]

Node:greenbar, Next:grep, Previous:Green's Theorem, Up:= G =

greenbar n.

A style of fanfolded continuous-feed paper with alternating green and white bars on it, especially used in old-style line printers. This slang almost certainly dates way back to mainframe days.

Node:grep, Next:gribble, Previous:greenbar, Up:= G =

grep /grep/ vi.

[from the qed/ed editor idiom g/*re*/p, where *re* stands for a regular expression, to Globally search for the Regular Expression and Print the lines containing matches to it, via **Unix** `grep(1)`] To rapidly scan a file or set of files looking for a particular string or pattern (when browsing through a large set of files, one may speak of `grepping around'). By extension, to look for something by pattern. "Grep the bulletin board for the system backup schedule, would you?" See also **vgrep**.

[It has also been alleged that the source is from the title of a paper "A General Regular Expression Parser" -ESR]

Node:gribble, Next:grilf, Previous:grep, Up:= G =

gribble n.

Random binary data rendered as unreadable text. Noise characters in a data stream are displayed as gribble. Modems with mismatched bitrates usually generate gribble (more specifically, **baud barf**). Dumping a binary file to the screen is an excellent source of gribble, and (if the bell/speaker is active) headaches.

Node:grilf, Next:grind, Previous:gribble, Up:= G =

grilf // n.

Girlfriend. Like **newsfroup** and **filk**, a typo reincarnated as a new word. Seems to have originated sometime in 1992 on **Usenet**. [A friend tells me there was a Lloyd Biggle SF novel "Watchers Of The Dark", in which alien species after species goes insane and begins to chant "Grilf! Grilf!". A human detective eventually determines that the word means "Liar!" I hope this has nothing to do with the popularity of the Usenet term. --ESR]

Node:grind, Next:grind crank, Previous:grilf, Up:= G =

grind vt.

1. [MIT and Berkeley; now rare] To prettify hardcopy of code, especially LISP code, by reindenting lines, printing keywords and comments in distinct fonts (if available), etc. This usage was associated with the MacLISP community and is now rare; **prettyprint** was and is the generic term for such operations. 2. [Unix] To generate the formatted version of a document from the **nroff**, **troff**, **TeX**, or Scribe source. 3. [common] To run seemingly interminably, esp. (but not necessarily) if performing some tedious and inherently useless task. Similar to **crunch** or **grovel**. Grinding has a connotation of using a lot of CPU time, but it is possible to grind a disk, network, etc. See also **hog**. 4. To make the whole system slow. "Troff really grinds a PDP-11." 5. `grind grind' excl. Roughly, "Isn't the machine slow today!"

Node:grind crank, Next:gripenet, Previous:grind, Up:= G =

grind crank n. //

A mythical accessory to a terminal. A crank on the side of a monitor, which when operated makes a zizzing noise and causes the computer to run faster. Usually one does not refer to a grind crank out loud, but merely makes the appropriate gesture and noise. See **grind**.

Historical note: At least one real machine actually had a grind crank -- the R1, a research machine built toward the end of the days of the great vacuum tube computers, in 1959. R1 (also known as `The Rice Institute Computer' (TRIC) and later as `The Rice University Computer' (TRUC)) had a single-step/free-run switch for use when debugging programs. Since single-stepping through a large program was rather tedious, there was also a crank with a cam and gear arrangement that repeatedly pushed the single-step button. This allowed one to `crank' through a lot of code, then slow down to single-step for a bit when you got near the code of interest, poke at some registers using the console typewriter, and then keep on cranking.

Node:gripenet, Next:gritch, Previous:grind crank, Up:= G =

gripenet n.

[IBM] A wry (and thoroughly unofficial) name for IBM's internal VNET system, deriving from its common use by IBMers to voice pointed criticism of IBM management that would be taboo in more formal channels.

Node:gritch, Next:grok, Previous:gripenet, Up:= G =

gritch /grich/

[MIT] 1. n. A complaint (often caused by a **glitch**). 2. vi. To complain. Often verb-doubled: "Gritch gritch". 3. A synonym for **glitch** (as verb or noun).

Interestingly, this word seems to have a separate history from **glitch**, with which it is often confused. Back in the early 1960s, when `glitch' was strictly a hardware-tech's term of art, the Burton House dorm at M.I.T. maintained a "Gritch Book", a blank volume, into which the residents hand-wrote complaints, suggestions, and witticisms. Previous years' volumes of this tradition were maintained, dating back to antiquity. The word "gritch" was described as a portmanteau of "gripe" and "bitch". Thus, sense 3 above is at least historically incorrect.

Node:grok, Next:gronk, Previous:gritch, Up:= G =

grok /grok/, var. /grohk/ vt.

[from the novel "Stranger in a Strange Land", by Robert A. Heinlein, where it is a Martian word meaning literally `to drink' and metaphorically `to be one with'] The emphatic form is `grok in fullness'. 1. To understand, usually in a global sense. Connotes intimate and exhaustive knowledge. Contrast **zen**, which is similar supernal understanding experienced as a single brief flash. See also **glark**. 2. Used of programs, may connote merely sufficient understanding. "Almost all C compilers grok the `void` type these days."

Node:gronk, Next:gronk out, Previous:grok, Up:= G =

gronk /gronk/ vt.

[popularized by Johnny Hart's comic strip "B.C." but the word apparently predates that] 1. To clear the state of a wedged device and restart it. More severe than `to **frob**' (sense 2). 2. [TMRC] To cut, sever, smash, or similarly disable. 3. The sound made by many 3.5-inch diskette drives. In particular, the microfloppies on a Commodore Amiga go "grink, gronk".

Node:gronk out, Next:gronked, Previous:gronk, Up:= G =

gronk out vi.

To cease functioning. Of people, to go home and go to sleep. "I guess I'll gronk out now; see you all tomorrow."

Node:gronked, Next:grovel, Previous:gronk out, Up:= G =

gronked adj.

1. Broken. "The teletype scanner was gronked, so we took the system down." 2. Of people, the condition of feeling very tired or (less commonly) sick. "I've been chasing that bug for 17 hours now and I am thoroughly gronked!" Compare **broken**, which means about the same as **gronk** used of hardware, but connotes depression or mental/emotional problems in people.

Node:grovel, Next:grue, Previous:gronked, Up:= G =

grovel vi.

1. To work interminably and without apparent progress. Often used transitively with `over' or `through'. "The file scavenger has been groveling through the /usr directories for 10 minutes now." Compare **grind** and **crunch**. Emphatic form: `grovel obscenely'. 2. To examine minutely or in complete detail. "The compiler grovels over the entire source program before beginning to translate it." "I grovelled through all the documentation, but I still couldn't find the command I wanted."

Node:grue, Next:grunge, Previous:grovel, Up:= G =

grue n.

[from archaic English verb for `shudder', as with fear] The grue was originated in the game **Zork** (Dave Lebling took the name from Jack Vance's "Dying Earth" fantasies) and used in several other **Infocom** games as a hint that you should perhaps look for a lamp, torch or some type of light source. Wandering into a dark area would cause the game to prompt you, "It is very dark. If you continue you are likely to be eaten by a grue." If you failed to locate a light source within the next couple of moves this would indeed be the case.

The grue, according to scholars of the Great Underground Empire, is a sinister, lurking presence in the dark places of the earth. Its favorite diet is either adventurers or enchanters, but its insatiable appetite is tempered by its extreme fear of light. No grues have ever been seen by the light of day, and only a few have been observed in their underground lairs. Of those who have seen grues, few have survived their fearsome jaws to tell the tale. Grues have sharp claws and fangs, and an uncontrollable tendency to slaver and gurgle. They are certainly the most evil-tempered of all creatures; to say they are touchy is a dangerous understatement. "Sour as a grue" is a common expression, even among themselves.

All this folklore is widely known among hackers.

Node:grunge, Next:gubbish, Previous:grue, Up:= G =

grunge /gruhnj/ n.

1. That which is grungy, or that which makes it so. 2. [Cambridge] Code which is inaccessible due to changes in other parts of the program. The preferred term in North America is **dead code**.

Node:gubbish, Next:Guido, Previous:grunge, Up:= G =

gubbish /guhb'*sh/ n.

[a portmanteau of `garbage' and `rubbish'; may have originated with SF author Philip K. Dick] Garbage; crap; nonsense. "What is all this gubbish?" The opposite portmanteau `rubbage' is also reported; in fact, it was British slang during the 19th century and appears in Dickens.

Node:Guido, Next:guiltware, Previous:gubbish, Up:= G =

Guido /gwee'do/ or /khwee'do/

Without qualification, Guido van Rossum (author of **Python**). Note that Guido answers to English /gwee'do/ but in Dutch it's /khwee'do/.

Node:guiltware, Next:gumby, Previous:Guido, Up:= G =

guiltware /gilt'weir/ n.

1. A piece of **freeware** decorated with a message telling one how long and hard the author worked on it and intimating that one is a no-good freeloader if one does not immediately send the poor suffering martyr gobs of money. 2. A piece of **shareware** that works.

Node:gumby, Next:gun, Previous:guiltware, Up:= G =

gumby /guhm'bee/ n.

[from a class of Monty Python characters, poss. with some influence from the 1960s claymation character] 1. An act of minor but conspicuous stupidity, often in `gumby maneuver' or `pull a gumby'. 2. [NRL] n. A bureaucrat, or other technical incompetent who impedes the progress of real work. 3. adj. Relating to things typically associated with people in sense 2. (e.g. "Ran would be writing code, but Richard gave him gumby work that's due on Friday", or, "Dammit! Travel screwed up my plane tickets. I have to go out on gumby patrol.")

Node:gun, Next:gunch, Previous:gumby, Up:= G =

gun vt.

[ITS, now rare: from the `:GUN` command] To forcibly terminate a program or job (computer, not career). "Some idiot left a background process running soaking up half the cycles, so I gunned it." Usage: now rare. Compare **can**, **blammo**.

Node:gunch, Next:gunpowder chicken, Previous:gun, Up:= G =

gunch /guhnch/ vt.

[TMRC] To push, prod, or poke at a device that has almost (but not quite) produced the desired result. Implies a threat to **mung**.

Node:gunpowder chicken, Next:gurfle, Previous:gunch, Up:= G =

gunpowder chicken n.

Same as **laser chicken**.

Node:gurfle, Next:guru, Previous:gunpowder chicken, Up:= G =

gurfle /ger'fl/ interj.

An expression of shocked disbelief. "He said we have to recode this thing in FORTRAN by next week. Gurfle!" Compare **weeble**.

Node:guru, Next:guru meditation, Previous:gurfle, Up:= G =

guru n.

[Unix] An expert. Implies not only **wizard** skill but also a history of being a knowledge resource for others. Less often, used (with a qualifier) for other experts on other systems, as in `VMS guru'. See **source of all good bits**.

Node:guru meditation, Next:gweep, Previous:guru, Up:= G =

guru meditation n.

Amiga equivalent of `panic' in Unix (sometimes just called a `guru' or `guru event'). When the system crashes, a cryptic message of the form "GURU MEDITATION #XXXXXXXX.YYYYYYYY" may appear, indicating what the problem was. An Amiga guru can figure things out from the numbers. Sometimes a **guru** event must be followed by a **Vulcan nerve pinch**.

This term is (no surprise) an in-joke from the earliest days of the Amiga. An earlier product of the Amiga corporation was a device called a `Joyboard' which was basically a plastic board built onto a joystick-like device; it was sold with a skiing game cartridge for the Atari game machine. It is said that whenever the prototype OS crashed, the system programmer responsible would calm down by concentrating on a solution while sitting cross-legged on a Joyboard trying to keep the board in balance. This position resembled that of a meditating guru. Sadly, the joke was removed fairly early on (but there's a well-known patch to restore it in more recent versions).

Node:gweep, Next:h, Previous:guru meditation, Up:= G =

gweep /gweep/

[WPI] 1. v. To **hack**, usually at night. At WPI, from 1975 onwards, one who gweeped could often be found at the College Computing Center punching cards or crashing the **PDP-10** or, later, the DEC-20. A correspondent who was there at the time opines that the term was originally onomatopoetic, describing the keyclick sound of the Datapoint terminals long connected to the PDP-10. The term has survived the demise of those technologies, however, and was still alive in early 1999. "I'm going to go gweep for a while. See you in the morning." "I gweep from 8 PM till 3 AM during the week." 2. n. One who habitually gweeps in sense 1; a **hacker**. "He's a hard-core gweep, mumbles code in his sleep."

= H =

- h:
- ha ha only serious:
- hack:
- hack attack:
- hack mode:
- hack on:
- hack together:
- hack up:
- hack value:
- hacked off:
- hacked up:
- hacker:
- hacker ethic:
- hacker humor:
- Hackers (the movie):
- hacking run:
- Hacking X for Y:
- Hackintosh:
- hackish:
- hackishness:
- hackitude:
- hair:
- hairball:
- hairy:
- HAKMEM:
- hakspek:
- Halloween Documents:
- hammer:
- hamster:
- HAND:
- hand cruft:
- hand-hacking:
- handle:
- handle:
- hand-roll:
- handshaking:
- handwave:
- hang:

- Hanlon's Razor:
- happily:
- haque:
- hard boot:
- hardcoded:
- hardwarily:
- hardwired:
- has the X nature:
- hash bucket:
- hash collision:
- hat:
- HCF:
- heads down:
- heartbeat:
- heatseeker:
- heavy metal:
- heavy wizardry:
- heavyweight:
- heisenbug:
- Helen Keller mode:
- hello sailor!:
- hello wall!:
- hello world:
- hex:
- hexadecimal:
- hexit:
- HHOK:
- HHOS:
- hidden flag:
- high bit:
- high moby:
- highly:
- hing:
- hired gun:
- hirsute:
- HLL:
- hoarding:
- hobbit:
- hog:
- hole:
- hollised:
- holy wars:
- home box:
- home machine:
- home page:
- hook:
- hop:
- hose:
- hosed:
- hot chat:
- hot spot:
- hotlink:

- house wizard:
- HP-SUX:
- HTH:
- huff:
- humma:
- hung:
- hungry puppy:
- hungus:
- hyperspace:
- hysterical reasons:

Node:h, Next:ha ha only serious, Previous:gweep, Up:= H =

h

[from SF fandom] A method of `marking' common words, i.e., calling attention to the fact that they are being used in a nonstandard, ironic, or humorous way. Originated in the fannish catchphrase "Bheer is the One True Ghod!" from decades ago. H-infix marking of `Ghod' and other words spread into the 1960s counterculture via underground comix, and into early hackerdom either from the counterculture or from SF fandom (the three overlapped heavily at the time). More recently, the h infix has become an expected feature of benchmark names (Dhrystone, Rhealstone, etc.); this is probably patterning on the original Whetstone (the name of a laboratory) but influenced by the fannish/counterculture h infix.

Node:ha ha only serious, Next:hack, Previous:h, Up:= H =

ha ha only serious

[from SF fandom, orig. as mutation of HHOK, `Ha Ha Only Kidding'] A phrase (often seen abbreviated as HHOS) that aptly captures the flavor of much hacker discourse. Applied especially to parodies, absurdities, and ironic jokes that are both intended and perceived to contain a possibly disquieting amount of truth, or truths that are constructed on in-joke and self-parody. This lexicon contains many examples of ha-ha-only-serious in both form and content. Indeed, the entirety of hacker culture is often perceived as ha-ha-only-serious by hackers themselves; to take it either too lightly or too seriously marks a person as an outsider, a **wannabee**, or in **larval stage**. For further enlightenment on this subject, consult any Zen master. See also **hacker humor**, and **AI koans**.

Node:hack, Next:hack attack, Previous:ha ha only serious, Up:= H =

hack

[very common] 1. n. Originally, a quick job that produces what is needed, but not well. 2. n. An incredibly good, and perhaps very time-consuming, piece of work that produces exactly what is needed. 3. vt. To bear emotionally or physically. "I can't hack this heat!" 4. vt. To work on something (typically a program). In an immediate sense: "What are you doing?" "I'm hacking TECO." In a general (time-extended) sense: "What do you do around here?" "I hack TECO." More generally, "I hack `foo'" is roughly equivalent to "`foo' is my major interest (or project)". "I hack solid-state physics." See **Hacking X for Y**. 5. vt. To pull a prank on. See sense 2 and **hacker** (sense 5). 6. vi. To interact with a computer in a playful and exploratory rather than goal-directed way. "Whatcha up to?" "Oh, just hacking." 7. n. Short for **hacker**. 8. See **nethack**. 9. [MIT] v. To explore the basements, roof ledges, and steam tunnels of a large, institutional building, to the dismay of Physical Plant workers and (since this is usually performed at educational institutions) the Campus Police. This activity has been found to be eerily similar to playing

adventure games such as Dungeons and Dragons and **Zork**. See also **vadding**.

Constructions on this term abound. They include `happy hacking' (a farewell), `how's hacking?' (a friendly greeting among hackers) and `hack, hack' (a fairly content-free but friendly comment, often used as a temporary farewell). For more on this totipotent term see "**The Meaning of Hack**". See also **neat hack**, **real hack**.

Node:hack attack, Next:hack mode, Previous:hack, Up:= H =

hack attack n.

[poss. by analogy with `Big Mac Attack' from ads for the McDonald's fast-food chain; the variant `big hack attack' is reported] Nearly synonymous with **hacking run**, though the latter more strongly implies an all-nighter.

Node:hack mode, Next:hack on, Previous:hack attack, Up:= H =

hack mode n.

1. What one is in when hacking, of course. 2. More specifically, a Zen-like state of total focus on The Problem that may be achieved when one is hacking (this is why every good hacker is part mystic). Ability to enter such concentration at will correlates strongly with wizardliness; it is one of the most important skills learned during **larval stage**. Sometimes amplified as `deep hack mode'.

Being yanked out of hack mode (see **priority interrupt**) may be experienced as a physical shock, and the sensation of being in hack mode is more than a little habituating. The intensity of this experience is probably by itself sufficient explanation for the existence of hackers, and explains why many resist being promoted out of positions where they can code. See also **cyberspace** (sense 2).

Some aspects of hacker etiquette will appear quite odd to an observer unaware of the high value placed on hack mode. For example, if someone appears at your door, it is perfectly okay to hold up a hand (without turning one's eyes away from the screen) to avoid being interrupted. One may read, type, and interact with the computer for quite some time before further acknowledging the other's presence (of course, he or she is reciprocally free to leave without a word). The understanding is that you might be in **hack mode** with a lot of delicate **state** (sense 2) in your head, and you dare not **swap** that context out until you have reached a good point to pause. See also **juggling eggs**.

Node:hack on, Next:hack together, Previous:hack mode, Up:= H =

hack on vt.

[very common] To **hack**; implies that the subject is some pre-existing hunk of code that one is evolving, as opposed to something one might **hack up**.

Node:hack together, Next:hack up, Previous:hack on, Up:= H =

hack together vt.

[common] To throw something together so it will work. Unlike `kluge together' or **cruft together**, this does not necessarily have negative connotations.

Node:hack up, Next:hack value, Previous:hack together, Up:= H =

hack up vt.

To **hack**, but generally implies that the result is a hack in sense 1 (a quick hack). Contrast this with **hack on**. To `hack up on' implies a **quick-and-dirty** modification to an existing system. Contrast **hacked up**; compare **kluge up**, **monkey up**, **cruft together**.

Node:hack value, Next:hacked off, Previous:hack up, Up:= H =

hack value n.

Often adduced as the reason or motivation for expending effort toward a seemingly useless goal, the point being that the accomplished goal is a hack. For example, MacLISP had features for reading and printing Roman numerals, which were installed purely for hack value. See **display hack** for one method of computing hack value, but this cannot really be explained, only experienced. As Louis Armstrong once said when asked to explain jazz: "Man, if you gotta ask you'll never know." (Feminists please note Fats Waller's explanation of rhythm: "Lady, if you got to ask, you ain't got it.")

Node:hacked off, Next:hacked up, Previous:hack value, Up:= H =

hacked off adj.

[analogous to `pissed off'] Said of system administrators who have become annoyed, upset, or touchy owing to suspicions that their sites have been or are going to be victimized by crackers, or used for inappropriate, technically illegal, or even overtly criminal activities. For example, having unreadable files in your home directory called `worm', `lockpick', or `goroot' would probably be an effective (as well as impressively obvious and stupid) way to get your sysadmin hacked off at you.

It has been pointed out that there is precedent for this usage in U.S. Navy slang, in which officers under discipline are sometimes said to be "in hack" and one may speak of "hacking off the C.O.".

Node:hacked up, Next:hacker, Previous:hacked off, Up:= H =

hacked up adj.

Sufficiently patched, kluged, and tweaked that the surgical scars are beginning to crowd out normal tissue (compare **critical mass**). Not all programs that are hacked become `hacked up'; if modifications are done with some eye to coherence and continued maintainability, the software may emerge better for the experience. Contrast **hack up**.

Node:hacker, Next:hacker ethic, Previous:hacked up, Up:= H =

hacker n.

[originally, someone who makes furniture with an axe] 1. A person who enjoys exploring the details of programmable systems and how to stretch their capabilities, as opposed to most users, who prefer to learn only the minimum necessary. 2. One who programs enthusiastically (even obsessively) or who enjoys

programming rather than just theorizing about programming. 3. A person capable of appreciating **hack value**. 4. A person who is good at programming quickly. 5. An expert at a particular program, or one who frequently does work using it or on it; as in `a Unix hacker'. (Definitions 1 through 5 are correlated, and people who fit them congregate.) 6. An expert or enthusiast of any kind. One might be an astronomy hacker, for example. 7. One who enjoys the intellectual challenge of creatively overcoming or circumventing limitations. 8. [deprecated] A malicious meddler who tries to discover sensitive information by poking around. Hence `password hacker', `network hacker'. The correct term for this sense is **cracker**.

The term `hacker' also tends to connote membership in the global community defined by the net (see **the network** and **Internet address**). For discussion of some of the basics of this culture, see the How To Become A Hacker FAQ. It also implies that the person described is seen to subscribe to some version of the hacker ethic (see **hacker ethic**).

It is better to be described as a hacker by others than to describe oneself that way. Hackers consider themselves something of an elite (a meritocracy based on ability), though one to which new members are gladly welcome. There is thus a certain ego satisfaction to be had in identifying yourself as a hacker (but if you claim to be one and are not, you'll quickly be labeled **bogus**). See also **wannabee**.

This term seems to have been first adopted as a badge in the 1960s by the hacker culture surrounding TMRC and the MIT AI Lab. We have a report that it was used in a sense close to this entry's by teenage radio hams and electronics tinkerers in the mid-1950s.

Node:hacker ethic, Next:hacker humor, Previous:hacker, Up:= H =

hacker ethic n.

1. The belief that information-sharing is a powerful positive good, and that it is an ethical duty of hackers to share their expertise by writing open-source and facilitating access to information and to computing resources wherever possible. 2. The belief that system-cracking for fun and exploration is ethically OK as long as the cracker commits no theft, vandalism, or breach of confidentiality.

Both of these normative ethical principles are widely, but by no means universally, accepted among hackers. Most hackers subscribe to the hacker ethic in sense 1, and many act on it by writing and giving away open-source software. A few go further and assert that *all* information should be free and *any* proprietary control of it is bad; this is the philosophy behind the **GNU** project.

Sense 2 is more controversial: some people consider the act of cracking itself to be unethical, like breaking and entering. But the belief that `ethical' cracking excludes destruction at least moderates the behavior of people who see themselves as `benign' crackers (see also **samurai**). On this view, it may be one of the highest forms of hackerly courtesy to (a) break into a system, and then (b) explain to the sysop, preferably by email from a **superuser** account, exactly how it was done and how the hole can be plugged -- acting as an unpaid (and unsolicited) **tiger team**.

The most reliable manifestation of either version of the hacker ethic is that almost all hackers are actively willing to share technical tricks, software, and (where possible) computing resources with other hackers. Huge cooperative networks such as **Usenet**, **FidoNet** and Internet (see **Internet address**) can function without central control because of this trait; they both rely on and reinforce a sense of community that may be hackerdom's most valuable intangible asset.

Node:hacker humor, Next:Hackers (the movie), Previous:hacker ethic, Up:= H =

hacker humor

A distinctive style of shared intellectual humor found among hackers, having the following marked characteristics:

1. Fascination with form-vs.-content jokes, paradoxes, and humor having to do with confusion of metalevels (see **meta**). One way to make a hacker laugh: hold a red index card in front of him/her with "GREEN" written on it, or vice-versa (note, however, that this is funny only the first time).

2. Elaborate deadpan parodies of large intellectual constructs, such as specifications (see **write-only memory**), standards documents, language descriptions (see **INTERCAL**), and even entire scientific theories (see **quantum bogodynamics**, **computron**).

3. Jokes that involve screwily precise reasoning from bizarre, ludicrous, or just grossly counter-intuitive premises.

4. Fascination with puns and wordplay.

5. A fondness for apparently mindless humor with subversive currents of intelligence in it -- for example, old Warner Brothers and Rocky & Bullwinkle cartoons, the Marx brothers, the early B-52s, and Monty Python's Flying Circus. Humor that combines this trait with elements of high camp and slapstick is especially favored.

6. References to the symbol-object antinomies and associated ideas in Zen Buddhism and (less often) Taoism. See **has the X nature**, **Discordianism**, **zen**, **ha ha only serious**, **koan**, **AI koans**.

See also **filk**, **retrocomputing**, and the Portrait of J. Random Hacker in **Appendix B**. If you have an itchy feeling that all six of these traits are really aspects of one thing that is incredibly difficult to talk about exactly, you are (a) correct and (b) responding like a hacker. These traits are also recognizable (though in a less marked form) throughout **science-fiction fandom**.

Node:Hackers (the movie), Next:hacking run, Previous:hacker humor, Up:= H =

Hackers (the movie) n.

A notable bomb from 1995. Should have been titled "Crackers", because cracking is what the movie was about. It's understandable that they didn't however; titles redolent of snack food are probably a tough sell in Hollywood.

Node:hacking run, Next:Hacking X for Y, Previous:Hackers (the movie), Up:= H =

hacking run n.

[analogy with `bombing run' or `speed run'] A hack session extended long outside normal working times, especially one longer than 12 hours. May cause you to `change phase the hard way' (see **phase**).

Node:Hacking X for Y, Next:Hackintosh, Previous:hacking run, Up:= H =

Hacking X for Y n.

[ITS] Ritual phrasing of part of the information which ITS made publicly available about each user. This information (the INQUIR record) was a sort of form in which the user could fill out various fields. On display, two of these fields were always combined into a project description of the form "Hacking X for

Y" (e.g., "`Hacking perceptrons for Minsky`"). This form of description became traditional and has since been carried over to other systems with more general facilities for self-advertisement (such as Unix **plan file**s).

Node:Hackintosh, Next:hackish, Previous:Hacking X for Y, Up:= H =

Hackintosh n.

1. An Apple Lisa that has been hacked into emulating a Macintosh (also called a `Mac XL'). 2. A Macintosh assembled from parts theoretically belonging to different models in the line.

Node:hackish, Next:hackishness, Previous:Hackintosh, Up:= H =

hackish /hak'ish/ adj.

(also **hackishness** n.) 1. Said of something that is or involves a hack. 2. Of or pertaining to hackers or the hacker subculture. See also **true-hacker**.

Node:hackishness, Next:hackitude, Previous:hackish, Up:= H =

hackishness n.

The quality of being or involving a hack. This term is considered mildly silly. Syn. **hackitude**.

Node:hackitude, Next:hair, Previous:hackishness, Up:= H =

hackitude n.

Syn. **hackishness**; this word is considered sillier.

Node:hair, Next:hairball, Previous:hackitude, Up:= H =

hair n.

[back-formation from **hairy**] The complications that make something hairy. "Decoding **TECO** commands requires a certain amount of hair." Often seen in the phrase `infinite hair', which connotes extreme complexity. Also in `hairiferous' (tending to promote hair growth): "GNUMACS elisp encourages lusers to write complex editing modes." "Yeah, it's pretty hairiferous all right." (or just: "Hair squared!")

Node:hairball, Next:hairy, Previous:hair, Up:= H =

hairball n.

1. [Fidonet] A large batch of messages that a store-and-forward network is failing to forward when it should. Often used in the phrase "Fido coughed up a hairball today", meaning that the stuck messages

have just come unstuck, producing a flood of mail where there had previously been drought. 2. An unmanageably huge mass of source code. "JWZ thought the Mozilla effort bogged down because the code was a huge hairball." 3. Any large amount of garbage coming out suddenly. "Sendmail is coughing up a hairball, so expect some slowness accessing the Internet."

Node:hairy, Next:HAKMEM, Previous:hairball, Up:= H =

hairy adj.

1. Annoyingly complicated. "**DWIM** is incredibly hairy." 2. Incomprehensible. "**DWIM** is incredibly hairy." 3. Of people, high-powered, authoritative, rare, expert, and/or incomprehensible. Hard to explain except in context: "He knows this hairy lawyer who says there's nothing to worry about." See also **hirsute**.

A well-known result in topology called the Brouwer Fixed-Point Theorem states that any continuous transformation of a 2-sphere into itself has at least one fixed point. Mathematically literate hackers tend to associate the term `hairy' with the informal version of this theorem; "You can't comb a hairy ball smooth."

The adjective `long-haired' is well-attested to have been in slang use among scientists and engineers during the early 1950s; it was equivalent to modern `hairy' senses 1 and 2, and was very likely ancestral to the hackish use. In fact the noun `long-hair' was at the time used to describe a person satisfying sense 3. Both senses probably passed out of use when long hair was adopted as a signature trait by the 1960s counterculture, leaving hackish `hairy' as a sort of stunted mutant relic.

Node:HAKMEM, Next:hakspek, Previous:hairy, Up:= H =

HAKMEM /hak'mem/ n.

MIT AI Memo 239 (February 1972). A legendary collection of neat mathematical and programming hacks contributed by many people at MIT and elsewhere. (The title of the memo really is "HAKMEM", which is a 6-letterism for `hacks memo'.) Some of them are very useful techniques, powerful theorems, or interesting unsolved problems, but most fall into the category of mathematical and computer trivia. Here is a sampling of the entries (with authors), slightly paraphrased:

Item 41 (Gene Salamin): There are exactly 23,000 prime numbers less than 2^(18).

Item 46 (Rich Schroeppel): The most *probable* suit distribution in bridge hands is 4-4-3-2, as compared to 4-3-3-3, which is the most *evenly* distributed. This is because the world likes to have unequal numbers: a thermodynamic effect saying things will not be in the state of lowest energy, but in the state of lowest disordered energy.

Item 81 (Rich Schroeppel): Count the magic squares of order 5 (that is, all the 5-by-5 arrangements of the numbers from 1 to 25 such that all rows, columns, and diagonals add up to the same number). There are about 320 million, not counting those that differ only by rotation and reflection.

Item 154 (Bill Gosper): The myth that any given programming language is machine independent is easily exploded by computing the sum of powers of 2. If the result loops with period = 1 with sign +, you are on a sign-magnitude machine. If the result loops with period = 1 at -1, you are on a twos-complement machine. If the result loops with period greater than 1, including the beginning, you are on a ones-complement machine. If the result loops with period greater than 1, not including the beginning, your machine isn't binary -- the pattern should tell you the base. If you run out of memory, you are on a string or bignum system. If arithmetic overflow is a fatal error, some fascist pig with a read-only mind is trying to enforce machine independence. But the very ability to trap overflow is machine dependent. By this

strategy, consider the universe, or, more precisely, algebra: Let X = the sum of many powers of 2 = ...111111 (base 2). Now add X to itself: X + X = ...111110. Thus, 2X = X - 1, so X = -1. Therefore algebra is run on a machine (the universe) that is two's-complement.

Item 174 (Bill Gosper and Stuart Nelson): 21963283741 is the only number such that if you represent it on the **PDP-10** as both an integer and a floating-point number, the bit patterns of the two representations are identical.

Item 176 (Gosper): The "banana phenomenon" was encountered when processing a character string by taking the last 3 letters typed out, searching for a random occurrence of that sequence in the text, taking the letter following that occurrence, typing it out, and iterating. This ensures that every 4-letter string output occurs in the original. The program typed BANANANANANANANA.... We note an ambiguity in the phrase, "the Nth occurrence of." In one sense, there are five 00's in 0000000000; in another, there are nine. The editing program TECO finds five. Thus it finds only the first ANA in BANANA, and is thus obligated to type N next. By Murphy's Law, there is but one NAN, thus forcing A, and thus a loop. An option to find overlapped instances would be useful, although it would require backing up N - 1 characters before seeking the next N-character string.

Note: This last item refers to a **Dissociated Press** implementation. See also **banana problem**.

HAKMEM also contains some rather more complicated mathematical and technical items, but these examples show some of its fun flavor.

An HTML transcription of the entire document is available at http://www.inwap.com/pdp10/hbaker/hakmem/hakmem.html.

Node:hakspek, Next:Halloween Documents, Previous:HAKMEM, Up:= H =

hakspek /hak'speek/ n.

A shorthand method of spelling found on many British academic bulletin boards and **talker system**s. Syllables and whole words in a sentence are replaced by single ASCII characters the names of which are phonetically similar or equivalent, while multiple letters are usually dropped. Hence, `for' becomes `4'; `two', `too', and `to' become `2'; `ck' becomes `k'. "Before I see you tomorrow" becomes "b4 i c u 2moro". First appeared in London about 1986, and was probably caused by the slowness of available talker systems, which operated on archaic machines with outdated operating systems and no standard methods of communication. Has become rarer since. See also **talk mode**.

Node:Halloween Documents, Next:hammer, Previous:hakspek, Up:= H =

Halloween Documents n.

A pair of Microsoft internal strategy memoranda leaked to ESR in late 1998 that confirmed everybody's paranoia about the current **Evil Empire**. These documents praised the technical excellence of **Linux** and outlined a counterstrategy of attempting to lock in customers by "de-commoditizing" Internet protocols and services. They were extensively cited on the Internet and in the press and proved so embarrassing that Microsoft PR barely said a word in public for six months afterwards.

Node:hammer, Next:hamster, Previous:Halloween Documents, Up:= H =

hammer vt.

Commonwealth hackish syn. for **bang on**.

Node:hamster, Next:HAND, Previous:hammer, Up:= H =

hamster n.

1. [Fairchild] A particularly slick little piece of code that does one thing well; a small, self-contained hack. The image is of a hamster **happily** spinning its exercise wheel. 2. A tailless mouse; that is, one with an infrared link to a receiver on the machine, as opposed to the conventional cable. 3. [UK] Any item of hardware made by Amstrad, a company famous for its cheap plastic PC-almost-compatibles.

Node:HAND, Next:hand cruft, Previous:hamster, Up:= H =

HAND //

[Usenet: very common] Abbreviation: Have A Nice Day. Typically used to close a **Usenet** posting, but also used to informally close emails; often preceded by **HTH**.

Node:hand cruft, Next:hand-hacking, Previous:HAND, Up:= H =

hand cruft vt.

[pun on `hand craft'] See **cruft**, sense 3.

Node:hand-hacking, Next:hand-roll, Previous:hand cruft, Up:= H =

hand-hacking n.

1. [rare] The practice of translating **hot spot**s from an **HLL** into hand-tuned assembler, as opposed to trying to coerce the compiler into generating better code. Both the term and the practice are becoming uncommon. See **tune**, **bum**, **by hand**; syn. with v. **cruft**. 2. [common] More generally, manual construction or patching of data sets that would normally be generated by a translation utility and interpreted by another program, and aren't really designed to be read or modified by humans.

Node:hand-roll, Next:handle, Previous:hand-hacking, Up:= H =

hand-roll v.

[from obs. mainstream slang `hand-rolled' in opposition to `ready-made', referring to cigarettes] To perform a normally automated software installation or configuration process **by hand**; implies that the normal process failed due to bugs in the configurator or was defeated by something exceptional in the local environment. "The worst thing about being a gateway between four different nets is having to hand-roll a new sendmail configuration every time any of them upgrades."

Node:handle, Next:handshaking, Previous:hand-roll, Up:= H =

handle n.

1. [from CB slang] An electronic pseudonym; a `nom de guerre' intended to conceal the user's true identity. Network and BBS handles function as the same sort of simultaneous concealment and display one finds on Citizen's Band radio, from which the term was adopted. Use of grandiose handles is characteristic of **warez d00dz**, **cracker**s, **weenie**s, **spod**s, and other lower forms of network life; true hackers travel on their own reputations rather than invented legendry. Compare **nick**, **screen name**. 2. A **magic cookie**, often in the form of a numeric index into some array somewhere, through which you can manipulate an object like a file or window. The form `file handle' is especially common. 3. [Mac] A pointer to a pointer to dynamically-allocated memory; the extra level of indirection allows on-the-fly memory compaction (to cut down on fragmentation) or aging out of unused resources, with minimal impact on the (possibly multiple) parts of the larger program containing references to the allocated memory. Compare **snap** (to snap a handle would defeat its purpose); see also **aliasing bug**, **dangling pointer**.

Node:handshaking, Next:handwave, Previous:handle, Up:= H =

handshaking n.

[very common] Hardware or software activity designed to start or keep two machines or programs in synchronization as they **do protocol**. Often applied to human activity; thus, a hacker might watch two people in conversation nodding their heads to indicate that they have heard each others' points and say "Oh, they're handshaking!". See also **protocol**.

Node:handwave, Next:hang, Previous:handshaking, Up:= H =

handwave

[poss. from gestures characteristic of stage magicians] 1. v. To gloss over a complex point; to distract a listener; to support a (possibly actually valid) point with blatantly faulty logic. 2. n. The act of handwaving. "Boy, what a handwave!"

If someone starts a sentence with "Clearly..." or "Obviously..." or "It is self-evident that...", it is a good bet he is about to handwave (alternatively, use of these constructions in a sarcastic tone before a paraphrase of someone else's argument suggests that it is a handwave). The theory behind this term is that if you wave your hands at the right moment, the listener may be sufficiently distracted to not notice that what you have said is **bogus**. Failing that, if a listener does object, you might try to dismiss the objection with a wave of your hand.

The use of this word is often accompanied by gestures: both hands up, palms forward, swinging the hands in a vertical plane pivoting at the elbows and/or shoulders (depending on the magnitude of the handwave); alternatively, holding the forearms in one position while rotating the hands at the wrist to make them flutter. In context, the gestures alone can suffice as a remark; if a speaker makes an outrageously unsupported assumption, you might simply wave your hands in this way, as an accusation, far more eloquent than words could express, that his logic is faulty.

Node:hang, Next:Hanlon's Razor, Previous:handwave, Up:= H =

hang v.

1. [very common] To wait for an event that will never occur. "The system is hanging because it can't read

from the crashed drive". See **wedged**, **hung**. 2. To wait for some event to occur; to hang around until something happens. "The program displays a menu and then hangs until you type a character." Compare **block**. 3. To attach a peripheral device, esp. in the construction `hang off': "We're going to hang another tape drive off the file server." Implies a device attached with cables, rather than something that is strictly inside the machine's chassis.

Node:Hanlon's Razor, Next:happily, Previous:hang, Up:= H =

Hanlon's Razor prov.

A corollary of **Finagle's Law**, similar to Occam's Razor, that reads "Never attribute to malice that which can be adequately explained by stupidity." The derivation of the Hanlon eponym is not definitely known, but a very similar remark ("You have attributed conditions to villainy that simply result from stupidity.") appears in "Logic of Empire", a classic 1941 SF story by Robert A. Heinlein, who calls it the `devil theory' of sociology. Heinlein's popularity in the hacker culture makes plausible the supposition that `Hanlon' is derived from `Heinlein' by phonetic corruption. A similar epigram has been attributed to William James, but Heinlein more probably got the idea from Alfred Korzybski and other practitioners of General Semantics. Quoted here because it seems to be a particular favorite of hackers, often showing up in **sig block**s, **fortune cookie** files and the login banners of BBS systems and commercial networks. This probably reflects the hacker's daily experience of environments created by well-intentioned but short-sighted people. Compare **Sturgeon's Law**, **Ninety-Ninety Rule**.

Node:happily, Next:haque, Previous:Hanlon's Razor, Up:= H =

happily adv.

Of software, used to emphasize that a program is unaware of some important fact about its environment, either because it has been fooled into believing a lie, or because it doesn't care. The sense of `happy' here is not that of elation, but rather that of blissful ignorance. "The program continues to run, happily unaware that its output is going to /dev/null." Also used to suggest that a program or device would really rather be doing something destructive, and is being given an opportunity to do so. "If you enter an O here instead of a zero, the program will happily erase all your data." Nevertheless, use of this term implies a basically benign attitude towards the program: It didn't mean any harm, it was just eager to do its job. We'd like to be angry at it but we shouldn't, we should try to understand it instead. The adjective "cheerfully" is often used in exactly the same way.

Node:haque, Next:hard boot, Previous:happily, Up:= H =

haque /hak/ n.

[Usenet] Variant spelling of **hack**, used only for the noun form and connoting an **elegant** hack. that is a **hack** in sense 2.

Node:hard boot, Next:hardcoded, Previous:haque, Up:= H =

hard boot n.

See **boot**.

Node:hardcoded, Next:hardwarily, Previous:hard boot, Up:= H =

hardcoded adj.

1. [common] Said of data inserted directly into a program, where it cannot be easily modified, as opposed to data in some **profile**, resource (see **de-rezz** sense 2), or environment variable that a **user** or hacker can easily modify. 2. In C, this is esp. applied to use of a literal instead of a `#define` macro (see **magic number**).

Node:hardwarily, Next:hardwired, Previous:hardcoded, Up:= H =

hardwarily /hard-weir'*-lee/ adv.

In a way pertaining to hardware. "The system is hardwarily unreliable." The adjective `hardwary' is *not* traditionally used, though it has recently been reported from the U.K. See **softwarily**.

Node:hardwired, Next:has the X nature, Previous:hardwarily, Up:= H =

hardwired adj.

1. In software, syn. for **hardcoded**. 2. By extension, anything that is not modifiable, especially in the sense of customizable to one's particular needs or tastes.

Node:has the X nature, Next:hash bucket, Previous:hardwired, Up:= H =

has the X nature

[seems to derive from Zen Buddhist koans of the form "Does an X have the Buddha-nature?"] adj. Common hacker construction for `is an X', used for humorous emphasis. "Anyone who can't even use a program with on-screen help embedded in it truly has the **loser** nature!" See also **the X that can be Y is not the true X**. See also **mu**.

Node:hash bucket, Next:hash collision, Previous:has the X nature, Up:= H =

hash bucket n.

A notional receptacle, a set of which might be used to apportion data items for sorting or lookup purposes. When you look up a name in the phone book (for example), you typically hash it by extracting its first letter; the hash buckets are the alphabetically ordered letter sections. This term is used as techspeak with respect to code that uses actual hash functions; in jargon, it is used for human associative memory as well. Thus, two things `in the same hash bucket' are more difficult to discriminate, and may be confused. "If you hash English words only by length, you get too many common grammar words in the first couple of hash buckets." Compare **hash collision**.

Node:hash collision, Next:hat, Previous:hash bucket, Up:= H =

hash collision n.

[from the techspeak] (var. `hash clash') When used of people, signifies a confusion in associative memory or imagination, especially a persistent one (see **thinko**). True story: One of us [ESR] was once on the phone with a friend about to move out to Berkeley. When asked what he expected Berkeley to be like, the friend replied: "Well, I have this mental picture of naked women throwing Molotov cocktails, but I think that's just a collision in my hash tables." Compare **hash bucket**.

Node:hat, Next:HCF, Previous:hash collision, Up:= H =

hat n.

Common (spoken) name for the circumflex (`^', ASCII 1011110) character. See **ASCII** for other synonyms.

Node:HCF, Next:heads down, Previous:hat, Up:= H =

HCF /H-C-F/ n.

Mnemonic for `Halt and Catch Fire', any of several undocumented and semi-mythical machine instructions with destructive side-effects, supposedly included for test purposes on several well-known architectures going as far back as the IBM 360. The MC6800 microprocessor was the first for which an HCF opcode became widely known. This instruction caused the processor to **toggle** a subset of the bus lines as rapidly as it could; in some configurations this could actually cause lines to burn up. Compare **killer poke**.

Node:heads down, Next:heartbeat, Previous:HCF, Up:= H =

heads down [Sun] adj.

Concentrating, usually so heavily and for so long that everything outside the focus area is missed. See also **hack mode** and **larval stage**, although this mode is hardly confined to fledgling hackers.

Node:heartbeat, Next:heatseeker, Previous:heads down, Up:= H =

heartbeat n.

1. The signal emitted by a Level 2 Ethernet transceiver at the end of every packet to show that the collision-detection circuit is still connected. 2. A periodic synchronization signal used by software or hardware, such as a bus clock or a periodic interrupt. 3. The `natural' oscillation frequency of a computer's clock crystal, before frequency division down to the machine's clock rate. 4. A signal emitted at regular intervals by software to demonstrate that it is still alive. Sometimes hardware is designed to reboot the machine if it stops hearing a heartbeat. See also **breath-of-life packet**.

Node:heatseeker, Next:heavy metal, Previous:heartbeat, Up:= H =

heatseeker n.

[IBM] A customer who can be relied upon to buy, without fail, the latest version of an existing product (not quite the same as a member of the **lunatic fringe**). A 1993 example of a heatseeker was someone

who, owning a 286 PC and Windows 3.0, went out and bought Windows 3.1 (which offers no worthwhile benefits unless you have a 386). If all customers were heatseekers, vast amounts of money could be made by just fixing some of the bugs in each release (n) and selling it to them as release (n+1). Microsoft in fact eems to have matered this technique.

Node:heavy metal, Next:heavy wizardry, Previous:heatseeker, Up:= H =

heavy metal n.

[Cambridge] Syn. **big iron**.

Node:heavy wizardry, Next:heavyweight, Previous:heavy metal, Up:= H =

heavy wizardry n.

Code or designs that trade on a particularly intimate knowledge or experience of a particular operating system or language or complex application interface. Distinguished from **deep magic**, which trades more on arcane *theoretical* knowledge. Writing device drivers is heavy wizardry; so is interfacing to **X** (sense 2) without a toolkit. Esp. found in source-code comments of the form "Heavy wizardry begins here". Compare **voodoo programming**.

Node:heavyweight, Next:heisenbug, Previous:heavy wizardry, Up:= H =

heavyweight adj.

[common] High-overhead; **baroque**; code-intensive; featureful, but costly. Esp. used of communication protocols, language designs, and any sort of implementation in which maximum generality and/or ease of implementation has been pushed at the expense of mundane considerations such as speed, memory utilization, and startup time. **EMACS** is a heavyweight editor; **X** is an *extremely* heavyweight window system. This term isn't pejorative, but one hacker's heavyweight is another's **elephantine** and a third's **monstrosity**. Oppose `lightweight'. Usage: now borders on techspeak, especially in the compound `heavyweight process'.

Node:heisenbug, Next:Helen Keller mode, Previous:heavyweight, Up:= H =

heisenbug /hi:'zen-buhg/ n.

[from Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle in quantum physics] A bug that disappears or alters its behavior when one attempts to probe or isolate it. (This usage is not even particularly fanciful; the use of a debugger sometimes alters a program's operating environment significantly enough that buggy code, such as that which relies on the values of uninitialized memory, behaves quite differently.) Antonym of **Bohr bug**; see also **mandelbug**, **schroedinbug**. In C, nine out of ten heisenbugs result from uninitialized auto variables, **fandango on core** phenomena (esp. lossage related to corruption of the malloc **arena**) or errors that **smash the stack**.

Node:Helen Keller mode, Next:hello sailor!, Previous:heisenbug, Up:= H =

Helen Keller mode n.

1. State of a hardware or software system that is deaf, dumb, and blind, i.e., accepting no input and generating no output, usually due to an infinite loop or some other excursion into **deep space**. (Unfair to the real Helen Keller, whose success at learning speech was triumphant.) See also **go flatline**, **catatonic**. 2. On IBM PCs under DOS, refers to a specific failure mode in which a screen saver has kicked in over an **ill-behaved** application which bypasses the very interrupts the screen saver watches for activity. Your choices are to try to get from the program's current state through a successful save-and-exit without being able to see what you're doing, or to re-boot the machine. This isn't (strictly speaking) a crash.

Node:hello sailor!, Next:hello wall!, Previous:Helen Keller mode, Up:= H =

hello sailor! interj.

Occasional West Coast equivalent of **hello world**; seems to have originated at SAIL, later associated with the game **Zork** (which also included "hello, aviator" and "hello, implementor"). Originally from the traditional hooker's greeting to a swabbie fresh off the boat, of course. The standard response is "Nothing happens here."; of all the Zork/Dungeon games, only in Infocom's Zork 3 is "Hello, Sailor" actually useful (excluding the unique situation where _knowing_ this fact is important in Dungeon...).

Node:hello wall!, Next:hello world, Previous:hello sailor!, Up:= H =

hello, wall! excl.

See **wall**.

Node:hello world, Next:hex, Previous:hello wall!, Up:= H =

hello world interj.

1. The canonical minimal test message in the C/Unix universe. 2. Any of the minimal programs that emit this message. Traditionally, the first program a C coder is supposed to write in a new environment is one that just prints "hello, world" to standard output (and indeed it is the first example program in **K&R**). Environments that generate an unreasonably large executable for this trivial test or which require a **hairy** compiler-linker invocation to generate it are considered to **lose** (see **X**). 3. Greeting uttered by a hacker making an entrance or requesting information from anyone present. "Hello, world! Is the LAN back up yet?"

Node:hex, Next:hexadecimal, Previous:hello world, Up:= H =

hex n.

1. Short for **hexadecimal**, base 16. 2. A 6-pack of anything (compare **quad**, sense 2). Neither usage has anything to do with **magic** or **black art**, though the pun is appreciated and occasionally used by hackers. True story: As a joke, some hackers once offered some surplus ICs for sale to be worn as protective amulets against hostile magic. The chips were, of course, hex inverters.

Node:hexadecimal, Next:hexit, Previous:hex, Up:= H =

hexadecimal n.

Base 16. Coined in the early 1960s to replace earlier `sexadecimal', which was too racy and amusing for stuffy IBM, and later adopted by the rest of the industry.

Actually, neither term is etymologically pure. If we take `binary' to be paradigmatic, the most etymologically correct term for base 10, for example, is `denary', which comes from `deni' (ten at a time, ten each), a Latin `distributive' number; the corresponding term for base-16 would be something like `sendenary'. `Decimal' is from an ordinal number; the corresponding prefix for 6 would imply something like `sextidecimal'. The `sexa-' prefix is Latin but incorrect in this context, and `hexa-' is Greek. The word `octal' is similarly incorrect; a correct form would be `octaval' (to go with decimal), or `octonary' (to go with binary). If anyone ever implements a base-3 computer, computer scientists will be faced with the unprecedented dilemma of a choice between two *correct* forms; both `ternary' and `trinary' have a claim to this throne.

Node:hexit, Next:HHOK, Previous:hexadecimal, Up:= H =

hexit /hek'sit/ n.

A hexadecimal digit (0-9, and A-F or a-f). Used by people who claim that there are only *ten* digits, dammit; sixteen-fingered human beings are rather rare, despite what some keyboard designs might seem to imply (see **space-cadet keyboard**).

Node:HHOK, Next:HHOS, Previous:hexit, Up:= H =

HHOK

See **ha ha only serious**.

Node:HHOS, Next:hidden flag, Previous:HHOK, Up:= H =

HHOS

See **ha ha only serious**.

Node:hidden flag, Next:high bit, Previous:HHOS, Up:= H =

hidden flag n.

[scientific computation] An extra option added to a routine without changing the calling sequence. For example, instead of adding an explicit input variable to instruct a routine to give extra diagnostic output, the programmer might just add a test for some otherwise meaningless feature of the existing inputs, such as a negative mass. The use of hidden flags can make a program very hard to debug and understand, but is all too common wherever programs are hacked on in a hurry.

Node:high bit, Next:high moby, Previous:hidden flag, Up:= H =

high bit n.

[from `high-order bit'] 1. The most significant bit in a byte. 2. [common] By extension, the most

significant part of something other than a data byte: "Spare me the whole **saga**, just give me the high bit." See also **meta bit**, **hobbit**, **dread high-bit disease**, and compare the mainstream slang `bottom line'.

Node:high moby, Next:highly, Previous:high bit, Up:= H =

high moby /hi:' mohb'ee/ n.

The high half of a 512K **PDP-10**'s physical address space; the other half was of course the low moby. This usage has been generalized in a way that has outlasted the **PDP-10**; for example, at the 1990 Washington D.C. Area Science Fiction Conclave (Disclave), when a miscommunication resulted in two separate wakes being held in commemoration of the shutdown of MIT's last **ITS** machines, the one on the upper floor was dubbed the `high moby' and the other the `low moby'. All parties involved **grok**ked this instantly. See **moby**.

Node:highly, Next:hing, Previous:high moby, Up:= H =

highly adv.

[scientific computation] The preferred modifier for overstating an understatement. As in: `highly nonoptimal', the worst possible way to do something; `highly nontrivial', either impossible or requiring a major research project; `highly nonlinear', completely erratic and unpredictable; `highly nontechnical', drivel written for **luser**s, oversimplified to the point of being misleading or incorrect (compare **drool-proof paper**). In other computing cultures, postfixing of **in the extreme** might be preferred.

Node:hing, Next:hired gun, Previous:highly, Up:= H =

hing // n.

[IRC] Fortuitous typo for `hint', now in wide intentional use among players of **initgame**. Compare **newsfroup**, **filk**.

Node:hired gun, Next:hirsute, Previous:hing, Up:= H =

hired gun n.

A contract programmer, as opposed to a full-time staff member. All the connotations of this term suggested by innumerable spaghetti Westerns are intentional.

Node:hirsute, Next:HLL, Previous:hired gun, Up:= H =

hirsute adj.

Occasionally used humorously as a synonym for **hairy**.

Node:HLL, Next:hoarding, Previous:hirsute, Up:= H =

HLL /H-L-L/ n.

[High-Level Language (as opposed to assembler)] Found primarily in email and news rather than speech. Rarely, the variants `VHLL' and `MLL' are found. VHLL stands for `Very-High-Level Language' and is used to describe a **bondage-and-discipline language** that the speaker happens to like; Prolog and Backus's FP are often called VHLLs. `MLL' stands for `Medium-Level Language' and is sometimes used half-jokingly to describe **C**, alluding to its `structured-assembler' image. See also **languages of choice**.

Node:hoarding, Next:hobbit, Previous:HLL, Up:= H =

hoarding n.

See **software hoarding**.

Node:hobbit, Next:hog, Previous:hoarding, Up:= H =

hobbit n.

1. [rare] The High Order BIT of a byte; same as the **meta bit** or **high bit**. 2. The non-ITS name of vad@ai.mit.edu (*Hobbit*), master of lasers.

Node:hog, Next:hole, Previous:hobbit, Up:= H =

hog n.,vt.

1. Favored term to describe programs or hardware that seem to eat far more than their share of a system's resources, esp. those which noticeably degrade interactive response. *Not* used of programs that are simply extremely large or complex or that are merely painfully slow themselves. More often than not encountered in qualified forms, e.g., `memory hog', `core hog', `hog the processor', `hog the disk'. "A controller that never gives up the I/O bus gets killed after the bus-hog timer expires." 2. Also said of *people* who use more than their fair share of resources (particularly disk, where it seems that 10% of the people use 90% of the disk, no matter how big the disk is or how many people use it). Of course, once disk hogs fill up one filesystem, they typically find some other new one to infect, claiming to the sysadmin that they have an important new project to complete.

Node:hole, Next:hollised, Previous:hog, Up:= H =

hole n.

A region in an otherwise **flat** entity which is not actually present. For example, some Unix filesystems can store large files with holes so that unused regions of the file are never actually stored on disk. (In techspeak, these are referred to as `sparse' files.) As another example, the region of memory in IBM PCs reserved for memory-mapped I/O devices which may not actually be present is called `the I/O hole', since memory-management systems must skip over this area when filling user requests for memory.

Node:hollised, Next:holy wars, Previous:hole, Up:= H =

hollised /hol'ist/ adj.

[Usenet: *sci.space*] To be hollised is to have been ordered by one's employer not to post any even remotely job-related material to Usenet (or, by extension, to other Internet media). The original and most notorious case of this involved one Ken Hollis, a Lockheed employee and space-program enthusiast who posted publicly available material on access to Space Shuttle launches to *sci.space*. He was gagged under threat of being fired in 1994 at the behest of NASA public-relations officers. The result was, of course, a huge publicity black eye for NASA. Nevertheless several other NASA contractor employees were subsequently hollised for similar activities. Use of this term carries the strong connotation that the persons doing the gagging are bureaucratic idiots blinded to their own best interests by territorial reflexes.

Node:holy wars, Next:home box, Previous:hollised, Up:= H =

holy wars n.

[from **Usenet**, but may predate it; common] n. **flame war**s over **religious issues**. The paper by Danny Cohen that popularized the terms **big-endian** and **little-endian** in connection with the LSB-first/MSB-first controversy was entitled "On Holy Wars and a Plea for Peace". Other perennial Holy Wars have included **EMACS** vs. **vi**, my personal computer vs. everyone else's personal computer, **ITS** vs. **Unix**, **Unix** vs. **VMS**, **BSD** Unix vs. **USG Unix**, **C** vs. **Pascal**, **C** vs. FORTRAN, etc., ad nauseam. The characteristic that distinguishes holy wars from normal technical disputes is that in a holy war most of the participants spend their time trying to pass off personal value choices and cultural attachments as objective technical evaluations. See also **theology**.

Node:home box, Next:home machine, Previous:holy wars, Up:= H =

home box n.

A hacker's personal machine, especially one he or she owns. "Yeah? Well, *my* home box runs a full 4.4 BSD, so there!"

Node:home machine, Next:home page, Previous:home box, Up:= H =

home machine n.

1. Syn. **home box**. 2. The machine that receives your email. These senses might be distinct, for example, for a hacker who owns one computer at home, but reads email at work.

Node:home page, Next:hook, Previous:home machine, Up:= H =

home page n.

1. One's personal billboard on the World Wide Web. The term `home page' is perhaps a bit misleading because home directories and physical homes in **RL** are private, but home pages are designed to be very public. 2. By extension, a WWW repository for information and links related to a project or organization. Compare **home box**.

Node:hook, Next:hop, Previous:home page, Up:= H =

hook n.

A software or hardware feature included in order to simplify later additions or changes by a user. For example, a simple program that prints numbers might always print them in base 10, but a more flexible version would let a variable determine what base to use; setting the variable to 5 would make the program print numbers in base 5. The variable is a simple hook. An even more flexible program might examine the variable and treat a value of 16 or less as the base to use, but treat any other number as the address of a user-supplied routine for printing a number. This is a **hairy** but powerful hook; one can then write a routine to print numbers as Roman numerals, say, or as Hebrew characters, and plug it into the program through the hook. Often the difference between a good program and a superb one is that the latter has useful hooks in judiciously chosen places. Both may do the original job about equally well, but the one with the hooks is much more flexible for future expansion of capabilities (**EMACS**, for example, is *all* hooks). The term `user exit' is synonymous but much more formal and less hackish.

Node:hop, Next:hose, Previous:hook, Up:= H =

hop

1. n. [common] One file transmission in a series required to get a file from point A to point B on a store-and-forward network. On such networks (including **UUCPNET** and **FidoNet**), an important inter-machine metric is the number of hops in the shortest path between them, which can be more significant than their geographical separation. See **bang path**. 2. v. [rare] To log in to a remote machine, esp. via rlogin or telnet. "I'll hop over to foovax to FTP that."

Node:hose, Next:hosed, Previous:hop, Up:= H =

hose

1. vt. [common] To make non-functional or greatly degraded in performance. "That big ray-tracing program really hoses the system." See **hosed**. 2. n. A narrow channel through which data flows under pressure. Generally denotes data paths that represent performance bottlenecks. 3. n. Cabling, especially thick Ethernet cable. This is sometimes called `bit hose' or `hosery' (play on `hosiery') or `etherhose'. See also **washing machine**.

Node:hosed, Next:hot chat, Previous:hose, Up:= H =

hosed adj.

Same as **down**. Used primarily by Unix hackers. Humorous: also implies a condition thought to be relatively easy to reverse. Probably derived from the Canadian slang `hoser' popularized by the Bob and Doug Mackenzie skits on SCTV, but this usage predated SCTV by years in hackerdom (it was certainly already live at CMU in the 1970s). See **hose**. It is also widely used of people in the mainstream sense of `in an extremely unfortunate situation'.

Once upon a time, a Cray that had been experiencing periodic difficulties crashed, and it was announced to have been hosed. It was discovered that the crash was due to the disconnection of some coolant hoses. The problem was corrected, and users were then assured that everything was OK because the system had been rehosed. See also **dehose**.

Node:hot chat, Next:hot spot, Previous:hosed, Up:= H =

hot chat n.

Sexually explicit one-on-one chat. See **teledildonics**.

Node:hot spot, Next:hotlink, Previous:hot chat, Up:= H =

hot spot n.

1. [primarily used by C/Unix programmers, but spreading] It is received wisdom that in most programs, less than 10% of the code eats 90% of the execution time; if one were to graph instruction visits versus code addresses, one would typically see a few huge spikes amidst a lot of low-level noise. Such spikes are called `hot spots' and are good candidates for heavy optimization or **hand-hacking**. The term is especially used of tight loops and recursions in the code's central algorithm, as opposed to (say) initial set-up costs or large but infrequent I/O operations. See **tune**, **bum**, **hand-hacking**. 2. The active location of a cursor on a bit-map display. "Put the mouse's hot spot on the `ON' widget and click the left button." 3. A screen region that is sensitive to mouse gestures, which trigger some action. World Wide Web pages now provide the **canonical** examples; WWW browsers present hypertext links as hot spots which, when clicked on, point the browser at another document (these are specifically called **hotlink**s). 4. In a massively parallel computer with shared memory, the one location that all 10,000 processors are trying to read or write at once (perhaps because they are all doing a **busy-wait** on the same lock). 5. More generally, any place in a hardware design that turns into a performance bottleneck due to resource contention.

Node:hotlink, Next:house wizard, Previous:hot spot, Up:= H =

hotlink /hot'link/ n.

A **hot spot** on a World Wide Web page; an area, which, when clicked or selected, chases a URL. Also spelled `hot link'. Use of this term focuses on the link's role as an immediate part of your display, as opposed to the timeless sense of logical connection suggested by **web pointer**. Your screen shows hotlinks but your document has web pointers, not (in normal usage) the other way around.

Node:house wizard, Next:HP-SUX, Previous:hotlink, Up:= H =

house wizard n.

[prob. from ad-agency tradetalk, `house freak'] A hacker occupying a technical-specialist, R&D, or systems position at a commercial shop. A really effective house wizard can have influence out of all proportion to his/her ostensible rank and still not have to wear a suit. Used esp. of Unix wizards. The term `house guru' is equivalent.

Node:HP-SUX, Next:HTH, Previous:house wizard, Up:= H =

HP-SUX /H-P suhks/ n.

Unflattering hackerism for HP-UX, Hewlett-Packard's Unix port, which features some truly unique bogosities in the filesystem internals and elsewhere (these occasionally create portability problems). HP-UX is often referred to as `hockey-pux' inside HP, and one respondent claims that the proper pronunciation is /H-P ukkkhhhh/ as though one were about to spit. Another such alternate spelling and pronunciation is "H-PUX" /H-puhks/. Hackers at HP/Apollo (the former Apollo Computers which was swallowed by HP in 1989) have been heard to complain that Mr. Packard should have pushed to have his name first, if for no other reason than the greater eloquence of the resulting acronym. Compare **AIDX**,

buglix. See also **Nominal Semidestructor**, **Telerat**, **ScumOS**, **sun-stools**, **Slowlaris**.

Node:HTH, Next:huff, Previous:HP-SUX, Up:= H =

HTH //

[Usenet: very common] Abbreviation: Hope This Helps (e.g. following a response to a technical question). Often used just before **HAND**. See also **YHBT**.

Node:huff, Next:humma, Previous:HTH, Up:= H =

huff v.

To compress data using a Huffman code. Various programs that use such methods have been called `HUFF' or some variant thereof. Oppose **puff**. Compare **crunch**, **compress**.

Node:humma, Next:hung, Previous:huff, Up:= H =

humma // excl.

A filler word used on various `chat' and `talk' programs when you had nothing to say but felt that it was important to say something. The word apparently originated (at least with this definition) on the MECC Timeshare System (MTS, a now-defunct educational time-sharing system running in Minnesota during the 1970s and the early 1980s) but was later sighted on early Unix systems. Compare the U.K's **wibble**.

Node:hung, Next:hungry puppy, Previous:humma, Up:= H =

hung adj.

[from `hung up'; common] Equivalent to **wedged**, but more common at Unix/C sites. Not generally used of people. Syn. with **locked up**, **wedged**; compare **hosed**. See also **hang**. A hung state is distinguished from **crash**ed or **down**, where the program or system is also unusable but because it is not running rather than because it is waiting for something. However, the recovery from both situations is often the same. It is also distinguished from the similar but more drastic state **wedged** - hung software can be woken up with easy things like interrupt keys, but wedged will need a kill -9 or even reboot.

Node:hungry puppy, Next:hungus, Previous:hung, Up:= H =

hungry puppy n.

Syn. **slopsucker**.

Node:hungus, Next:hyperspace, Previous:hungry puppy, Up:= H =

hungus /huhng'g*s/ adj.

[perhaps related to slang `humongous'] Large, unwieldy, usually unmanageable. "TCP is a hungus piece of code." "This is a hungus set of modifications." The **Infocom** text adventure game "Beyond Zork" included two monsters called hunguses.

Node:hyperspace, Next:hysterical reasons, Previous:hungus, Up:= H =

hyperspace /hi:'per-spays/ n.

A memory location that is *far* away from where the program counter should be pointing, especially a place that is inaccessible because it is not even mapped in by the virtual-memory system. "Another core dump -- looks like the program jumped off to hyperspace somehow." (Compare **jump off into never-never land**.) This usage is from the SF notion of a spaceship jumping `into hyperspace', that is, taking a shortcut through higher-dimensional space -- in other words, bypassing this universe. The variant `east hyperspace' is recorded among CMU and Bliss hackers.

Node:hysterical reasons, Next:I didn't change anything!, Previous:hyperspace, Up:= H =

hysterical reasons n.

(also `hysterical raisins') A variant on the stock phrase "for historical reasons", indicating specifically that something must be done in some stupid way for backwards compatibility, and moreover that the feature it must be compatible with was the result of a bad design in the first place. "All IBM PC video adapters have to support MDA text mode for hysterical reasons." Compare **bug-for-bug compatible**.

Node:= I =, Next:= J =, Previous:= H =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= I =

- I didn't change anything!:
- I see no X here.:
- IANAL:
- IBM:
- IBM discount:
- ICBM address:
- ice:
- ID10T error:
- idempotent:
- IDP:
- If you want X you know where to find it.:
- ifdef out:
- IIRC:
- ill-behaved:
- IMHO:
- Imminent Death Of The Net Predicted!:
- in the extreme:
- inc:
- incantation:
- include:

- include war:
- indent style:
- index of X:
- infant mortality:
- infinite:
- infinite loop:
- Infinite-Monkey Theorem:
- infinity:
- inflate:
- Infocom:
- initgame:
- insanely great:
- INTERCAL:
- interesting:
- Internet:
- Internet address:
- Internet Death Penalty:
- Internet Exploder:
- Internet Exploiter:
- interrupt:
- interrupt list:
- interrupts locked out:
- intro:
- IRC:
- iron:
- Iron Age:
- iron box:
- ironmonger:
- ISO standard cup of tea:
- ISP:
- ITS:
- IWBNI:
- IYFEG:

Node:I didn't change anything!, Next:I see no X here., Previous:hysterical reasons, Up:= I =

I didn't change anything! interj.

An aggrieved cry often heard as bugs manifest during a regression test. The **canonical** reply to this assertion is "Then it works just the same as it did before, doesn't it?" See also **one-line fix**. This is also heard from applications programmers trying to blame an obvious applications problem on an unrelated systems software change, for example a divide-by-0 fault after terminals were added to a network. Usually, their statement is found to be false. Upon close questioning, they will admit some major restructuring of the program that shouldn't have broken anything, in their opinion, but which actually **hosed** the code completely.

Node:I see no X here., Next:IANAL, Previous:I didn't change anything!, Up:= I =

I see no X here.

Hackers (and the interactive computer games they write) traditionally favor this slightly marked usage over other possible equivalents such as "There's no X here!" or "X is missing." or "Where's the X?". This goes back to the original PDP-10 **ADVENT**, which would respond in this wise if you asked it to do something involving an object not present at your location in the game.

Node:IANAL, Next:IBM, Previous:I see no X here., Up:= I =

IANAL //

[Usenet] Abbreviation, "I Am Not A Lawyer". Usually precedes legal advice.

Node:IBM, Next:IBM discount, Previous:IANAL, Up:= I =

IBM /I-B-M/

Inferior But Marketable; It's Better Manually; Insidious Black Magic; It's Been Malfunctioning; Incontinent Bowel Movement; and a near-**infinite** number of even less complimentary expansions, including `International Business Machines'. See **TLA**. These abbreviations illustrate the considerable antipathy most hackers long felt toward the `industry leader' (see **fear and loathing**).

What galled hackers about most IBM machines above the PC level wasn't so much that they were underpowered and overpriced (though that does count against them), but that the designs are incredibly archaic, **crufty**, and **elephantine** … and you can't *fix* them -- source code is locked up tight, and programming tools are expensive, hard to find, and bletcherous to use once you've found them. For many years, before Microsoft, IBM was the company hackers loved to hate.

But everything changes. In the 1980s IBM had its own troubles with Microsoft. In the late 1990s IBM re-invented itself as a services company, began to release open-source software through its AlphaWorks group, and began shipping **Linux** systems and building ties to the Linux community. To the astonishment of all parties, IBM emerged as a friend of the hacker community

This lexicon includes a number of entries attributed to `IBM'; these derive from some rampantly unofficial jargon lists circulated within IBM's own beleaguered hacker underground.

Node:IBM discount, Next:ICBM address, Previous:IBM, Up:= I =

IBM discount n.

A price increase. Outside IBM, this derives from the common perception that IBM products are generally overpriced (see **clone**); inside, it is said to spring from a belief that large numbers of IBM employees living in an area cause prices to rise.

Node:ICBM address, Next:ice, Previous:IBM discount, Up:= I =

ICBM address n.

(Also `missile address') The form used to register a site with the Usenet mapping project, back before the day of pervasive Internet, included a blank for longitude and latitude, preferably to seconds-of-arc accuracy. This was actually used for generating geographically-correct maps of Usenet links on a plotter; however, it became traditional to refer to this as one's `ICBM address' or `missile address', and some

people include it in their **sig block** with that name. (A real missile address would include target elevation.)

Node:ice, Next:ID10T error, Previous:ICBM address, Up:= I =

ice n.

[coined by Usenetter Tom Maddox, popularized by William Gibson's cyberpunk SF novels: a contrived acronym for `Intrusion Countermeasure Electronics'] Security software (in Gibson's novels, software that responds to intrusion by attempting to immobilize or even literally kill the intruder). Hence, `icebreaker': a program designed for cracking security on a system.

Neither term is in serious use yet as of early 1999, but many hackers find the metaphor attractive, and each may develop a denotation in the future. In the meantime, the speculative usage could be confused with `ICE', an acronym for "in-circuit emulator".

In ironic reference to the speculative usage, however, some hackers and computer scientists formed ICE (International Cryptographic Experiment) in 1994. ICE is a consortium to promote uniform international access to strong cryptography.

Node:ID10T error, Next:idempotent, Previous:ice, Up:= I =

ID10T error /I-D-ten-T er'*r/

Synonym for **PEBKAC**, e.g. "The user is being an idiot". Tech-support people passing a problem report to someone higher up the food chain (and presumably better equipped to deal with idiots) may ask the user to convey that there seems to be an I-D-ten-T error. Users never twig.

Node:idempotent, Next:IDP, Previous:ID10T error, Up:= I =

idempotent adj.

[from mathematical techspeak] Acting as if used only once, even if used multiple times. This term is often used with respect to **C** header files, which contain common definitions and declarations to be included by several source files. If a header file is ever included twice during the same compilation (perhaps due to nested #include files), compilation errors can result unless the header file has protected itself against multiple inclusion; a header file so protected is said to be idempotent. The term can also be used to describe an initialization subroutine that is arranged to perform some critical action exactly once, even if the routine is called several times.

Node:IDP, Next:If you want X you know where to find it., Previous:idempotent, Up:= I =

IDP /I-D-P/ v.,n.

[Usenet] Abbreviation for **Internet Death Penalty**. Common (probably now more so than the full form), and frequently verbed. Compare **UDP**.

Node:If you want X you know where to find it., Next:ifdef out, Previous:IDP, Up:= I =

If you want X, you know where to find it.

There is a legend that Dennis Ritchie, inventor of **C**, once responded to demands for features resembling those of what at the time was a much more popular language by observing "If you want PL/I, you know where to find it." Ever since, this has been hackish standard form for fending off requests to alter a new design to mimic some older (and, by implication, inferior and **baroque**) one. The case X = **Pascal** manifests semi-regularly on Usenet's *comp.lang.c* newsgroup. Indeed, the case X = X has been reported in discussions of graphics software (see **X**).

Node:ifdef out, Next:IIRC, Previous:If you want X you know where to find it., Up:= I =

ifdef out /if'def owt/ v.

Syn. for **condition out**, specific to **C**.

Node:IIRC, Next:ill-behaved, Previous:ifdef out, Up:= I =

IIRC //

Common abbreviation for "If I Recall Correctly".

Node:ill-behaved, Next:IMHO, Previous:IIRC, Up:= I =

ill-behaved adj.

1. [numerical analysis] Said of an algorithm or computational method that tends to blow up because of accumulated roundoff error or poor convergence properties. 2. Software that bypasses the defined **OS** interfaces to do things (like screen, keyboard, and disk I/O) itself, often in a way that depends on the hardware of the machine it is running on or which is nonportable or incompatible with other pieces of software. In the IBM PC/MS-DOS world, there is a folk theorem (nearly true) to the effect that (owing to gross inadequacies and performance penalties in the OS interface) all interesting applications are ill-behaved. See also **bare metal**. Oppose **well-behaved**, compare **PC-ism**. See **mess-dos**.

Node:IMHO, Next:Imminent Death Of The Net Predicted!, Previous:ill-behaved, Up:= I =

IMHO // abbrev.

[from SF fandom via Usenet; abbreviation for `In My Humble Opinion'] "IMHO, mixed-case C names should be avoided, as mistyping something in the wrong case can cause hard-to-detect errors -- and they look too Pascalish anyhow." Also seen in variant forms such as IMNSHO (In My Not-So-Humble Opinion) and IMAO (In My Arrogant Opinion).

Node:Imminent Death Of The Net Predicted!, Next:in the extreme, Previous:IMHO, Up:= I =

Imminent Death Of The Net Predicted! prov.

[Usenet] Since **Usenet** first got off the ground in 1980-81, it has grown exponentially, approximately doubling in size every year. On the other hand, most people feel the **signal-to-noise ratio** of Usenet has

dropped steadily. These trends led, as far back as mid-1983, to predictions of the imminent collapse (or death) of the net. Ten years and numerous doublings later, enough of these gloomy prognostications have been confounded that the phrase "Imminent Death Of The Net Predicted!" has become a running joke, hauled out any time someone grumbles about the **S/N ratio** or the huge and steadily increasing volume, or the possible loss of a key node or link, or the potential for lawsuits when ignoramuses post copyrighted material, etc., etc., etc.

Node:in the extreme, Next:inc, Previous:Imminent Death Of The Net Predicted!, Up:= I =

in the extreme adj.

A preferred superlative suffix for many hackish terms. See, for example, `obscure in the extreme' under **obscure**, and compare **highly**.

Node:inc, Next:incantation, Previous:in the extreme, Up:= I =

inc /ink/ v.

Verbal (and only rarely written) shorthand for *increment*, i.e. `increase by one'. Especially used by assembly programmers, as many assembly languages have an `inc` mnemonic. Antonym: dec (see **DEC**).

Node:incantation, Next:include, Previous:inc, Up:= I =

incantation n.

Any particularly arbitrary or obscure command that one must mutter at a system to attain a desired result. Not used of passwords or other explicit security features. Especially used of tricks that are so poorly documented that they must be learned from a **wizard**. "This compiler normally locates initialized data in the data segment, but if you **mutter** the right incantation they will be forced into text space."

Node:include, Next:include war, Previous:incantation, Up:= I =

include vt.

[Usenet] 1. To duplicate a portion (or whole) of another's message (typically with attribution to the source) in a reply or followup, for clarifying the context of one's response. See the discussion of inclusion styles under "Hacker Writing Style". 2. [from **C**] `#include <disclaimer.h>` has appeared in **sig block**s to refer to a notional `standard **disclaimer** file'.

Node:include war, Next:indent style, Previous:include, Up:= I =

include war n.

Excessive multi-leveled inclusion within a discussion **thread**, a practice that tends to annoy readers. In a forum with high-traffic newsgroups, such as Usenet, this can lead to **flame**s and the urge to start a **kill file**.

---

indent style n.

[C, C++, and Java programmers] The rules one uses to indent code in a readable fashion. There are four major C indent styles, described below; all have the aim of making it easier for the reader to visually track the scope of control constructs. They have been inherited by C++ and Java, which have C-like syntaxes. The significant variable is the placement of `{` and `}` with respect to the statement(s) they enclose and to the guard or controlling statement (`if`, `else`, `for`, `while`, or `do`) on the block, if any.

`K&R style' -- Named after Kernighan & Ritchie, because the examples in **K&R** are formatted this way. Also called `kernel style' because the Unix kernel is written in it, and the `One True Brace Style' (abbrev. 1TBS) by its partisans. In C code, the body is typically indented by eight spaces (or one tab) per level, as shown here. Four spaces are occasionally seen in C, but in C++ and Java four tends to be the rule rather than the exception.

```
if (<cond>) {
        <body>
}
```

`Allman style' -- Named for Eric Allman, a Berkeley hacker who wrote a lot of the BSD utilities in it (it is sometimes called `BSD style'). Resembles normal indent style in Pascal and Algol. It is the only style other than K&R in widespread use among Java programmers. Basic indent per level shown here is eight spaces, but four (or sometimes three) spaces are generally preferred by C++ and Java programmers.

```
if (<cond>)
{
        <body>
}
```

`Whitesmiths style' -- popularized by the examples that came with Whitesmiths C, an early commercial C compiler. Basic indent per level shown here is eight spaces, but four spaces are occasionally seen.

```
if (<cond>)
        {
        <body>
        }
```

`GNU style' -- Used throughout GNU EMACS and the Free Software Foundation code, and just about nowhere else. Indents are always four spaces per level, with `{` and `}` halfway between the outer and inner indent levels.

```
if (<cond>)
  {
    <body>
  }
```

Surveys have shown the Allman and Whitesmiths styles to be the most common, with about equal mind shares. K&R/1TBS used to be nearly universal, but is now much less common in C (the opening brace tends to get lost against the right paren of the guard part in an `if` or `while`, which is a **Bad Thing**). Defenders of 1TBS argue that any putative gain in readability is less important than their style's relative economy with vertical space, which enables one to see more code on one's screen at once.

The Java Language Specification legislates not only the capitalization of identifiers, but where nouns, adjectives, and verbs should be in method, class, interface, and variable names (section 6.8). While the specification stops short of also standardizing on a bracing style, all source code originating from Sun Laboratories uses the K&R style. This has set a precedent for Java programmers, which most follow.

Doubtless these issues will continue to be the subject of **holy wars**.

Node:index of X, Next:infant mortality, Previous:indent style, Up:= I =

index of X n.

See **coefficient of X**.

Node:infant mortality, Next:infinite, Previous:index of X, Up:= I =

infant mortality n.

It is common lore among hackers (and in the electronics industry at large; this term is possibly techspeak by now) that the chances of sudden hardware failure drop off exponentially with a machine's time since first use (that is, until the relatively distant time at which enough mechanical wear in I/O devices and thermal-cycling stress in components has accumulated for the machine to start going senile). Up to half of all chip and wire failures happen within a new system's first few weeks; such failures are often referred to as `infant mortality' problems (or, occasionally, as `sudden infant death syndrome'). See **bathtub curve**, **burn-in period**.

Node:infinite, Next:infinite loop, Previous:infant mortality, Up:= I =

infinite adj.

[common] Consisting of a large number of objects; extreme. Used very loosely as in: "This program produces infinite garbage." "He is an infinite loser." The word most likely to follow `infinite', though, is **hair**. (It has been pointed out that fractals are an excellent example of infinite hair.) These uses are abuses of the word's mathematical meaning. The term `semi-infinite', denoting an immoderately large amount of some resource, is also heard. "This compiler is taking a semi-infinite amount of time to optimize my program." See also **semi**.

Node:infinite loop, Next:Infinite-Monkey Theorem, Previous:infinite, Up:= I =

infinite loop n.

One that never terminates (that is, the machine **spin**s or **buzz**es forever and goes **catatonic**). There is a standard joke that has been made about each generation's exemplar of the ultra-fast machine: "The Cray-3 is so fast it can execute an infinite loop in under 2 seconds!"

Node:Infinite-Monkey Theorem, Next:infinity, Previous:infinite loop, Up:= I =

Infinite-Monkey Theorem n.

"If you put an **infinite** number of monkeys at typewriters, eventually one will bash out the script for Hamlet." (One may also hypothesize a small number of monkeys and a very long period of time.) This theorem asserts nothing about the intelligence of the one **random** monkey that eventually comes up with the script (and note that the mob will also type out all the possible *incorrect* versions of Hamlet). It may be referred to semi-seriously when justifying a **brute force** method; the implication is that, with enough

resources thrown at it, any technical challenge becomes a **one-banana problem**. This argument gets more respect since **Linux** justified the **bazaar** mode of development.

This theorem was first popularized by the astronomer Sir Arthur Eddington. It became part of the idiom of techies via the classic SF short story "Inflexible Logic" by Russell Maloney, and many younger hackers know it through a reference in Douglas Adams's "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy".

Node:infinity, Next:inflate, Previous:Infinite-Monkey Theorem, Up:= I =

infinity n.

1. The largest value that can be represented in a particular type of variable (register, memory location, data type, whatever). 2. `minus infinity': The smallest such value, not necessarily or even usually the simple negation of plus infinity. In N-bit twos-complement arithmetic, infinity is 2^(N-1) - 1 but minus infinity is - (2^(N-1)), not -(2^(N-1) - 1). Note also that this is different from time T equals minus infinity, which is closer to a mathematician's usage of infinity.

Node:inflate, Next:Infocom, Previous:infinity, Up:= I =

inflate vt.

To decompress or **puff** a file. Rare among Internet hackers, used primarily by MS-DOS/Windows types.

Node:Infocom, Next:initgame, Previous:inflate, Up:= I =

Infocom n.

A now-legendary games company, active from 1979 to 1989, that commercialized the MDL parser technology used for **Zork** to produce a line of text adventure games that remain favorites among hackers. Infocom's games were intelligent, funny, witty, erudite, irreverent, challenging, satirical, and most thoroughly hackish in spirit. The physical game packages from Infocom are now prized collector's items. After being acquired by Activision in 1989 they did a few more "modern" (e.g. graphics-intensive) games which were less successful than reissues of their classics.

The software, thankfully, is still extant; Infocom games were written in a kind of P-code and distributed with a P-code interpreter core, and not only freeware emulators for that interpreter but an actual compiler as well have been written to permit the P-code to be run on platforms the games never originally graced. In fact, new games written in this P-code are still bering written. (Emulators that can run Infocom game ZIPs, and new games, are available at ftp://wuarchive.wustl.edu:/doc/misc/if-archive/infocom.)

Node:initgame, Next:insanely great, Previous:Infocom, Up:= I =

initgame /in-it'gaym/ n.

[IRC] An **IRC** version of the trivia game "Botticelli", in which one user changes his **nick** to the initials of a famous person or other named entity, and the others on the channel ask yes or no questions, with the one to guess the person getting to be "it" next. As a courtesy, the one picking the initials starts by providing a 4-letter hint of the form sex, nationality, life-status, reality-status. For example, MAAR means "Male, American, Alive, Real" (as opposed to "fictional"). Initgame can be surprisingly addictive. See also **hing**.

[1996 update: a recognizable version of the initgame has become a staple of some radio talk shows in the U.S. We had it first! - ESR]

Node:insanely great, Next:INTERCAL, Previous:initgame, Up:= I =

insanely great adj.

[Mac community, from Steve Jobs; also BSD Unix people via Bill Joy] Something so incredibly **elegant** that it is imaginable only to someone possessing the most puissant of **hacker**-natures.

Node:INTERCAL, Next:interesting, Previous:insanely great, Up:= I =

INTERCAL /in't*r-kal/ n.

[said by the authors to stand for `Compiler Language With No Pronounceable Acronym'] A computer language designed by Don Woods and James Lyons in 1972. INTERCAL is purposely different from all other computer languages in all ways but one; it is purely a written language, being totally unspeakable. An excerpt from the INTERCAL Reference Manual will make the style of the language clear:

> It is a well-known and oft-demonstrated fact that a person whose work is incomprehensible is held in high esteem. For example, if one were to state that the simplest way to store a value of 65536 in a 32-bit INTERCAL variable is:
>
> ```
> DO :1 <- #0$#256
> ```
>
> any sensible programmer would say that that was absurd. Since this is indeed the simplest method, the programmer would be made to look foolish in front of his boss, who would of course have happened to turn up, as bosses are wont to do. The effect would be no less devastating for the programmer having been correct.

INTERCAL has many other peculiar features designed to make it even more unspeakable. The Woods-Lyons implementation was actually used by many (well, at least several) people at Princeton. The language has been recently reimplemented as C-INTERCAL and is consequently enjoying an unprecedented level of unpopularity; there is even an *alt.lang.intercal* newsgroup devoted to the study and ... appreciation of the language on Usenet.

Inevitably, INTERCAL has a home page on the Web: http://www.tuxedo.org/intercal/. An extended version, implemented in (what else?) **Perl** and adding object-oriented features, is available at http://dd-sh.assurdo.com/INTERCAL. See also **Befunge**.

Node:interesting, Next:Internet, Previous:INTERCAL, Up:= I =

interesting adj.

In hacker parlance, this word has strong connotations of `annoying', or `difficult', or both. Hackers relish a challenge, and enjoy wringing all the irony possible out of the ancient Chinese curse "May you live in interesting times". Oppose **trivial**, **uninteresting**.

Node:Internet, Next:Internet address, Previous:interesting, Up:= I =

Internet n.

The mother of all networks. First incarnated beginning in 1969 as the ARPANET, a U.S. Department of Defense research testbed. Though it has been widely believed that the goal was to develop a network architecture for military command-and-control that could survive disruptions up to and including nuclear war, this is a myth; in fact, ARPANET was conceived from the start as a way to get most economical use out of then-scarce large-computer resources.

As originally imagined, ARPANET's major use would have been to support what is now called remote login and more sophisticated forms of distributed computing, but the infant technology of electronic mail quickly grew to dominate actual usage. Universities, research labs and defense contractors early discovered the Internet's potential as a medium of communication between *humans* and linked up in steadily increasing numbers, connecting together a quirky mix of academics, techies, hippies, SF fans, hackers, and anarchists. The roots of this lexicon lie in those early years.

Over the next quarter-century the Internet evolved in many ways. The typical machine/OS combination moved from **DEC** **PDP-10**s and **PDP-20**s, running **TOPS-10** and **TOPS-20**, to PDP-11s and VAXes and Suns running **Unix**, and in the 1990s to Unix on Intel microcomputers. The Internet's protocols grew more capable, most notably in the move from NCP/IP to **TCP/IP** in 1982 and the implementation of Domain Name Service in 1983. It was around this time that people began referring to the collection of interconnected networks with ARPANET at its core as "the Internet".

The ARPANET had a fairly strict set of participation guidelines - connected institutions had to be involved with a DOD-related research project. By the mid-80s, many of the organizations clamoring to join didn't fit this profile. In 1986, the National Science Foundation built NSFnet to open up access to its five regional supercomputing centers; NSFnet became the backbone of the Internet, replacing the original ARPANET pipes (which were formally shut down in 1990). Between 1990 and late 1994 the pieces of NSFnet were sold to major telecommunications companies until the Internet backbone had gone completely commercial.

That year, 1994, was also the year the mainstream culture discovered the Internet. Once again, the **killer app** was not the anticipated one - rather, what caught the public imagination was the hypertext and multimedia features of the World Wide Web. Subsequently the Internet has seen off its only serious challenger (the OSI protocol stack favored by European telecom monopolies) and is in the process of absorbing into itself many of the proprietary networks built during the second wave of wide-area networking after 1980. It is now (1996) a commonplace even in mainstream media to predict that a globally-extended Internet will become the key unifying communications technology of the next century. See also **the network** and **Internet address**.

Node:Internet address, Next:Internet Death Penalty, Previous:Internet, Up:= I =

Internet address n.

1. [techspeak] An absolute network address of the form *foo@bar.baz*, where foo is a user name, bar is a **sitename**, and baz is a `domain' name, possibly including periods itself. Contrast with **bang path**; see also **the network** and **network address**. All Internet machines and most UUCP sites can now resolve these addresses, thanks to a large amount of behind-the-scenes magic and **PD** software written since 1980 or so. See also **bang path**, **domainist**. 2. More loosely, any network address reachable through Internet; this includes **bang path** addresses and some internal corporate and government networks.

Reading Internet addresses is something of an art. Here are the four most important top-level functional Internet domains followed by a selection of geographical domains:

com

commercial organizations

edu

educational institutions

gov

U.S. government civilian sites

mil

U.S. military sites

Note that most of the sites in the *com* and *edu* domains are in the U.S. or Canada.

us

sites in the U.S. outside the functional domains

su

sites in the ex-Soviet Union (see **kremvax**).

uk

sites in the United Kingdom

Within the *us* domain, there are subdomains for the fifty states, each generally with a name identical to the state's postal abbreviation. Within the *uk* domain, there is an *ac* subdomain for academic sites and a *co* domain for commercial ones. Other top-level domains may be divided up in similar ways.

Node:Internet Death Penalty, Next:Internet Exploder, Previous:Internet address, Up:= I =

Internet Death Penalty

[Usenet] (often abbreviated IDP) The ultimate sanction against **spam**-emitting sites - complete shunning at the router level of all mail and packets, as well as Usenet messages, from the offending domain(s). Compare **Usenet Death Penalty**, with which it is sometimes confused.

Node:Internet Exploder, Next:Internet Exploiter, Previous:Internet Death Penalty, Up:= I =

Internet Exploder

[very common] Pejorative hackerism for Microsoft's "Internet Explorer" web browser (also "Internet Exploiter"). Compare **HP-SUX**, **AIDX**, **buglix**, **Macintrash**, **Telerat**, **ScumOS**, **sun-stools**, **Slowlaris**.

Node:Internet Exploiter, Next:interrupt, Previous:Internet Exploder, Up:= I =

Internet Exploiter n.

Another common name-of-insult for Internet Explorer, Microsoft's overweight Web Browser; more hostile than **Internet Exploder**. Reflects widespread hostility to Microsoft and a sense that it is seeking to hijack, monopolize, and corrupt the Internet. Compare **Exploder** and the less pejorative **Netscrape**.

Node:interrupt, Next:interrupt list, Previous:Internet Exploiter, Up:= I =

interrupt

1. [techspeak] n. On a computer, an event that interrupts normal processing and temporarily diverts flow-of-control through an "interrupt handler" routine. See also **trap**. 2. interj. A request for attention from a hacker. Often explicitly spoken. "Interrupt -- have you seen Joe recently?" See **priority interrupt**. 3. Under MS-DOS, nearly synonymous with `system call', because the OS and BIOS routines are both called using the INT instruction (see **interrupt list**) and because programmers so often have to bypass the OS (going directly to a BIOS interrupt) to get reasonable performance.

Node:interrupt list, Next:interrupts locked out, Previous:interrupt, Up:= I =

interrupt list n.

[MS-DOS] The list of all known software interrupt calls (both documented and undocumented) for IBM PCs and compatibles, maintained and made available for free redistribution by Ralf Brown <ralf@cs.cmu.edu>. As of late 1992, it had grown to approximately two megabytes in length.

Node:interrupts locked out, Next:intro, Previous:interrupt list, Up:= I =

interrupts locked out adj.

When someone is ignoring you. In a restaurant, after several fruitless attempts to get the waitress's attention, a hacker might well observe "She must have interrupts locked out". The synonym `interrupts disabled' is also common. Variations abound; "to have one's interrupt mask bit set" and "interrupts masked out" are also heard. See also **spl**.

Node:intro, Next:IRC, Previous:interrupts locked out, Up:= I =

intro n.

[**demoscene**] Introductory **screen** of some production. 2. A short **demo**, usually showing just one or two **screen**s. 3. Small, usually 64k, 40k or 4k **demo**. Sizes are generally dictated by **compo** rules. See also **dentro**, **demo**.

Node:IRC, Next:iron, Previous:intro, Up:= I =

IRC /I-R-C/ n.

[Internet Relay Chat] A worldwide "party line" network that allows one to converse with others in real time. IRC is structured as a network of Internet servers, each of which accepts connections from client

programs, one per user. The IRC community and the **Usenet** and **MUD** communities overlap to some extent, including both hackers and regular folks who have discovered the wonders of computer networks. Some Usenet jargon has been adopted on IRC, as have some conventions such as **emoticon**s. There is also a vigorous native jargon, represented in this lexicon by entries marked `[IRC]'. See also **talk mode**.

Node:iron, Next:Iron Age, Previous:IRC, Up:= I =

iron n.

Hardware, especially older and larger hardware of **mainframe** class with big metal cabinets housing relatively low-density electronics (but the term is also used of modern supercomputers). Often in the phrase **big iron**. Oppose **silicon**. See also **dinosaur**.

Node:Iron Age, Next:iron box, Previous:iron, Up:= I =

Iron Age n.

In the history of computing, 1961-1971 -- the formative era of commercial **mainframe** technology, when ferrite-core **dinosaur**s ruled the earth. The Iron Age began, ironically enough, with the delivery of the first minicomputer (the PDP-1) and ended with the introduction of the first commercial microprocessor (the Intel 4004) in 1971. See also **Stone Age**; compare **elder days**.

Node:iron box, Next:ironmonger, Previous:Iron Age, Up:= I =

iron box n.

[Unix/Internet] A special environment set up to trap a **cracker** logging in over remote connections long enough to be traced. May include a modified **shell** restricting the cracker's movements in unobvious ways, and `bait' files designed to keep him interested and logged on. See also **back door**, **firewall machine**, **Venus flytrap**, and Clifford Stoll's account in "**The Cuckoo's Egg**" of how he made and used one (see the **Bibliography** in Appendix C). Compare **padded cell**.

Node:ironmonger, Next:ISO standard cup of tea, Previous:iron box, Up:= I =

ironmonger n.

[IBM] A hardware specialist (derogatory). Compare **sandbender**, **polygon pusher**.

Node:ISO standard cup of tea, Next:ISP, Previous:ironmonger, Up:= I =

ISO standard cup of tea n.

[South Africa] A cup of tea with milk and one teaspoon of sugar, where the milk is poured into the cup before the tea. Variations are ISO 0, with no sugar; ISO 2, with two spoons of sugar; and so on.

Like many ISO standards, this one has a faintly alien ring in North America, where hackers generally shun the decadent British practice of adulterating perfectly good tea with dairy products and prefer instead to add a wedge of lemon, if anything. If one were feeling extremely silly, one might hypothesize

an analogous `ANSI standard cup of tea' and wind up with a political situation distressingly similar to several that arise in much more serious technical contexts. (Milk and lemon don't mix very well.)

Node:ISP, Next:ITS, Previous:ISO standard cup of tea, Up:= I =

ISP /I-S-P/

Common abbreviation for Internet Service Provider, a kind of company that barely existed before 1993. ISPs sell Internet access to the mass market. While the big nationwide commercial BBSs with Internet access (like America Online, CompuServe, GEnie, Netcom, etc.) are technically ISPs, the term is usually reserved for local or regional small providers (often run by hackers turned entrepreneurs) who resell Internet access cheaply without themselves being information providers or selling advertising. Compare **NSP**.

Node:ITS, Next:IWBNI, Previous:ISP, Up:= I =

ITS /I-T-S/ n.

1. Incompatible Time-sharing System, an influential though highly idiosyncratic operating system written for PDP-6s and PDP-10s at MIT and long used at the MIT AI Lab. Much AI-hacker jargon derives from ITS folklore, and to have been `an ITS hacker' qualifies one instantly as an old-timer of the most venerable sort. ITS pioneered many important innovations, including transparent file sharing between machines and terminal-independent I/O. After about 1982, most actual work was shifted to newer machines, with the remaining ITS boxes run essentially as a hobby and service to the hacker community. The shutdown of the lab's last ITS machine in May 1990 marked the end of an era and sent old-time hackers into mourning nationwide (see **high moby**). 2. A mythical image of operating-system perfection worshiped by a bizarre, fervent retro-cult of old-time hackers and ex-users (see **troglodyte**, sense 2). ITS worshipers manage somehow to continue believing that an OS maintained by assembly-language hand-hacking that supported only monocase 6-character filenames in one directory per account remains superior to today's state of commercial art (their venom against **Unix** is particularly intense). See also **holy wars**, **Weenix**.

Node:IWBNI, Next:IYFEG, Previous:ITS, Up:= I =

IWBNI //

Abbreviation for `It Would Be Nice If'. Compare **WIBNI**.

Node:IYFEG, Next:J. Random, Previous:IWBNI, Up:= I =

IYFEG //

[Usenet] Abbreviation for `Insert Your Favorite Ethnic Group'. Used as a meta-name when telling ethnic jokes on the net to avoid offending anyone. See **JEDR**.

Node:= J =, Next:= K =, Previous:= I =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= J =

- J. Random:
- J. Random Hacker:
- jack in:
- jaggies:
- Java:
- JCL:
- JEDR:
- jello:
- jiffy:
- job security:
- jock:
- joe code:
- jolix:
- juggling eggs:
- jump off into never-never land:
- jupiter:

Node:J. Random, Next:J. Random Hacker, Previous:IYFEG, Up:= J =

J. Random /J rand'm/ n.

[common; generalized from **J. Random Hacker**] Arbitrary; ordinary; any one; any old. `J. Random' is often prefixed to a noun to make a name out of it. It means roughly `some particular' or `any specific one'. "Would you let J. Random Loser marry your daughter?" The most common uses are `J. Random Hacker', `J. Random Loser', and `J. Random Nerd' ("Should J. Random Loser be allowed to **gun** down other people?"), but it can be used simply as an elaborate version of **random** in any sense.

Node:J. Random Hacker, Next:jack in, Previous:J. Random, Up:= J =

J. Random Hacker /J rand'm hak'r/ n.

[very common] A mythical figure like the Unknown Soldier; the archetypal hacker nerd. This term is one of the oldest in the jargon, apparently going back to MIT in the 1960s. See **random**, **Suzie COBOL**. This may originally have been inspired by `J. Fred Muggs', a show-biz chimpanzee whose name was a household word back in the early days of **TMRC**, and was probably influenced by `J. Presper Eckert' (one of the co-inventors of the electronic computer). See also **Fred Foobar**.

Node:jack in, Next:jaggies, Previous:J. Random Hacker, Up:= J =

jack in v.

To log on to a machine or connect to a network or **BBS**, esp. for purposes of entering a **virtual reality** simulation such as a **MUD** or **IRC** (leaving is "jacking out"). This term derives from **cyberpunk** SF, in which it was used for the act of plugging an electrode set into neural sockets in order to interface the brain directly to a virtual reality. It is primarily used by MUD and IRC fans and younger hackers on BBS systems.

Node:jaggies, Next:Java, Previous:jack in, Up:= J =

jaggies /jag'eez/ n.

The `stairstep' effect observable when an edge (esp. a linear edge of very shallow or steep slope) is rendered on a pixel device (as opposed to a vector display).

Node:Java, Next:JCL, Previous:jaggies, Up:= J =

Java

An object-oriented language originally developed at Sun by James Gosling (and known by the name "Oak") with the intention of being the successor to **C++** (the project was however originally sold to Sun as an embedded language for use in set-top boxes). After the great Internet explosion of 1993-1994, Java was hacked into a byte-interpreted language and became the focus of a relentless hype campaign by Sun, which touted it as the new language of choice for distributed applications.

Java is indeed a stronger and cleaner design than C++ and has been embraced by many in the hacker community - but it has been a considerable source of frustration to many others, for reasons ranging from uneven support on different Web browser platforms, performance issues, and some notorious deficiencies of some of the standard toolkits (AWT in particular). **Microsoft**'s determined attempts to corrupt the language (which it rightly sees as a threat to its OS monopoly) have not helped. As of 1999, these issues are still in the process of being resolved.

Despite many attractive features and a good design, it is difficult to find people willing to praise Java who have tried to implement a complex, real-world system with it (but to be fair it is early days yet, and no other language has ever been forced to spend its childhood under the limelight the way Java has). On the other hand, Java has already been a big **win** in academic circles, where it has taken the place of **Pascal** as the preferred tool for teaching the basics of good programming to the next generation of hackers.

Node:JCL, Next:JEDR, Previous:Java, Up:= J =

JCL /J-C-L/ n.

1. IBM's supremely **rude** Job Control Language. JCL is the script language used to control the execution of programs in IBM's batch systems. JCL has a very **fascist** syntax, and some versions will, for example, **barf** if two spaces appear where it expects one. Most programmers confronted with JCL simply copy a working file (or card deck), changing the file names. Someone who actually understands and generates unique JCL is regarded with the mixed respect one gives to someone who memorizes the phone book. It is reported that hackers at IBM itself sometimes sing "Who's the breeder of the crud that mangles you and me? I-B-M, J-C-L, M-o-u-s-e" to the tune of the "Mickey Mouse Club" theme to express their opinion of the beast. 2. A comparative for any very **rude** software that a hacker is expected to use. "That's as bad as JCL." As with **COBOL**, JCL is often used as an archetype of ugliness even by those who haven't experienced it. See also **IBM**, **fear and loathing**.

A (poorly documented, naturally) shell simulating JCL syntax is available at the Retrocomputing Museum http://www.ccil.org/retro.

Node:JEDR, Next:jello, Previous:JCL, Up:= J =

JEDR // n.

Synonymous with **IYFEG**. At one time, people in the Usenet newsgroup *rec.humor.funny* tended to use `JEDR' instead of **IYFEG** or `<ethnic>'; this stemmed from a public attempt to suppress the group once made by a loser with initials JEDR after he was offended by an ethnic joke posted there. (The practice was **retcon**ned by the expanding these initials as `Joke Ethnic/Denomination/Race'.) After much sound and fury JEDR faded away; this term appears to be doing likewise. JEDR's only permanent effect on the net.culture was to discredit `sensitivity' arguments for censorship so thoroughly that more recent attempts to raise them have met with immediate and near-universal rejection.

Node:jello, Next:jiffy, Previous:JEDR, Up:= J =

jello n.

[Usenet: by analogy with **spam**] A message that is both excessively cross-posted and too frequently posted, as opposed to **spam** (which is merely too frequently posted) or **velveeta** (which is merely excessively cross-posted). This term is widely recognized but not commonly used; most people refer to both kinds of abuse or their combination as spam.

Node:jiffy, Next:job security, Previous:jello, Up:= J =

jiffy n.

1. The duration of one tick of the system clock on your computer (see **tick**). Often one AC cycle time (1/60 second in the U.S. and Canada, 1/50 most other places), but more recently 1/100 sec has become common. "The swapper runs every 6 jiffies" means that the virtual memory management routine is executed once for every 6 ticks of the clock, or about ten times a second. 2. Confusingly, the term is sometimes also used for a 1-millisecond **wall time** interval. 3. Even more confusingly, physicists semi-jokingly use `jiffy' to mean the time required for light to travel one foot in a vacuum, which turns out to be close to one *nanosecond*. 4. Indeterminate time from a few seconds to forever. "I'll do it in a jiffy" means certainly not now and possibly never. This is a bit contrary to the more widespread use of the word. Oppose **nano**. See also **Real Soon Now**.

Node:job security, Next:jock, Previous:jiffy, Up:= J =

job security n.

When some piece of code is written in a particularly **obscure** fashion, and no good reason (such as time or space optimization) can be discovered, it is often said that the programmer was attempting to increase his job security (i.e., by making himself indispensable for maintenance). This sour joke seldom has to be said in full; if two hackers are looking over some code together and one points at a section and says "job security", the other one may just nod.

Node:jock, Next:joe code, Previous:job security, Up:= J =

jock n.

1. A programmer who is characterized by large and somewhat brute-force programs. See **brute force**. 2. When modified by another noun, describes a specialist in some particular computing area. The compounds `compiler jock' and `systems jock' seem to be the best-established examples.

Node:joe code, Next:jolix, Previous:jock, Up:= J =

joe code /joh' kohd`/ n.

1. Code that is overly **tense** and unmaintainable. "**Perl** may be a handy program, but if you look at the source, it's complete joe code." 2. Badly written, possibly buggy code.

Correspondents wishing to remain anonymous have fingered a particular Joe at the Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory and observed that usage has drifted slightly; the original sobriquet `Joe code' was intended in sense 1.

1994 update: This term has now generalized to `<name> code', used to designate code with distinct characteristics traceable to its author. "This section doesn't check for a NULL return from malloc()! Oh. No wonder! It's Ed code!". Used most often with a programmer who has left the shop and thus is a convenient scapegoat for anything that is wrong with the project.

Node:jolix, Next:juggling eggs, Previous:joe code, Up:= J =

jolix /joh'liks/ n.,adj.

386BSD, the freeware port of the BSD Net/2 release to the Intel i386 architecture by Bill Jolitz, Lynne Greer Jolitz, and friends. Used to differentiate from BSDI's port based on the same source tape, which used to be called BSD/386 and is now BSD/OS. See **BSD**.

Node:juggling eggs, Next:jump off into never-never land, Previous:jolix, Up:= J =

juggling eggs vi.

Keeping a lot of **state** in your head while modifying a program. "Don't bother me now, I'm juggling eggs", means that an interrupt is likely to result in the program's being scrambled. In the classic 1975 first-contact SF novel "The Mote in God's Eye", by Larry Niven and Jerry Pournelle, an alien describes a very difficult task by saying "We juggle priceless eggs in variable gravity." See also **hack mode** and **on the gripping hand**.

Node:jump off into never-never land, Next:jupiter, Previous:juggling eggs, Up:= J =

jump off into never-never land v.

[from J. M. Barrie's "Peter Pan"] Same as **branch to Fishkill**, but more common in technical cultures associated with non-IBM computers that use the term `jump' rather than `branch'. Compare **hyperspace**.

Node:jupiter, Next:K, Previous:jump off into never-never land, Up:= J =

jupiter vt.

[IRC] To kill an **IRC** **bot** or user and then take its place by adopting its **nick** so that it cannot reconnect. Named after a particular IRC user who did this to NickServ, the robot in charge of preventing people from inadvertently using a nick claimed by another user. Now commonly shortened to `jupe'.

= K =

- K:
- K&R:
- k-:
- kahuna:
- kamikaze packet:
- kangaroo code:
- ken:
- kgbvax:
- KIBO:
- kiboze:
- kibozo:
- kick:
- kill file:
- killer app:
- killer micro:
- killer poke:
- kilo-:
- KIPS:
- KISS Principle:
- kit:
- klone:
- kludge:
- kluge:
- kluge around:
- kluge up:
- Knights of the Lambda Calculus:
- knobs:
- Knuth:
- koan:
- kremvax:
- kyrka:

K /K/ n.

[from **kilo-**] A kilobyte. Used both as a spoken word and a written suffix (like **meg** and **gig** for megabyte and gigabyte). See **quantifiers**.

K&R [Kernighan and Ritchie] n.

Brian Kernighan and Dennis Ritchie's book "The C Programming Language", esp. the classic and influential first edition (Prentice-Hall 1978; ISBN 0-13-110163-3). Syn. **White Book**, **Old Testament**.

See also **New Testament**.

Node:k-, Next:kahuna, Previous:K&R, Up:= K =

k- pref.

[rare] Extremely. Rare among hackers, but quite common among crackers and **warez d00dz** in compounds such as `k-kool' /K'kool'/, `k-rad' /K'rad'/, and `k-awesome' /K'aw`sm/. Also used to intensify negatives; thus, `k-evil', `k-lame', `k-screwed', and `k-annoying'. Overuse of this prefix, or use in more formal or technical contexts, is considered an indicator of **lamer** status.

Node:kahuna, Next:kamikaze packet, Previous:k-, Up:= K =

kahuna /k*-hoo'n*/ n.

[IBM: from the Hawaiian title for a shaman] Synonym for **wizard**, **guru**.

Node:kamikaze packet, Next:kangaroo code, Previous:kahuna, Up:= K =

kamikaze packet n.

The `official' jargon for what is more commonly called a **Christmas tree packet**. **RFC**-1025, "TCP and IP Bake Off" says:

> 10 points for correctly being able to process a "Kamikaze" packet (AKA nastygram, christmas tree packet, lamp test segment, et al.). That is, correctly handle a segment with the maximum combination of features at once (e.g., a SYN URG PUSH FIN segment with options and data).

See also **Chernobyl packet**.

Node:kangaroo code, Next:ken, Previous:kamikaze packet, Up:= K =

kangaroo code n.

Syn. **spaghetti code**.

Node:ken, Next:kgbvax, Previous:kangaroo code, Up:= K =

ken /ken/ n.

1. [Unix] Ken Thompson, principal inventor of Unix. In the early days he used to hand-cut distribution tapes, often with a note that read "Love, ken". Old-timers still use his first name (sometimes uncapitalized, because it's a login name and mail address) in third-person reference; it is widely understood (on Usenet, in particular) that without a last name `Ken' refers only to Ken Thompson. Similarly, Dennis without last name means Dennis Ritchie (and he is often known as *dmr*). See also **demigod**, **Unix**. 2. A flaming user. This was originated by the Software Support group at Symbolics because the two greatest flamers in the user community were both named Ken.

Node:kgbvax, Next:KIBO, Previous:ken, Up:= K =

kgbvax /K-G-B'vaks/ n.

See **kremvax**.

Node:KIBO, Next:kiboze, Previous:kgbvax, Up:= K =

KIBO /ki:'boh/

1. [acronym] Knowledge In, Bullshit Out. A summary of what happens whenever valid data is passed through an organization (or person) that deliberately or accidentally disregards or ignores its significance. Consider, for example, what an advertising campaign can do with a product's actual specifications. Compare **GIGO**; see also **SNAFU principle**. 2. James Parry <kibo@world.std.com>, a Usenetter infamous for various surrealist net.pranks and an uncanny, machine-assisted knack for joining any thread in which his nom de guerre is mentioned. He has a website at http://www.kibo.com/.

Node:kiboze, Next:kibozo, Previous:KIBO, Up:= K =

kiboze v.

[Usenet] To **grep** the Usenet news for a string, especially with the intention of posting a follow-up. This activity was popularised by Kibo (see **KIBO**, sense 2).

Node:kibozo, Next:kick, Previous:kiboze, Up:= K =

kibozo /ki:-boh'zoh/ n.

[Usenet] One who **kiboze**s but is not Kibo (see **KIBO**, sense 2).

Node:kick, Next:kill file, Previous:kibozo, Up:= K =

kick v.

[IRC] To cause somebody to be removed from a **IRC** channel, an option only available to channel ops. This is an extreme measure, often used to combat extreme **flamage** or **flood**ing, but sometimes used at the **CHOP**'s whim. Compare **gun**.

Node:kill file, Next:killer app, Previous:kick, Up:= K =

kill file n.

[Usenet; very common] (alt. `KILL file') Per-user file(s) used by some **Usenet** reading programs (originally Larry Wall's `rn(1)`) to discard summarily (without presenting for reading) articles matching some particularly uninteresting (or unwanted) patterns of subject, author, or other header lines. Thus to add a person (or subject) to one's kill file is to arrange for that person to be ignored by one's newsreader in

future. By extension, it may be used for a decision to ignore the person or subject in other media. See also **plonk**.

Node:killer app, Next:killer micro, Previous:kill file, Up:= K =

killer app

The application that actually makes a sustaining market for a promising but under-utilized technology. First used in the mid-1980s to describe Lotus 1-2-3 once it became evident that demand for that product had been the major driver of the early business market for IBM PCs. The term was then restrospectively applied to VisiCalc, which had played a similar role in the success of the Apple II. After 1994 it became commonplace to describe the World Wide Web as the Internet's killer app. One of the standard questions asked about each new personal-computer technology as it emerges has become "what's the killer app?"

Node:killer micro, Next:killer poke, Previous:killer app, Up:= K =

killer micro n.

[popularized by Eugene Brooks] A microprocessor-based machine that infringes on mini, mainframe, or supercomputer performance turf. Often heard in "No one will survive the attack of the killer micros!", the battle cry of the downsizers. Used esp. of RISC architectures.

The popularity of the phrase `attack of the killer micros' is doubtless reinforced by the title of the movie "Attack Of The Killer Tomatoes" (one of the **canonical** examples of so-bad-it's-wonderful among hackers). This has even more **flavor** now that killer micros have gone on the offensive not just individually (in workstations) but in hordes (within massively parallel computers).

[1996 update: Eugene Brooks was right. Since this term first entered the Jargon File in 1990, the minicomputer has effectively vanished, the **mainframe** sector is in deep and apparently terminal decline (with IBM but a shadow of its former self), and even the supercomputer business has contracted into a smaller niche. It's networked killer micros as far as the eye can see. --ESR]

Node:killer poke, Next:kilo-, Previous:killer micro, Up:= K =

killer poke n.

A recipe for inducing hardware damage on a machine via insertion of invalid values (see **poke**) into a memory-mapped control register; used esp. of various fairly well-known tricks on **bitty box**es without hardware memory management (such as the IBM PC and Commodore PET) that can overload and trash analog electronics in the monitor. See also **HCF**.

Node:kilo-, Next:KIPS, Previous:killer poke, Up:= K =

kilo- pref.

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:KIPS, Next:KISS Principle, Previous:kilo-, Up:= K =

KIPS /kips/ n.

[abbreviation, by analogy with **MIPS** using **K**] Thousands (*not* 1024s) of Instructions Per Second. Usage: rare.

Node:KISS Principle, Next:kit, Previous:KIPS, Up:= K =

KISS Principle /kis' prin'si-pl/ n.

"Keep It Simple, Stupid". A maxim often invoked when discussing design to fend off **creeping featurism** and control development complexity. Possibly related to the **marketroid** maxim on sales presentations, "Keep It Short and Simple".

Node:kit, Next:klone, Previous:KISS Principle, Up:= K =

kit n.

[Usenet; poss. fr. **DEC** slang for a full software distribution, as opposed to a patch or upgrade] A source software distribution that has been packaged in such a way that it can (theoretically) be unpacked and installed according to a series of steps using only standard Unix tools, and entirely documented by some reasonable chain of references from the top-level **README file**. The more general term **distribution** may imply that special tools or more stringent conditions on the host environment are required.

Node:klone, Next:kludge, Previous:kit, Up:= K =

klone /klohn/ n.

See **clone**, sense 4.

Node:kludge, Next:kluge, Previous:klone, Up:= K =

kludge 1. /klooj/ n.

Incorrect (though regrettably common) spelling of **kluge** (US). These two words have been confused in American usage since the early 1960s, and widely confounded in Great Britain since the end of World War II. 2. [TMRC] A **crock** that works. (A long-ago "Datamation" article by Jackson Granholme similarly said: "An ill-assorted collection of poorly matching parts, forming a distressing whole.") 3. v. To use a kludge to get around a problem. "I've kludged around it for now, but I'll fix it up properly later."

This word appears to have derived from Scots `kludge' or `kludgie' for a common toilet, via British military slang. It apparently became confused with U.S. **kluge** during or after World War II; some Britons from that era use both words in definably different ways, but **kluge** is now uncommon in Great Britain. `Kludge' in Commonwealth hackish differs in meaning from `kluge' in that it lacks the positive senses; a kludge is something no Commonwealth hacker wants to be associated too closely with. Also, `kludge' is more widely known in British mainstream slang than `kluge' is in the U.S.

Node:kluge, Next:kluge around, Previous:kludge, Up:= K =

kluge /klooj/

[from the German `klug', clever; poss. related to Polish `klucz' (a key, a hint, a main point)] 1. n. A Rube Goldberg (or Heath Robinson) device, whether in hardware or software. 2. n. A clever programming trick intended to solve a particular nasty case in an expedient, if not clear, manner. Often used to repair bugs. Often involves **ad-hockery** and verges on being a **crock**. 3. n. Something that works for the wrong reason. 4. vt. To insert a kluge into a program. "I've kluged this routine to get around that weird bug, but there's probably a better way." 5. [WPI] n. A feature that is implemented in a **rude** manner.

Nowadays this term is often encountered in the variant spelling `kludge'. Reports from **old fart**s are consistent that `kluge' was the original spelling, reported around computers as far back as the mid-1950s and, at that time, used exclusively of *hardware* kluges. In 1947, the "New York Folklore Quarterly" reported a classic shaggy-dog story `Murgatroyd the Kluge Maker' then current in the Armed Forces, in which a `kluge' was a complex and puzzling artifact with a trivial function. Other sources report that `kluge' was common Navy slang in the WWII era for any piece of electronics that worked well on shore but consistently failed at sea.

However, there is reason to believe this slang use may be a decade older. Several respondents have connected it to the brand name of a device called a "Kluge paper feeder", an adjunct to mechanical printing presses. Legend has it that the Kluge feeder was designed before small, cheap electric motors and control electronics; it relied on a fiendishly complex assortment of cams, belts, and linkages to both power and synchronize all its operations from one motive driveshaft. It was accordingly temperamental, subject to frequent breakdowns, and devilishly difficult to repair -- but oh, so clever! People who tell this story also aver that `Kluge' was the name of a design engineer.

There is in fact a Brandtjen & Kluge Inc., an old family business that manufactures printing equipment - interestingly, their name is pronounced /kloo'gee/! Henry Brandtjen, president of the firm, told me (ESR, 1994) that his company was co-founded by his father and an engineer named Kluge /kloo'gee/, who built and co-designed the original Kluge automatic feeder in 1919. Mr. Brandtjen claims, however, that this was a *simple* device (with only four cams); he says he has no idea how the myth of its complexity took hold.

TMRC and the MIT hacker culture of the early '60s seems to have developed in a milieu that remembered and still used some WWII military slang (see also **foobar**). It seems likely that `kluge' came to MIT via alumni of the many military electronics projects that had been located in Cambridge (many in MIT's venerable Building 20, in which **TMRC** is also located) during the war.

The variant `kludge' was apparently popularized by the **Datamation** article mentioned above; it was titled "How to Design a Kludge" (February 1962, pp. 30, 31). This spelling was probably imported from Great Britain, where **kludge** has an independent history (though this fact was largely unknown to hackers on either side of the Atlantic before a mid-1993 debate in the Usenet group *alt.folklore.computers* over the First and Second Edition versions of this entry; everybody used to think **kludge** was just a mutation of **kluge**). It now appears that the British, having forgotten the etymology of their own `kludge' when `kluge' crossed the Atlantic, repaid the U.S. by lobbing the `kludge' orthography in the other direction and confusing their American cousins' spelling!

The result of this history is a tangle. Many younger U.S. hackers pronounce the word as /klooj/ but spell it, incorrectly for its meaning and pronunciation, as `kludge'. (Phonetically, consider huge, refuge, centrifuge, and deluge as opposed to sludge, judge, budge, and fudge. Whatever its failings in other areas, English spelling is perfectly consistent about this distinction.) British hackers mostly learned /kluhj/ orally, use it in a restricted negative sense and are at least consistent. European hackers have mostly learned the word from written American sources and tend to pronounce it /kluhj/ but use the wider American meaning!

Some observers consider this mess appropriate in view of the word's meaning.

Node:kluge around, Next:kluge up, Previous:kluge, Up:= K =

kluge around vt.

To avoid a bug or difficult condition by inserting a **kluge**. Compare **workaround**.

Node:kluge up, Next:Knights of the Lambda Calculus, Previous:kluge around, Up:= K =

kluge up vt.

To lash together a quick hack to perform a task; this is milder than **cruft together** and has some of the connotations of **hack up** (note, however, that the construction `kluge on' corresponding to **hack on** is never used). "I've kluged up this routine to dump the buffer contents to a safe place."

Node:Knights of the Lambda Calculus, Next:knobs, Previous:kluge up, Up:= K =

Knights of the Lambda Calculus n.

A semi-mythical organization of wizardly LISP and Scheme hackers. The name refers to a mathematical formalism invented by Alonzo Church, with which LISP is intimately connected. There is no enrollment list and the criteria for induction are unclear, but one well-known LISPer has been known to give out buttons and, in general, the *members* know who they are....

Node:knobs, Next:Knuth, Previous:Knights of the Lambda Calculus, Up:= K =

knobs pl.n.

Configurable options, even in software and even those you can't adjust in real time. Anything you can **twiddle** is a knob. "Has this PNG viewer got an alpha knob?" Software may be described as having "knobs and switches" or occasionally "knobs and lights".

Node:Knuth, Next:koan, Previous:knobs, Up:= K =

Knuth /ka-nooth'/ n.

[Donald E. Knuth's "The Art of Computer Programming"] Mythically, the reference that answers all questions about data structures or algorithms. A safe answer when you do not know: "I think you can find that in Knuth." Contrast **the literature**. See also **bible**. There is a Donald Knuth home page at http://www-cs-faculty.Stanford.EDU/~knuth.

Node:koan, Next:kremvax, Previous:Knuth, Up:= K =

koan /koh'an/ n.

A Zen teaching riddle. Classically, koans are attractive paradoxes to be meditated on; their purpose is to help one to enlightenment by temporarily jamming normal cognitive processing so that something more interesting can happen (this practice is associated with Rinzei Zen Buddhism). Hackers are very fond of the koan form and compose their own koans for humororous and/or enlightening effect. See **Some AI**

Koans, **has the X nature**, **hacker humor**.

Node:kremvax, Next:kyrka, Previous:koan, Up:= K =

kremvax /krem-vaks/ n.

[from the then large number of **Usenet** **VAXen** with names of the form *foovax*] Originally, a fictitious Usenet site at the Kremlin, announced on April 1, 1984 in a posting ostensibly originated there by Soviet leader Konstantin Chernenko. The posting was actually forged by Piet Beertema as an April Fool's joke. Other fictitious sites mentioned in the hoax were *moskvax* and **kgbvax**. This was probably the funniest of the many April Fool's forgeries perpetrated on Usenet (which has negligible security against them), because the notion that Usenet might ever penetrate the Iron Curtain seemed so totally absurd at the time.

In fact, it was only six years later that the first genuine site in Moscow, *demos.su*, joined Usenet. Some readers needed convincing that the postings from it weren't just another prank. Vadim Antonov, senior programmer at Demos and the major poster from there up to mid-1991, was quite aware of all this, referred to it frequently in his own postings, and at one point twitted some credulous readers by blandly asserting that he *was* a hoax!

Eventually he even arranged to have the domain's gateway site named *kremvax*, thus neatly turning fiction into fact and demonstrating that the hackish sense of humor transcends cultural barriers. [Mr. Antonov also contributed the Russian-language material for this lexicon. --ESR]

In an even more ironic historical footnote, *kremvax* became an electronic center of the anti-communist resistance during the bungled hard-line coup of August 1991. During those three days the Soviet UUCP network centered on *kremvax* became the only trustworthy news source for many places within the USSR. Though the sysops were concentrating on internal communications, cross-border postings included immediate transliterations of Boris Yeltsin's decrees condemning the coup and eyewitness reports of the demonstrations in Moscow's streets. In those hours, years of speculation that totalitarianism would prove unable to maintain its grip on politically-loaded information in the age of computer networking were proved devastatingly accurate -- and the original *kremvax* joke became a reality as Yeltsin and the new Russian revolutionaries of `glasnost' and `perestroika' made *kremvax* one of the timeliest means of their outreach to the West.

Node:kyrka, Next:lace card, Previous:kremvax, Up:= K =

kyrka /chur'ka/ n.

[Swedish] See **feature key**.

Node:= L =, Next:= M =, Previous:= K =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= L =

- lace card:
- lag:
- lamer:
- language lawyer:
- languages of choice:

- LART:
- larval stage:
- lase:
- laser chicken:
- lasherism:
- laundromat:
- LDB:
- leaf site:
- leak:
- leaky heap:
- leapfrog attack:
- leech:
- legal:
- legalese:
- LER:
- LERP:
- let the smoke out:
- letterbomb:
- lexer:
- lexiphage:
- life:
- Life is hard:
- light pipe:
- lightweight:
- like kicking dead whales down the beach:
- like nailing jelly to a tree:
- line 666:
- line eater the:
- line noise:
- line starve:
- linearithmic:
- link farm:
- link rot:
- link-dead:
- lint:
- Lintel:
- Linus:
- Linux:
- lion food:
- Lions Book:
- LISP:
- list-bomb:
- lithium lick:
- little-endian:
- live:
- live data:
- Live Free Or Die!:
- livelock:
- liveware:
- lobotomy:
- locals the:
- locked and loaded:

- locked up:
- logic bomb:
- logical:
- loop through:
- loose bytes:
- lord high fixer:
- lose:
- lose lose:
- loser:
- losing:
- loss:
- lossage:
- lost in the noise:
- lost in the underflow:
- lots of MIPS but no I/O:
- low-bandwidth:
- LPT:
- Lubarsky's Law of Cybernetic Entomology:
- Lumber Cartel:
- lunatic fringe:
- lurker:
- luser:

Node:lace card, Next:lag, Previous:kyrka, Up:= L =

lace card n. obs.

A **punched card** with all holes punched (also called a `whoopee card' or `ventilator card'). Card readers tended to jam when they got to one of these, as the resulting card had too little structural strength to avoid buckling inside the mechanism. Card punches could also jam trying to produce these things owing to power-supply problems. When some practical joker fed a lace card through the reader, you needed to clear the jam with a `card knife' -- which you used on the joker first.

Node:lag, Next:lamer, Previous:lace card, Up:= L =

lag n.

[MUD, IRC; very common] When used without qualification this is synomous with **netlag**. Curiously, people will often complain "I'm really lagged" when in fact it is their server or network connection that is lagging.

Node:lamer, Next:language lawyer, Previous:lag, Up:= L =

lamer n.

[prob. originated in skateboarder slang] 1. Synonym for **luser**, not used much by hackers but common among **warez d00dz**, crackers, and **phreaker**s. A person who downloads much, but who never uploads. (Also known as `leecher'). Oppose **elite**. Has the same connotations of self-conscious elitism that use of **luser** does among hackers. 2. Someone who tries to crack a BBS. 3. Someone who annoys the sysop or other BBS users - for instance, by posting lots of silly messages, uploading virus-ridden software,

frequently dropping carrier, etc.

Crackers also use it to refer to cracker **wannabee**s. In phreak culture, a lamer is one who scams codes off others rather than doing cracks or really understanding the fundamental concepts. In **warez d00dz** culture, where the ability to wave around cracked commercial software within days of (or before) release to the commercial market is much esteemed, the lamer might try to upload garbage or shareware or something incredibly old (old in this context is read as a few years to anything older than 3 days).

`Lamer' is also much used in the IRC world in a similar sense to the above.

Node:language lawyer, Next:languages of choice, Previous:lamer, Up:= L =

language lawyer n.

A person, usually an experienced or senior software engineer, who is intimately familiar with many or most of the numerous restrictions and features (both useful and esoteric) applicable to one or more computer programming languages. A language lawyer is distinguished by the ability to show you the five sentences scattered through a 200-plus-page manual that together imply the answer to your question "if only you had thought to look there". Compare **wizard**, **legal**, **legalese**.

Node:languages of choice, Next:LART, Previous:language lawyer, Up:= L =

languages of choice n.

C, **C++**, **LISP**, and **Perl**. Nearly every hacker knows one of C or LISP, and most good ones are fluent in both. C++, despite some serious drawbacks, is generally preferred to other object-oriented languages (though in 1999 it looks as though Java has displaced it in the affections of hackers, if not everywhere). Since around 1990 Perl has rapidly been gaining favor, especially as a tool for systems-administration utilities and rapid prototyping. Python, Smalltalk and Prolog are also popular in small but influential communities.

There is also a rapidly dwindling category of older hackers with FORTRAN, or even assembler, as their language of choice. They often prefer to be known as **Real Programmer**s, and other hackers consider them a bit odd (see "**The Story of Mel**" in Appendix A). Assembler is generally no longer considered interesting or appropriate for anything but **HLL** implementation, **glue**, and a few time-critical and hardware-specific uses in systems programs. FORTRAN occupies a shrinking niche in scientific programming.

Most hackers tend to frown on languages like **Pascal** and **Ada**, which don't give them the near-total freedom considered necessary for hacking (see **bondage-and-discipline language**), and to regard everything even remotely connected with **COBOL** or other traditional **card walloper** languages as a total and unmitigated **loss**.

Node:LART, Next:larval stage, Previous:languages of choice, Up:= L =

LART //

Luser Attitude Readjustment Tool. 1. n. In the collective mythos of **scary devil monastery**, this is an essential item in the toolkit of every **BOFH**. The LART classic is a 2x4 or other large billet of wood usable as a club, to be applied upside the head of spammers and other people who cause sysadmins more grief than just naturally goes with the job. Perennial debates rage on *alt.sysadmin.recovery* over what

constitutes the truly effective LART; knobkerries, semiautomatic weapons, flamethrowers, and tactical nukes all have their partisans. Compare **clue-by-four**. 2. v. To use a LART. Some would add "in malice", but some sysadmins do prefer to gently lart their users as a first (and sometimes final) warning. 3. interj. Calling for one's LART, much as a surgeon might call "Scalpel!". 4. interj. [rare] Used in **flame**s as a rebuke. "LART! LART! LART!"

Node:larval stage, Next:lase, Previous:LART, Up:= L =

larval stage n.

Describes a period of monomaniacal concentration on coding apparently passed through by all fledgling hackers. Common symptoms include the perpetration of more than one 36-hour **hacking run** in a given week; neglect of all other activities including usual basics like food, sleep, and personal hygiene; and a chronic case of advanced bleary-eye. Can last from 6 months to 2 years, the apparent median being around 18 months. A few so afflicted never resume a more `normal' life, but the ordeal seems to be necessary to produce really wizardly (as opposed to merely competent) programmers. See also **wannabee**. A less protracted and intense version of larval stage (typically lasting about a month) may recur when one is learning a new **OS** or programming language.

Node:lase, Next:laser chicken, Previous:larval stage, Up:= L =

lase /layz/ vt.

To print a given document via a laser printer. "OK, let's lase that sucker and see if all those graphics-macro calls did the right things."

Node:laser chicken, Next:lasherism, Previous:lase, Up:= L =

laser chicken n.

Kung Pao Chicken, a standard Chinese dish containing chicken, peanuts, and hot red peppers in a spicy pepper-oil sauce. Many hackers call it `laser chicken' for two reasons: It can **zap** you just like a laser, and the sauce has a red color reminiscent of some laser beams. The dish has also been called `gunpowder chicken'.

In a variation on this theme, it is reported that some Australian hackers have redesignated the common dish `lemon chicken' as `Chernobyl Chicken'. The name is derived from the color of the sauce, which is considered bright enough to glow in the dark (as, mythically, do some of the inhabitants of Chernobyl).

Node:lasherism, Next:laundromat, Previous:laser chicken, Up:= L =

lasherism n.

[Harvard] A program that solves a standard problem (such as the Eight Queens puzzle or implementing the **life** algorithm) in a deliberately nonstandard way. Distinguished from a **crock** or **kluge** by the fact that the programmer did it on purpose as a mental exercise. Such constructions are quite popular in exercises such as the **Obfuscated C Contest**, and occasionally in **retrocomputing**. Lew Lasher was a student at Harvard around 1980 who became notorious for such behavior.

Node:laundromat, Next:LDB, Previous:lasherism, Up:= L =

laundromat n.

Syn. **disk farm**; see **washing machine**.

Node:LDB, Next:leaf site, Previous:laundromat, Up:= L =

LDB /l*'d*b/ vt.

[from the PDP-10 instruction set] To extract from the middle. "LDB me a slice of cake, please." This usage has been kept alive by Common LISP's function of the same name. Considered silly. See also **DPB**.

Node:leaf site, Next:leak, Previous:LDB, Up:= L =

leaf site n.,obs.

Before pervasive TCP/IP, this term was used of a machine that merely originated and read Usenet news or mail, and did not relay any third-party traffic. It was often uttered in a critical tone; when the ratio of leaf sites to backbone, rib, and other relay sites got too high, the network tended to develop bottlenecks. Compare **backbone site**, **rib site**. Now that traffic patterns depend more on the distribution of routers than of host machines this term has largely fallen out of use.

Node:leak, Next:leaky heap, Previous:leaf site, Up:= L =

leak n.

With qualifier, one of a class of resource-management bugs that occur when resources are not freed properly after operations on them are finished, so they effectively disappear (leak out). This leads to eventual exhaustion as new allocation requests come in. **memory leak** and **fd leak** have their own entries; one might also refer, to, say, a `window handle leak' in a window system.

Node:leaky heap, Next:leapfrog attack, Previous:leak, Up:= L =

leaky heap n.

[Cambridge] An **arena** with a **memory leak**.

Node:leapfrog attack, Next:leech, Previous:leaky heap, Up:= L =

leapfrog attack n.

Use of userid and password information obtained illicitly from one host (e.g., downloading a file of account IDs and passwords, tapping TELNET, etc.) to compromise another host. Also, the act of TELNETting through one or more hosts in order to confuse a trace (a standard cracker procedure).

Node:leech, Next:legal, Previous:leapfrog attack, Up:= L =

leech n.

Among BBS types, crackers and **warez d00dz**, one who consumes knowledge without generating new software, cracks, or techniques. BBS culture specifically defines a leech as someone who downloads files with few or no uploads in return, and who does not contribute to the message section. Cracker culture extends this definition to someone (a **lamer**, usually) who constantly presses informed sources for information and/or assistance, but has nothing to contribute.

Node:legal, Next:legalese, Previous:leech, Up:= L =

legal adj.

Loosely used to mean `in accordance with all the relevant rules', esp. in connection with some set of constraints defined by software. "The older =+ alternate for += is no longer legal syntax in ANSI C." "This parser processes each line of legal input the moment it sees the trailing linefeed." Hackers often model their work as a sort of game played with the environment in which the objective is to maneuver through the thicket of `natural laws' to achieve a desired objective. Their use of `legal' is flavored as much by this game-playing sense as by the more conventional one having to do with courts and lawyers. Compare **language lawyer**, **legalese**.

Node:legalese, Next:LER, Previous:legal, Up:= L =

legalese n.

Dense, pedantic verbiage in a language description, product specification, or interface standard; text that seems designed to obfuscate and requires a **language lawyer** to **parse** it. Though hackers are not afraid of high information density and complexity in language (indeed, they rather enjoy both), they share a deep and abiding loathing for legalese; they associate it with deception, **suit**s, and situations in which hackers generally get the short end of the stick.

Node:LER, Next:LERP, Previous:legalese, Up:= L =

LER /L-E-R/

n. 1. [TMRC, from `Light-Emitting Diode'] A light-emitting resistor (that is, one in the process of burning up). Ohm's law was broken. See also **SED**. 2. An incandescent light bulb (the filament emits light because it's resistively heated).

Node:LERP, Next:let the smoke out, Previous:LER, Up:= L =

LERP /lerp/ vi.,n.

Quasi-acronym for Linear Interpolation, used as a verb or noun for the operation. "Bresenham's algorithm lerps incrementally between the two endpoints of the line."

Node:let the smoke out, Next:letterbomb, Previous:LERP, Up:= L =

let the smoke out v.

To fry hardware (see **fried**). See **magic smoke** for a discussion of the underlying mythology.

Node:letterbomb, Next:lexer, Previous:let the smoke out, Up:= L =

letterbomb

1. n. A piece of **email** containing **live data** intended to do nefarious things to the recipient's machine or terminal. It used to be possible, for example, to send letterbombs that would lock up some specific kinds of terminals when they are viewed, so thoroughly that the user must cycle power (see **cycle**, sense 3) to unwedge them. Under Unix, a letterbomb can also try to get part of its contents interpreted as a shell command to the mailer. The results of this could range from silly to tragic; fortunately it has been some years since any of the standard Unix/Internet mail software was vulnerable to such an attack (though, as the Melissa virus attack demonstrated in early 1999, Microsoft systems can have serious problems). See also **Trojan horse**; compare **nastygram**. 2. Loosely, a **mailbomb**.

Node:lexer, Next:lexiphage, Previous:letterbomb, Up:= L =

lexer /lek'sr/ n.

Common hacker shorthand for `lexical analyzer', the input-tokenizing stage in the parser for a language (the part that breaks it into word-like pieces). "Some C lexers get confused by the old-style compound ops like =-."

Node:lexiphage, Next:life, Previous:lexer, Up:= L =

lexiphage /lek'si-fayj`/ n.

A notorious word **chomper** on ITS. See **bagbiter**. This program would draw on a selected victim's bitmapped terminal the words "THE BAG" in ornate letters, followed a pair of jaws biting pieces of it off.

Node:life, Next:Life is hard, Previous:lexiphage, Up:= L =

life n.

1. A cellular-automata game invented by John Horton Conway and first introduced publicly by Martin Gardner ("Scientific American", October 1970); the game's popularity had to wait a few years for computers on which it could reasonably be played, as it's no fun to simulate the cells by hand. Many hackers pass through a stage of fascination with it, and hackers at various places contributed heavily to the mathematical analysis of this game (most notably Bill Gosper at MIT, who even implemented life in **TECO**!; see **Gosperism**). When a hacker mentions `life', he is much more likely to mean this game than the magazine, the breakfast cereal, or the human state of existence. 2. The opposite of **Usenet**. As in "**Get a life!**"

Node:Life is hard, Next:light pipe, Previous:life, Up:= L =

Life is hard prov.

[XEROX PARC] This phrase has two possible interpretations: (1) "While your suggestion may have some merit, I will behave as though I hadn't heard it." (2) "While your suggestion has obvious merit, equally obvious circumstances prevent it from being seriously considered." The charm of the phrase lies precisely in this subtle but important ambiguity.

Node:light pipe, Next:lightweight, Previous:Life is hard, Up:= L =

light pipe n.

Fiber optic cable. Oppose **copper**.

Node:lightweight, Next:like kicking dead whales down the beach, Previous:light pipe, Up:= L =

lightweight adj.

Opposite of **heavyweight**; usually found in combining forms such as `lightweight process'.

Node:like kicking dead whales down the beach, Next:like nailing jelly to a tree, Previous:lightweight, Up:= L =

like kicking dead whales down the beach adj.

Describes a slow, difficult, and disgusting process. First popularized by a famous quote about the difficulty of getting work done under one of IBM's mainframe OSes. "Well, you *could* write a C compiler in COBOL, but it would be like kicking dead whales down the beach." See also **fear and loathing**.

Node:like nailing jelly to a tree, Next:line 666, Previous:like kicking dead whales down the beach, Up:= L =

like nailing jelly to a tree adj.

Used to describe a task thought to be impossible, esp. one in which the difficulty arises from poor specification or inherent slipperiness in the problem domain. "Trying to display the `prettiest' arrangement of nodes and arcs that diagrams a given graph is like nailing jelly to a tree, because nobody's sure what `prettiest' means algorithmically."

Hacker use of this term may recall mainstream slang originated early in the 20th century by President Theodore Roosevelt. There is a legend that, weary of inconclusive talks with Colombia over the right to dig a canal through its then-province Panama, he remarked, "Negotiating with those pirates is like trying to nail currant jelly to the wall." Roosevelt's government subsequently encouraged the anti-Colombian insurgency that created the nation of Panama.

Node:line 666, Next:line eater the, Previous:like nailing jelly to a tree, Up:= L =

line 666 [from Christian eschatological myth] n.

The notional line of source at which a program fails for obscure reasons, implying either that *somebody* is out to get it (when you are the programmer), or that it richly deserves to be so gotten (when you are not).

"It works when I trace through it, but seems to crash on line 666 when I run it." "What happens is that whenever a large batch comes through, mmdf dies on the Line of the Beast. Probably some twit hardcoded a buffer size."

Node:line eater the, Next:line noise, Previous:line 666, Up:= L =

line eater, the n. obs.

[Usenet] 1. A bug in some now-obsolete versions of the netnews software that used to eat up to BUFSIZ bytes of the article text. The bug was triggered by having the text of the article start with a space or tab. This bug was quickly personified as a mythical creature called the `line eater', and postings often included a dummy line of `line eater food'. Ironically, line eater `food' not beginning with a space or tab wasn't actually eaten, since the bug was avoided; but if there *was* a space or tab before it, then the line eater would eat the food *and* the beginning of the text it was supposed to be protecting. The practice of `sacrificing to the line eater' continued for some time after the bug had been **nailed to the wall**, and is still humorously referred to. The bug itself was still occasionally reported to be lurking in some mail-to-netnews gateways as late as 1991. 2. See **NSA line eater**.

Node:line noise, Next:line starve, Previous:line eater the, Up:= L =

line noise n.

1. [techspeak] Spurious characters due to electrical noise in a communications link, especially an RS-232 serial connection. Line noise may be induced by poor connections, interference or crosstalk from other circuits, electrical storms, **cosmic rays**, or (notionally) birds crapping on the phone wires. 2. Any chunk of data in a file or elsewhere that looks like the results of line noise in sense 1. 3. Text that is theoretically a readable text or program source but employs syntax so bizarre that it looks like line noise in senses 1 or 2. Yes, there are languages this ugly. The canonical example is **TECO**; it is often claimed that "TECO's input syntax is indistinguishable from line noise." Other non-**WYSIWYG** editors, such as Multics `qed` and Unix `ed`, in the hands of a real hacker, also qualify easily, as do deliberately obfuscated languages such as **INTERCAL**.

Node:line starve, Next:linearithmic, Previous:line noise, Up:= L =

line starve

[MIT] 1. vi. To feed paper through a printer the wrong way by one line (most printers can't do this). On a display terminal, to move the cursor up to the previous line of the screen. "To print `X squared', you just output `X', line starve, `2', line feed." (The line starve causes the `2' to appear on the line above the `X', and the line feed gets back to the original line.) 2. n. A character (or character sequence) that causes a terminal to perform this action. ASCII 0011010, also called SUB or control-Z, was one common line-starve character in the days before microcomputers and the X3.64 terminal standard. Today, the term might be used for the ISO reverse line feed character 0x8D. Unlike `line feed', `line starve' is *not* standard **ASCII** terminology. Even among hackers it is considered a bit silly. 3. [proposed] A sequence such as \c (used in System V echo, as well as **nroff** and **troff**) that suppresses a **newline** or other character(s) that would normally be emitted.

Node:linearithmic, Next:link farm, Previous:line starve, Up:= L =

linearithmic adj.

Of an algorithm, having running time that is O(N log N). Coined as a portmanteau of `linear' and `logarithmic' in "Algorithms In C" by Robert Sedgewick (Addison-Wesley 1990, ISBN 0-201-51425-7).

Node:link farm, Next:link rot, Previous:linearithmic, Up:= L =

link farm n.

[Unix] A directory tree that contains many links to files in a master directory tree of files. Link farms save space when one is maintaining several nearly identical copies of the same source tree -- for example, when the only difference is architecture-dependent object files. "Let's freeze the source and then rebuild the FROBOZZ-3 and FROBOZZ-4 link farms." Link farms may also be used to get around restrictions on the number of `-I` (include-file directory) arguments on older C preprocessors. However, they can also get completely out of hand, becoming the filesystem equivalent of **spaghetti code**.

Node:link rot, Next:link-dead, Previous:link farm, Up:= L =

link rot n.

The natural decay of web links as the sites they're connected to change or die. Compare **bit rot**.

Node:link-dead, Next:lint, Previous:link rot, Up:= L =

link-dead adj.

[MUD] The state a player is in when they kill their connection to a **MUD** without leaving it properly. The player is then commonly left as a statue in the game, and is only removed after a certain period of time (an hour on most MUDs). Used on **IRC** as well, although it is inappropriate in that context. Compare **netdead**.

Node:lint, Next:Lintel, Previous:link-dead, Up:= L =

lint

[from Unix's `lint(1)`, named for the bits of fluff it supposedly picks from programs] 1. vt. To examine a program closely for style, language usage, and portability problems, esp. if in C, esp. if via use of automated analysis tools, most esp. if the Unix utility `lint(1)` is used. This term used to be restricted to use of `lint(1)` itself, but (judging by references on Usenet) it has become a shorthand for **desk check** at some non-Unix shops, even in languages other than C. Also as v. **delint**. 2. n. Excess verbiage in a document, as in "This draft has too much lint".

Node:Lintel, Next:Linus, Previous:lint, Up:= L =

Lintel n.

The emerging **Linux**/Intel alliance. This term began to be used in early 1999 after it became clear that the **Wintel** alliance was under increasing strain and Intel started taking stakes in Linux companies.

Node:Linus, Next:Linux, Previous:Lintel, Up:= L =

Linus /leen'us'/ or /lin'us'/, not /li:'nus/

Linus Torvalds, the author of **Linux**. Nobody in the hacker culture has been as readily recognized by first name alone since Ken (Thompson).

Node:Linux, Next:lion food, Previous:Linus, Up:= L =

Linux /lee'nuhks/ or /li'nuks/, *not* /li:'nuhks/ n.

The free Unix workalike created by Linus Torvalds and friends starting about 1991. Tthe pronunciation /lee'nuhks/ is preferred because the name `Linus' has an /ee/ sound in Swedish (Linus's family is part of Finland's 6% ethnic-Swedish minority). This may be the most remarkable hacker project in history -- an entire clone of Unix for 386, 486 and Pentium micros, distributed for free with sources over the net (ports to Alpha and Sparc and many other machines are also in use).

Linux is what **GNU** aimed to be, and it relies on the GNU toolset. But the Free Software Foundation didn't produce the kernel to go with that toolset until 1999, which was too late. Other, similar efforts like FreeBSD and NetBSD have been technically successful but never caught fire the way Linux has; as this is written in 1999, Linux is seriously challenging Microsoft's OS dominance.

An earlier version of this entry opined "The secret of Linux's success seems to be that Linus worked much harder early on to keep the development process open and recruit other hackers, creating a snowball effect." Truer than we knew. See **bazaar**.

(Some people object that the name `Linux' should be used to refer only to the kernel, not the entire operating system. This claim is a proxy for an underlying territorial dispute; people who insist on the term `GNU/Linux' want the the **FSF** to get most of the credit for Linux because RMS and friends wrote many of its user-level tools. Neither this theory nor the term `GNU/Linux' has gained more than minority acceptance).

Node:lion food, Next:Lions Book, Previous:Linux, Up:= L =

lion food n.

[IBM] Middle management or HQ staff (or, by extension, administrative drones in general). From an old joke about two lions who, escaping from the zoo, split up to increase their chances but agree to meet after 2 months. When they finally meet, one is skinny and the other overweight. The thin one says: "How did you manage? I ate a human just once and they turned out a small army to chase me -- guns, nets, it was terrible. Since then I've been reduced to eating mice, insects, even grass." The fat one replies: "Well, *I* hid near an IBM office and ate a manager a day. And nobody even noticed!"

Node:Lions Book, Next:LISP, Previous:lion food, Up:= L =

Lions Book n.

"Source Code and Commentary on Unix level 6", by John Lions. The two parts of this book contained (1) the entire source listing of the Unix Version 6 kernel, and (2) a commentary on the source discussing the algorithms. These were circulated internally at the University of New South Wales beginning 1976-77, and were, for years after, the *only* detailed kernel documentation available to anyone outside Bell Labs.

Because Western Electric wished to maintain trade secret status on the kernel, the Lions Book was only supposed to be distributed to affiliates of source licensees. In spite of this, it soon spread by *samizdat* to a good many of the early Unix hackers.

[1996 update: The Lions book lives again! It was put back in print as ISBN 1-57398-013-7 from Peer-To-Peer Communications, with forewords by Dennis Ritchie and Ken Thompson. In a neat bit of reflexivity, the page before the contents quotes this entry.]

Node:LISP, Next:list-bomb, Previous:Lions Book, Up:= L =

LISP n.

[from `LISt Processing language', but mythically from `Lots of Irritating Superfluous Parentheses'] AI's mother tongue, a language based on the ideas of (a) variable-length lists and trees as fundamental data types, and (b) the interpretation of code as data and vice-versa. Invented by John McCarthy at MIT in the late 1950s, it is actually older than any other **HLL** still in use except FORTRAN. Accordingly, it has undergone considerable adaptive radiation over the years; modern variants are quite different in detail from the original LISP 1.5. The dominant HLL among hackers until the early 1980s, LISP now shares the throne with **C**. Its partisans claim it is the only language that is truly beautiful. See **languages of choice**.

All LISP functions and programs are expressions that return values; this, together with the high memory utilization of LISPs, gave rise to Alan Perlis's famous quip (itself a take on an Oscar Wilde quote) that "LISP programmers know the value of everything and the cost of nothing".

One significant application for LISP has been as a proof by example that most newer languages, such as **COBOL** and **Ada**, are full of unnecessary **crock**s. When the **Right Thing** has already been done once, there is no justification for **bogosity** in newer languages.

Node:list-bomb, Next:lithium lick, Previous:LISP, Up:= L =

list-bomb v.

To **mailbomb** someone by forging messages causing the victim to become a subscriber to many mailing lists. This is a self-defeating tactic; it merely forces mailing list servers to require confirmation by return message for every subscription.

Node:lithium lick, Next:little-endian, Previous:list-bomb, Up:= L =

lithium lick n.

[NeXT] Steve Jobs. Employees who have gotten too much attention from their esteemed founder are said to have `lithium lick' when they begin to show signs of Jobsian fervor and repeat the most recent catch phrases in normal conversation -- for example, "It just works, right out of the box!"

Node:little-endian, Next:live, Previous:lithium lick, Up:= L =

little-endian adj.

Describes a computer architecture in which, within a given 16- or 32-bit word, bytes at lower addresses have lower significance (the word is stored `little-end-first'). The PDP-11 and VAX families of computers

and Intel microprocessors and a lot of communications and networking hardware are little-endian. See **big-endian**, **middle-endian**, **NUXI problem**. The term is sometimes used to describe the ordering of units other than bytes; most often, bits within a byte.

Node:live, Next:live data, Previous:little-endian, Up:= L =

live /li:v/ adj.,adv.

[common] Opposite of `test'. Refers to actual real-world data or a program working with it. For example, the response to "I think the record deleter is finished" might be "Is it live yet?" or "Have you tried it out on live data?" This usage usually carries the connotation that live data is more fragile and must not be corrupted, or bad things will happen. So a more appropriate response might be: "Well, make sure it works perfectly before we throw live data at it." The implication here is that record deletion is something pretty significant, and a haywire record-deleter running amok live would probably cause great harm.

Node:live data, Next:Live Free Or Die!, Previous:live, Up:= L =

live data n.

1. Data that is written to be interpreted and takes over program flow when triggered by some un-obvious operation, such as viewing it. One use of such hacks is to break security. For example, some smart terminals have commands that allow one to download strings to program keys; this can be used to write live data that, when listed to the terminal, infects it with a security-breaking **virus** that is triggered the next time a hapless user strikes that key. For another, there are some well-known bugs in **vi** that allow certain texts to send arbitrary commands back to the machine when they are simply viewed. 2. In C code, data that includes pointers to function **hook**s (executable code). 3. An object, such as a **trampoline**, that is constructed on the fly by a program and intended to be executed as code.

Node:Live Free Or Die!, Next:livelock, Previous:live data, Up:= L =

Live Free Or Die! imp.

1. The state motto of New Hampshire, which appears on that state's automobile license plates. 2. A slogan associated with Unix in the romantic days when Unix aficionados saw themselves as a tiny, beleaguered underground tilting against the windmills of industry. The "free" referred specifically to freedom from the **fascist** design philosophies and crufty misfeatures common on competing operating systems. Armando Stettner, one of the early Unix developers, used to give out fake license plates bearing this motto under a large Unix, all in New Hampshire colors of green and white. These are now valued collector's items. In 1994 **DEC** put an inferior imitation of these in circulation with a red corporate logo added. Compaq (half of which was once DEC) has continued the practice.

Node:livelock, Next:liveware, Previous:Live Free Or Die!, Up:= L =

livelock /li:v'lok/ n.

A situation in which some critical stage of a task is unable to finish because its clients perpetually create more work for it to do after they have been serviced but before it can clear its queue. Differs from **deadlock** in that the process is not blocked or waiting for anything, but has a virtually infinite amount of work to do and can never catch up.

Node:liveware, Next:lobotomy, Previous:livelock, Up:= L =

liveware /li:v'weir/ n.

1. Synonym for **wetware**. Less common. 2. [Cambridge] Vermin. "Waiter, there's some liveware in my salad..."

Node:lobotomy, Next:locals the, Previous:liveware, Up:= L =

lobotomy n.

1. What a hacker subjected to formal management training is said to have undergone. At IBM and elsewhere this term is used by both hackers and low-level management; the latter doubtless intend it as a joke. 2. The act of removing the processor from a microcomputer in order to replace or upgrade it. Some very cheap **clone** systems are sold in `lobotomized' form -- everything but the brain.

Node:locals the, Next:locked and loaded, Previous:lobotomy, Up:= L =

locals, the pl.n.

The users on one's local network (as opposed, say, to people one reaches via public Internet or UUCP connects). The marked thing about this usage is how little it has to do with real-space distance. "I have to do some tweaking on this mail utility before releasing it to the locals."

Node:locked and loaded, Next:locked up, Previous:locals the, Up:= L =

locked and loaded adj.,obs.

[from military slang for an M-16 rifle with magazine inserted and prepared for firing] Said of a removable disk volume properly prepared for use -- that is, locked into the drive and with the heads loaded. Ironically, because their heads are `loaded' whenever the power is up, this description is never used of **Winchester** drives (which are named after a rifle).

Node:locked up, Next:logic bomb, Previous:locked and loaded, Up:= L =

locked up adj.

Syn. for **hung**, **wedged**.

Node:logic bomb, Next:logical, Previous:locked up, Up:= L =

logic bomb n.

Code surreptitiously inserted into an application or OS that causes it to perform some destructive or security-compromising activity whenever specified conditions are met. Compare **back door**.

Node:logical, Next:loop through, Previous:logic bomb, Up:= L =

logical adj.

[from the technical term `logical device', wherein a physical device is referred to by an arbitrary `logical' name] Having the role of. If a person (say, Les Earnest at SAIL) who had long held a certain post left and were replaced, the replacement would for a while be known as the `logical' Les Earnest. (This does not imply any judgment on the replacement.) Compare **virtual**.

At Stanford, `logical' compass directions denote a coordinate system in which `logical north' is toward San Francisco, `logical west' is toward the ocean, etc., even though logical north varies between physical (true) north near San Francisco and physical west near San Jose. (The best rule of thumb here is that, by definition, El Camino Real always runs logical north-and-south.) In giving directions, one might say: "To get to Rincon Tarasco restaurant, get onto **El Camino Bignum** going logical north." Using the word `logical' helps to prevent the recipient from worrying about that the fact that the sun is setting almost directly in front of him. The concept is reinforced by North American highways which are almost, but not quite, consistently labeled with logical rather than physical directions. A similar situation exists at MIT: Route 128 (famous for the electronics industry that has grown up along it) is a 3-quarters circle surrounding Boston at a radius of 10 miles, terminating near the coastline at each end. It would be most precise to describe the two directions along this highway as `clockwise' and `counterclockwise', but the road signs all say "north" and "south", respectively. A hacker might describe these directions as `logical north' and `logical south', to indicate that they are conventional directions not corresponding to the usual denotation for those words. (If you went logical south along the entire length of route 128, you would start out going northwest, curve around to the south, and finish headed due east, passing along one infamous stretch of pavement that is simultaneously route 128 south and Interstate 93 north, and is signed as such!)

Node:loop through, Next:loose bytes, Previous:logical, Up:= L =

loop through vt.

To process each element of a list of things. "Hold on, I've got to loop through my paper mail." Derives from the computer-language notion of an iterative loop; compare `cdr down' (under **cdr**), which is less common among C and Unix programmers. ITS hackers used to say `IRP over' after an obscure pseudo-op in the MIDAS PDP-10 assembler (the same IRP op can nowadays be found in Microsoft's assembler).

Node:loose bytes, Next:lord high fixer, Previous:loop through, Up:= L =

loose bytes n.

Commonwealth hackish term for the padding bytes or **shim**s many compilers insert between members of a record or structure to cope with alignment requirements imposed by the machine architecture.

Node:lord high fixer, Next:lose, Previous:loose bytes, Up:= L =

lord high fixer n.

[primarily British, from Gilbert & Sullivan's `lord high executioner'] The person in an organization who knows the most about some aspect of a system. See **wizard**.

Node:lose, Next:lose lose, Previous:lord high fixer, Up:= L =

lose vi.

1. [very common] To fail. A program loses when it encounters an exceptional condition or fails to work in the expected manner. 2. To be exceptionally unesthetic or crocky. 3. Of people, to be obnoxious or unusually stupid (as opposed to ignorant). See also **deserves to lose**. 4. n. Refers to something that is **losing**, especially in the phrases "That's a lose!" and "What a lose!"

Node:lose lose, Next:loser, Previous:lose, Up:= L =

lose lose interj.

A reply to or comment on an undesirable situation. "I accidentally deleted all my files!" "Lose, lose."

Node:loser, Next:losing, Previous:lose lose, Up:= L =

loser n.

An unexpectedly bad situation, program, programmer, or person. Someone who habitually loses. (Even winners can lose occasionally.) Someone who knows not and knows not that he knows not. Emphatic forms are `real loser', `total loser', and `complete loser' (but not **`moby loser', which would be a contradiction in terms). See **luser**.

Node:losing, Next:loss, Previous:loser, Up:= L =

losing adj.

Said of anything that is or causes a **lose** or **lossage**. "The compiler is losing badly when I try to use templates."

Node:loss, Next:lossage, Previous:losing, Up:= L =

loss n.

Something (not a person) that loses; a situation in which something is losing. Emphatic forms include `moby loss', and `total loss', `complete loss'. Common interjections are "What a loss!" and "What a moby loss!" Note that `moby loss' is OK even though **`moby loser' is not used; applied to an abstract noun, moby is simply a magnifier, whereas when applied to a person it implies substance and has positive connotations. Compare **lossage**.

Node:lossage, Next:lost in the noise, Previous:loss, Up:= L =

lossage /los'*j/ n.

[very common] The result of a bug or malfunction. This is a mass or collective noun. "What a loss!" and "What lossage!" are nearly synonymous. The former is slightly more particular to the speaker's present circumstances; the latter implies a continuing **lose** of which the speaker is currently a victim. Thus (for

example) a temporary hardware failure is a loss, but bugs in an important tool (like a compiler) are serious lossage.

Node:lost in the noise, Next:lost in the underflow, Previous:lossage, Up:= L =

lost in the noise adj.

Syn. **lost in the underflow**. This term is from signal processing, where signals of very small amplitude cannot be separated from low-intensity noise in the system. Though popular among hackers, it is not confined to hackerdom; physicists, engineers, astronomers, and statisticians all use it.

Node:lost in the underflow, Next:lots of MIPS but no I/O, Previous:lost in the noise, Up:= L =

lost in the underflow adj.

Too small to be worth considering; more specifically, small beyond the limits of accuracy or measurement. This is a reference to `floating underflow', a condition that can occur when a floating-point arithmetic processor tries to handle quantities smaller than its limit of magnitude. It is also a pun on `undertow' (a kind of fast, cold current that sometimes runs just offshore and can be dangerous to swimmers). "Well, sure, photon pressure from the stadium lights alters the path of a thrown baseball, but that effect gets lost in the underflow." Compare **epsilon**, **epsilon squared**; see also **overflow bit**.

Node:lots of MIPS but no I/O, Next:low-bandwidth, Previous:lost in the underflow, Up:= L =

lots of MIPS but no I/O adj.

Used to describe a person who is technically brilliant but can't seem to communicate with human beings effectively. Technically it describes a machine that has lots of processing power but is bottlenecked on input-output (in 1991, the IBM Rios, a.k.a. RS/6000, was a notorious example).

Node:low-bandwidth, Next:LPT, Previous:lots of MIPS but no I/O, Up:= L =

low-bandwidth adj.

[from communication theory] Used to indicate a talk that, although not **content-free**, was not terribly informative. "That was a low-bandwidth talk, but what can you expect for an audience of **suit**s!" Compare **zero-content**, **bandwidth**, **math-out**.

Node:LPT, Next:Lubarsky's Law of Cybernetic Entomology, Previous:low-bandwidth, Up:= L =

LPT /L-P-T/ or /lip'it/ or /lip-it'/ n.

1. Line printer (originally Line Printing Terminal). Rare under Unix, more common among hackers who grew up with ITS, MS-DOS, CP/M and other operating systems that were strongly influenced by early **DEC** conventions. 2. Local PorT. Used among MS-DOS programmers (and so expanded in the MS-DOS 5 manual). It seems likely this is a **backronym**.

Node:Lubarsky's Law of Cybernetic Entomology, Next:Lumber Cartel, Previous:LPT, Up:= L =

Lubarsky's Law of Cybernetic Entomology prov.

"There is *always* one more bug."

Node:Lumber Cartel, Next:lunatic fringe, Previous:Lubarsky's Law of Cybernetic Entomology, Up:= L =

Lumber Cartel n.

A mythical conspiracy accused by **spam**-spewers of funding anti-spam activism in order to force the direct-mail promotions industry back onto paper. Hackers, predictably, responded by forming a "Lumber Cartel" spoofing this paranoid theory; the web page is http://come.to/the.lumber.cartel. Members often include the tag TINLC ("There Is No Lumber Cartel") in their postings; see **TINC**, **backbone cabal** and **NANA** for explanation.

Node:lunatic fringe, Next:lurker, Previous:Lumber Cartel, Up:= L =

lunatic fringe n.

[IBM] Customers who can be relied upon to accept release 1 versions of software. Compare **heatseeker**.

Node:lurker, Next:luser, Previous:lunatic fringe, Up:= L =

lurker n.

One of the `silent majority' in a electronic forum; one who posts occasionally or not at all but is known to read the group's postings regularly. This term is not pejorative and indeed is casually used reflexively: "Oh, I'm just lurking." Often used in `the lurkers', the hypothetical audience for the group's **flamage**-emitting regulars. When a lurker speaks up for the first time, this is called `delurking'.

The creator of the popular science-fiction TV series "Babylon 5" has ties to SF fandom and the hacker culture. In that series, the use of the term `lurker' for a homeless or displaced person is a conscious reference to the jargon term.

Node:luser, Next:M, Previous:lurker, Up:= L =

luser /loo'zr/ n.

[common] A **user**; esp. one who is also a **loser**. (**luser** and **loser** are pronounced identically.) This word was coined around 1975 at MIT. Under ITS, when you first walked up to a terminal at MIT and typed Control-Z to get the computer's attention, it printed out some status information, including how many people were already using the computer; it might print "14 users", for example. Someone thought it would be a great joke to patch the system to print "14 losers" instead. There ensued a great controversy, as some of the users didn't particularly want to be called losers to their faces every time they used the computer. For a while several hackers struggled covertly, each changing the message behind the back of the others; any time you logged into the computer it was even money whether it would say "users" or "losers". Finally, someone tried the compromise "lusers", and it stuck. Later one of the ITS machines supported `luser` as a request-for-help command. ITS died the death in mid-1990, except as a museum piece; the usage lives on, however, and the term `luser' is often seen in program comments and on Usenet.

= M =

- M:
- M$:
- macdink:
- machinable:
- machoflops:
- Macintoy:
- Macintrash:
- macro:
- macro-:
- macrology:
- macrotape:
- maggotbox:
- magic:
- magic cookie:
- magic number:
- magic smoke:
- mail storm:
- mailbomb:
- mailing list:
- main loop:
- mainframe:
- management:
- mandelbug:
- manged:
- mangle:
- mangled name:
- mangler:
- manularity:
- marbles:
- marginal:
- Marginal Hacks:
- marginally:
- marketroid:
- Mars:
- martian:
- massage:
- math-out:
- Matrix:
- maximum Maytag mode:
- meatspace:
- meatware:
- meeces:
- meg:
- mega-:
- megapenny:
- MEGO:

- meltdown network:
- meme:
- meme plague:
- memetics:
- memory farts:
- memory leak:
- memory smash:
- menuitis:
- mess-dos:
- meta:
- meta bit:
- metasyntactic variable:
- MFTL:
- mickey:
- mickey mouse program:
- micro-:
- MicroDroid:
- microfloppies:
- microfortnight:
- microLenat:
- microReid:
- microserf:
- Microsloth Windows:
- Microsoft:
- middle-endian:
- middle-out implementation:
- milliLampson:
- minifloppies:
- MIPS:
- misbug:
- misfeature:
- Missed'em-five:
- missile address:
- miswart:
- MMF:
- mobo:
- moby:
- mockingbird:
- mod:
- mode:
- mode bit:
- modulo:
- molly-guard:
- Mongolian Hordes technique:
- monkey up:
- monkey scratch:
- monstrosity:
- monty:
- Moof:
- Moore's Law:
- moose call:
- moria:

- MOTAS:
- MOTOS:
- MOTSS:
- mouse ahead:
- mouse around:
- mouse belt:
- mouse droppings:
- mouse elbow:
- mouso:
- MS-DOS:
- mu:
- MUD:
- muddie:
- mudhead:
- multician:
- Multics:
- multitask:
- mumblage:
- mumble:
- munch:
- munching:
- munching squares:
- munchkin:
- mundane:
- mung:
- munge:
- Murphy's Law:
- music:
- mutter:

Node:M, Next:M$, Previous:luser, Up:= M =

M pref. (on units) suff. (on numbers)

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:M$, Next:macdink, Previous:M, Up:= M =

M$

Common net abbreviation for Microsoft, everybody's least favorite monopoly.

Node:macdink, Next:machinable, Previous:M$, Up:= M =

macdink /mak'dink/ vt.

[from the Apple Macintosh, which is said to encourage such behavior] To make many incremental and unnecessary cosmetic changes to a program or file. Often the subject of the macdinking would be better off without them. "When I left at 11 P.M. last night, he was still macdinking the slides for his

presentation." See also **fritterware**, **window shopping**.

Node:machinable, Next:machoflops, Previous:macdink, Up:= M =

machinable adj.

Machine-readable. Having the **softcopy** nature.

Node:machoflops, Next:Macintoy, Previous:machinable, Up:= M =

machoflops /mach'oh-flops/ n.

[pun on `megaflops', a coinage for `millions of FLoating-point Operations Per Second'] Refers to artificially inflated performance figures often quoted by computer manufacturers. Real applications are lucky to get half the quoted speed. See **Your mileage may vary**, **benchmark**.

Node:Macintoy, Next:Macintrash, Previous:machoflops, Up:= M =

Macintoy /mak'in-toy/ n.

The Apple Macintosh, considered as a **toy**. Less pejorative than **Macintrash**.

Node:Macintrash, Next:macro, Previous:Macintoy, Up:= M =

Macintrash /mak'in-trash`/ n.

The Apple Macintosh, as described by a hacker who doesn't appreciate being kept away from the *real computer* by the interface. The term **maggotbox** has been reported in regular use in the Research Triangle area of North Carolina. Compare **Macintoy**. See also **beige toaster**, **WIMP environment**, **point-and-drool interface**, **drool-proof paper**, **user-friendly**.

Node:macro, Next:macro-, Previous:Macintrash, Up:= M =

macro /mak'roh/ n.

[techspeak] A name (possibly followed by a formal **arg** list) that is equated to a text or symbolic expression to which it is to be expanded (possibly with the substitution of actual arguments) by a macro expander. This definition can be found in any technical dictionary; what those won't tell you is how the hackish connotations of the term have changed over time.

The term `macro' originated in early assemblers, which encouraged the use of macros as a structuring and information-hiding device. During the early 1970s, macro assemblers became ubiquitous, and sometimes quite as powerful and expensive as **HLL**s, only to fall from favor as improving compiler technology marginalized assembler programming (see **languages of choice**). Nowadays the term is most often used in connection with the C preprocessor, LISP, or one of several special-purpose languages built around a macro-expansion facility (such as TeX or Unix's [nt]roff suite).

Indeed, the meaning has drifted enough that the collective `macros' is now sometimes used for code in

any special-purpose application control language (whether or not the language is actually translated by text expansion), and for macro-like entities such as the `keyboard macros' supported in some text editors (and PC TSR or Macintosh INIT/CDEV keyboard enhancers).

Node:macro-, Next:macrology, Previous:macro, Up:= M =

macro- pref.

Large. Opposite of **micro-**. In the mainstream and among other technical cultures (for example, medical people) this competes with the prefix **mega-**, but hackers tend to restrict the latter to quantification.

Node:macrology, Next:macrotape, Previous:macro-, Up:= M =

macrology /mak-rol'*-jee/ n.

1. Set of usually complex or crufty macros, e.g., as part of a large system written in **LISP**, **TECO**, or (less commonly) assembler. 2. The art and science involved in comprehending a macrology in sense 1. Sometimes studying the macrology of a system is not unlike archeology, ecology, or **theology**, hence the sound-alike construction. See also **boxology**.

Node:macrotape, Next:maggotbox, Previous:macrology, Up:= M =

macrotape /mak'roh-tayp/ n.

An industry-standard reel of tape. Originally, as opposed to a DEC microtape; nowadays, as opposed to modern QIC and DDS tapes. Syn. **round tape**.

Node:maggotbox, Next:magic, Previous:macrotape, Up:= M =

maggotbox /mag'*t-boks/ n.

See **Macintrash**. This is even more derogatory.

Node:magic, Next:magic cookie, Previous:maggotbox, Up:= M =

magic

1. adj. As yet unexplained, or too complicated to explain; compare **automagically** and (Arthur C.) Clarke's Third Law: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." "TTY echoing is controlled by a large number of magic bits." "This routine magically computes the parity of an 8-bit byte in three instructions." 2. adj. Characteristic of something that works although no one really understands why (this is especially called **black magic**). 3. n. [Stanford] A feature not generally publicized that allows something otherwise impossible, or a feature formerly in that category but now unveiled. 4. n. The ultimate goal of all engineering & development, elegance in the extreme; from the first corollary to Clarke's Third Law: "Any technology distinguishable from magic is insufficiently advanced".

Parodies playing on these senses of the term abound; some have made their way into serious documentation, as when a MAGIC directive was described in the Control Card Reference for GCOS

c.1978. For more about hackish `magic', see **Appendix A**. Compare **black magic**, **wizardly**, **deep magic**, **heavy wizardry**.

Node:magic cookie, Next:magic number, Previous:magic, Up:= M =

magic cookie n.

[Unix; common] 1. Something passed between routines or programs that enables the receiver to perform some operation; a capability ticket or opaque identifier. Especially used of small data objects that contain data encoded in a strange or intrinsically machine-dependent way. E.g., on non-Unix OSes with a non-byte-stream model of files, the result of `ftell(3)` may be a magic cookie rather than a byte offset; it can be passed to `fseek(3)`, but not operated on in any meaningful way. The phrase `it hands you a magic cookie' means it returns a result whose contents are not defined but which can be passed back to the same or some other program later. 2. An in-band code for changing graphic rendition (e.g., inverse video or underlining) or performing other control functions (see also **cookie**). Some older terminals would leave a blank on the screen corresponding to mode-change magic cookies; this was also called a **glitch** (or occasionally a `turd'; compare **mouse droppings**). See also **cookie**.

Node:magic number, Next:magic smoke, Previous:magic cookie, Up:= M =

magic number n.

[Unix/C; common] 1. In source code, some non-obvious constant whose value is significant to the operation of a program and that is inserted inconspicuously in-line (**hardcoded**), rather than expanded in by a symbol set by a commented `#define`. Magic numbers in this sense are bad style. 2. A number that encodes critical information used in an algorithm in some opaque way. The classic examples of these are the numbers used in hash or CRC functions, or the coefficients in a linear congruential generator for pseudo-random numbers. This sense actually predates and was ancestral to the more commonsense 1. 3. Special data located at the beginning of a binary data file to indicate its type to a utility. Under Unix, the system and various applications programs (especially the linker) distinguish between types of executable file by looking for a magic number. Once upon a time, these magic numbers were PDP-11 branch instructions that skipped over header data to the start of executable code; 0407, for example, was octal for `branch 16 bytes relative'. Many other kinds of files now have magic numbers somewhere; some magic numbers are, in fact, strings, like the `!<arch>` at the beginning of a Unix archive file or the `%!` leading PostScript files. Nowadays only a **wizard** knows the spells to create magic numbers. How do you choose a fresh magic number of your own? Simple -- you pick one at random. See? It's magic!

The magic number, on the other hand, is 7+/-2. See "The magical number seven, plus or minus two: some limits on our capacity for processing information" by George Miller, in the "Psychological Review" 63:81-97 (1956). This classic paper established the number of distinct items (such as numeric digits) that humans can hold in short-term memory. Among other things, this strongly influenced the interface design of the phone system.

Node:magic smoke, Next:mail storm, Previous:magic number, Up:= M =

magic smoke n.

A substance trapped inside IC packages that enables them to function (also called `blue smoke'; this is similar to the archaic `phlogiston' hypothesis about combustion). Its existence is demonstrated by what happens when a chip burns up -- the magic smoke gets let out, so it doesn't work any more. See **smoke test**, **let the smoke out**.

Usenetter Jay Maynard tells the following story: "Once, while hacking on a dedicated Z80 system, I was testing code by blowing EPROMs and plugging them in the system, then seeing what happened. One time, I plugged one in backwards. I only discovered that *after* I realized that Intel didn't put power-on lights under the quartz windows on the tops of their EPROMs -- the die was glowing white-hot. Amazingly, the EPROM worked fine after I erased it, filled it full of zeros, then erased it again. For all I know, it's still in service. Of course, this is because the magic smoke didn't get let out." Compare the original phrasing of **Murphy's Law**.

Node:mail storm, Next:mailbomb, Previous:magic smoke, Up:= M =

mail storm n.

[from **broadcast storm**, influenced by `maelstrom'] What often happens when a machine with an Internet connection and active users re-connects after extended downtime -- a flood of incoming mail that brings the machine to its knees. See also **hairball**.

Node:mailbomb, Next:mailing list, Previous:mail storm, Up:= M =

mailbomb

(also *mail bomb*) [Usenet] 1. v. To send, or urge others to send, massive amounts of **email** to a single system or person, esp. with intent to crash or **spam** the recipient's system. Sometimes done in retaliation for a perceived serious offense. Mailbombing is itself widely regarded as a serious offense -- it can disrupt email traffic or other facilities for innocent users on the victim's system, and in extreme cases, even at upstream sites. 2. n. An automatic procedure with a similar effect. 3. n. The mail sent. Compare **letterbomb**, **nastygram**, **BLOB** (sense 2), **list-bomb**.

Node:mailing list, Next:main loop, Previous:mailbomb, Up:= M =

mailing list n.

(often shortened in context to `list') 1. An **email** address that is an alias (or **macro**, though that word is never used in this connection) for many other email addresses. Some mailing lists are simple `reflectors', redirecting mail sent to them to the list of recipients. Others are filtered by humans or programs of varying degrees of sophistication; lists filtered by humans are said to be `moderated'. 2. The people who receive your email when you send it to such an address.

Mailing lists are one of the primary forms of hacker interaction, along with **Usenet**. They predate Usenet, having originated with the first UUCP and ARPANET connections. They are often used for private information-sharing on topics that would be too specialized for or inappropriate to public Usenet groups. Though some of these maintain almost purely technical content (such as the Internet Engineering Task Force mailing list), others (like the `sf-lovers' list maintained for many years by Saul Jaffe) are recreational, and many are purely social. Perhaps the most infamous of the social lists was the eccentric *bandykin* distribution; its latter-day progeny, *lectroids* and *tanstaafl*, still include a number of the oddest and most interesting people in hackerdom.

Mailing lists are easy to create and (unlike Usenet) don't tie up a significant amount of machine resources (until they get very large, at which point they can become interesting torture tests for mail software). Thus, they are often created temporarily by working groups, the members of which can then collaborate on a project without ever needing to meet face-to-face. Much of the material in this lexicon was criticized and polished on just such a mailing list (called `jargon-friends'), which included all the co-authors of

Steele-1983.

Node:main loop, Next:mainframe, Previous:mailing list, Up:= M =

main loop n.

The top-level control flow construct in an input- or event-driven program, the one which receives and acts or dispatches on the program's input. See also **driver**.

Node:mainframe, Next:management, Previous:main loop, Up:= M =

mainframe n.

Term originally referring to the cabinet containing the central processor unit or `main frame' of a room-filling **Stone Age** batch machine. After the emergence of smaller `minicomputer' designs in the early 1970s, the traditional **big iron** machines were described as `mainframe computers' and eventually just as mainframes. The term carries the connotation of a machine designed for batch rather than interactive use, though possibly with an interactive timesharing operating system retrofitted onto it; it is especially used of machines built by IBM, Unisys, and the other great **dinosaur**s surviving from computing's **Stone Age**.

It has been common wisdom among hackers since the late 1980s that the mainframe architectural tradition is essentially dead (outside of the tiny market for **number-crunching** supercomputers (see **cray**)), having been swamped by the recent huge advances in IC technology and low-cost personal computing. The wave of failures, takeovers, and mergers among traditional mainframe makers in the early 1990s bore this out. The biggest mainframer of all, IBM, was compelled to re-invent itself as a huge systems-consulting house. (See **dinosaurs mating** and **killer micro**).

Node:management, Next:mandelbug, Previous:mainframe, Up:= M =

management n.

1. Corporate power elites distinguished primarily by their distance from actual productive work and their chronic failure to manage (see also **suit**). Spoken derisively, as in "*Management* decided that ...". 2. Mythically, a vast bureaucracy responsible for all the world's minor irritations. Hackers' satirical public notices are often signed `The Mgt'; this derives from the "Illuminatus" novels (see the **Bibliography** in Appendix C).

Node:mandelbug, Next:manged, Previous:management, Up:= M =

mandelbug /man'del-buhg/ n.

[from the Mandelbrot set] A bug whose underlying causes are so complex and obscure as to make its behavior appear chaotic or even non-deterministic. This term implies that the speaker thinks it is a **Bohr bug**, rather than a **heisenbug**. See also **schroedinbug**.

Node:manged, Next:mangle, Previous:mandelbug, Up:= M =

manged /mahnjd/ n.

[probably from the French `manger' or Italian `mangiare', to eat; perhaps influenced by English `mange', `mangy'] adj. Refers to anything that is mangled or damaged, usually beyond repair. "The disk was manged after the electrical storm." Compare **mung**.

Node:mangle, Next:mangled name, Previous:manged, Up:= M =

mangle vt.

1. Used similarly to **mung** or **scribble**, but more violent in its connotations; something that is mangled has been irreversibly and totally trashed. 2. To produce the **mangled name** corresponding to a C++ declaration.

Node:mangled name, Next:mangler, Previous:mangle, Up:= M =

mangled name n.

A name, appearing in a C++ object file, that is a coded representation of the object declaration as it appears in the source. Mangled names are used because C++ allows multiple objects to have the same name, as long as they are distinguishable in some other way, such as by having different parameter types. Thus, the internal name must have that additional information embedded in it, using the limited character set allowed by most linkers. For instance, one popular compiler encodes the standard library function declaration "memchr(const void*,int,unsigned int)" as "@memchr$qpxviui".

Node:mangler, Next:manularity, Previous:mangled name, Up:= M =

mangler n.

[DEC] A manager. Compare **management**. Note that **system mangler** is somewhat different in connotation.

Node:manularity, Next:marbles, Previous:mangler, Up:= M =

manularity /man`yoo-la'ri-tee/ n.

[prob. fr. techspeak `manual' + `granularity'] A notional measure of the manual labor required for some task, particularly one of the sort that automation is supposed to eliminate. "Composing English on paper has much higher manularity than using a text editor, especially in the revising stage." Hackers tend to consider manularity a symptom of primitive methods; in fact, a true hacker confronted with an apparent requirement to do a computing task **by hand** will inevitably seize the opportunity to build another tool (see **toolsmith**).

Node:marbles, Next:marginal, Previous:manularity, Up:= M =

marbles pl.n.

[from mainstream "lost all his/her marbles"] The minimum needed to build your way further up some hierarchy of tools or abstractions. After a bad system crash, you need to determine if the machine has enough marbles to come up on its own, or enough marbles to allow a rebuild from backups, or if you need

to rebuild from scratch. "This compiler doesn't even have enough marbles to compile **hello world**."

Node:marginal, Next:Marginal Hacks, Previous:marbles, Up:= M =

marginal adj.

[common] 1. [techspeak] An extremely small change. "A marginal increase in **core** can decrease **GC** time drastically." In everyday terms, this means that it is a lot easier to clean off your desk if you have a spare place to put some of the junk while you sort through it. 2. Of little merit. "This proposed new feature seems rather marginal to me." 3. Of extremely small probability of **win**ning. "The power supply was rather marginal anyway; no wonder it fried."

Node:Marginal Hacks, Next:marginally, Previous:marginal, Up:= M =

Marginal Hacks n.

Margaret Jacks Hall, a building into which the Stanford AI Lab was moved near the beginning of the 1980s (from the **D. C. Power Lab**).

Node:marginally, Next:marketroid, Previous:Marginal Hacks, Up:= M =

marginally adv.

Slightly. "The ravs here are only marginally better than at Small Eating Place." See **epsilon**.

Node:marketroid, Next:Mars, Previous:marginally, Up:= M =

marketroid /mar'k*-troyd/ n.

alt. `marketing slime', `marketeer', `marketing droid', `marketdroid'. A member of a company's marketing department, esp. one who promises users that the next version of a product will have features that are not actually scheduled for inclusion, are extremely difficult to implement, and/or are in violation of the laws of physics; and/or one who describes existing features (and misfeatures) in ebullient, buzzword-laden adspeak. Derogatory. Compare **droid**.

Node:Mars, Next:martian, Previous:marketroid, Up:= M =

Mars n.

A legendary tragic failure, the archetypal Hacker Dream Gone Wrong. Mars was the code name for a family of PDP-10 compatible computers built by Systems Concepts (now, The SC Group): the multi-processor SC-30M, the small uniprocessor SC-25M, and the never-built superprocessor SC-40M. These machines were marvels of engineering design; although not much slower than the unique **Foonly** F-1, they were physically smaller and consumed less power than the much slower **DEC** KS10 or Foonly F-2, F-3, or F-4 machines. They were also completely compatible with the DEC KL10, and ran all KL10 binaries (including the operating system) with no modifications at about 2-3 times faster than a KL10.

When DEC cancelled the Jupiter project in 1983, Systems Concepts should have made a bundle selling

their machine into shops with a lot of software investment in PDP-10s, and in fact their spring 1984 announcement generated a great deal of excitement in the PDP-10 world. TOPS-10 was running on the Mars by the summer of 1984, and TOPS-20 by early fall. Unfortunately, the hackers running Systems Concepts were much better at designing machines than at mass producing or selling them; the company allowed itself to be sidetracked by a bout of perfectionism into continually improving the design, and lost credibility as delivery dates continued to slip. They also overpriced the product ridiculously; they believed they were competing with the KL10 and VAX 8600 and failed to reckon with the likes of Sun Microsystems and other hungry startups building workstations with power comparable to the KL10 at a fraction of the price. By the time SC shipped the first SC-30M to Stanford in late 1985, most customers had already made the traumatic decision to abandon the PDP-10, usually for VMS or Unix boxes. Most of the Mars computers built ended up being purchased by CompuServe.

This tale and the related saga of **Foonly** hold a lesson for hackers: if you want to play in the **Real World**, you need to learn Real World moves.

Node:martian, Next:massage, Previous:Mars, Up:= M =

martian n.

A packet sent on a TCP/IP network with a source address of the test loopback interface [127.0.0.1]. This means that it will come back labeled with a source address that is clearly not of this earth. "The domain server is getting lots of packets from Mars. Does that gateway have a martian filter?" Compare **Christmas tree packet**, **Godzillagram**.

Node:massage, Next:math-out, Previous:martian, Up:= M =

massage vt.

[common] Vague term used to describe `smooth' transformations of a data set into a different form, esp. transformations that do not lose information. Connotes less pain than **munch** or **crunch**. "He wrote a program that massages X bitmap files into GIF format." Compare **slurp**.

Node:math-out, Next:Matrix, Previous:massage, Up:= M =

math-out n.

[poss. from `white-out' (the blizzard variety)] A paper or presentation so encrusted with mathematical or other formal notation as to be incomprehensible. This may be a device for concealing the fact that it is actually **content-free**. See also **numbers**, **social science number**.

Node:Matrix, Next:maximum Maytag mode, Previous:math-out, Up:= M =

Matrix n.

[FidoNet] 1. What the Opus BBS software and sysops call **FidoNet**. 2. Fanciful term for a **cyberspace** expected to emerge from current networking experiments (see **the network**). The name of the rather good 1999 **cypherpunk** movie "The Matrix" played on this sense, which however had been established for years before. 3. The totality of present-day computer networks (popularized in this sense by John Quarterman; rare outside academic literature).

Node:maximum Maytag mode, Next:meatspace, Previous:Matrix, Up:= M =

maximum Maytag mode n.

What a **washing machine** or, by extension, any disk drive is in when it's being used so heavily that it's shaking like an old Maytag with an unbalanced load. If prolonged for any length of time, can lead to disks becoming **walking drives**. In 1999 it's been some years since hard disks were large enough to do this, but the same phenomenon has recently been reported with 24X CD-ROM drives.

Node:meatspace, Next:meatware, Previous:maximum Maytag mode, Up:= M =

meatspace /meet'spays/ n.

The physical world, where the meat lives - as opposed to **cyberspace**. Hackers are actually more willing to use this term than `cyberspace', because it's not speculative - we already have a running meatspace implementation (the universe). Compare **RL**.

Node:meatware, Next:meeces, Previous:meatspace, Up:= M =

meatware n.

Synonym for **wetware**. Less common.

Node:meeces, Next:meg, Previous:meatware, Up:= M =

meeces /mees'*z/ n.

[TMRC] Occasional furry visitors who are not **urchin**s. [That is, mice. This may no longer be in live use; it clearly derives from the refrain of the early-1960s cartoon character Mr. Jinx: "I hate meeces to *pieces*!" -- ESR]

Node:meg, Next:mega-, Previous:meeces, Up:= M =

meg /meg/ n.

See **quantifiers**.

Node:mega-, Next:megapenny, Previous:meg, Up:= M =

mega- /me'g*/ pref.

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:megapenny, Next:MEGO, Previous:mega-, Up:= M =

megapenny /meg'*-pen`ee/ n.

$10,000 (1 cent * 10^6). Used semi-humorously as a unit in comparing computer cost and performance figures.

Node:MEGO, Next:meltdown network, Previous:megapenny, Up:= M =

MEGO /me'goh/ or /mee'goh/

[`My Eyes Glaze Over', often `Mine Eyes Glazeth (sic) Over', attributed to the futurologist Herman Kahn] Also `MEGO factor'. 1. n. A **handwave** intended to confuse the listener and hopefully induce agreement because the listener does not want to admit to not understanding what is going on. MEGO is usually directed at senior management by engineers and contains a high proportion of **TLA**s. 2. excl. An appropriate response to MEGO tactics. 3. Among non-hackers, often refers not to behavior that causes the eyes to glaze, but to the eye-glazing reaction itself, which may be triggered by the mere threat of technical detail as effectively as by an actual excess of it.

Node:meltdown network, Next:meme, Previous:MEGO, Up:= M =

meltdown, network n.

See **network meltdown**.

Node:meme, Next:meme plague, Previous:meltdown network, Up:= M =

meme /meem/ n.

[coined by analogy with `gene', by Richard Dawkins] An idea considered as a **replicator**, esp. with the connotation that memes parasitize people into propagating them much as viruses do. Used esp. in the phrase `meme complex' denoting a group of mutually supporting memes that form an organized belief system, such as a religion. This lexicon is an (epidemiological) vector of the `hacker subculture' meme complex; each entry might be considered a meme. However, `meme' is often misused to mean `meme complex'. Use of the term connotes acceptance of the idea that in humans (and presumably other tool- and language-using sophonts) cultural evolution by selection of adaptive ideas has superseded biological evolution by selection of hereditary traits. Hackers find this idea congenial for tolerably obvious reasons.

Node:meme plague, Next:memetics, Previous:meme, Up:= M =

meme plague n.

The spread of a successful but pernicious **meme**, esp. one that parasitizes the victims into giving their all to propagate it. Astrology, BASIC, and the other guy's religion are often considered to be examples. This usage is given point by the historical fact that `joiner' ideologies like Naziism or various forms of millennarian Christianity have exhibited plague-like cycles of exponential growth followed by collapses to small reservoir populations.

Node:memetics, Next:memory farts, Previous:meme plague, Up:= M =

memetics /me-met'iks/ n.

[from **meme**] The study of memes. As of early 1999, this is still an extremely informal and speculative endeavor, though the first steps towards at least statistical rigor have been made by H. Keith Henson and others. Memetics is a popular topic for speculation among hackers, who like to see themselves as the architects of the new information ecologies in which memes live and replicate.

Node:memory farts, Next:memory leak, Previous:memetics, Up:= M =

memory farts n.

The flatulent sounds that some DOS box BIOSes (most notably AMI's) make when checking memory on bootup.

Node:memory leak, Next:memory smash, Previous:memory farts, Up:= M =

memory leak n.

An error in a program's dynamic-store allocation logic that causes it to fail to reclaim discarded memory, leading to eventual collapse due to memory exhaustion. Also (esp. at CMU) called **core leak**. These problems were severe on older machines with small, fixed-size address spaces, and special "leak detection" tools were commonly written to root them out. With the advent of virtual memory, it is unfortunately easier to be sloppy about wasting a bit of memory (although when you run out of memory on a VM machine, it means you've got a *real* leak!). See **aliasing bug**, **fandango on core**, **smash the stack**, **precedence lossage**, **overrun screw**, **leaky heap**, **leak**.

Node:memory smash, Next:menuitis, Previous:memory leak, Up:= M =

memory smash n.

[XEROX PARC] Writing through a pointer that doesn't point to what you think it does. This occasionally reduces your machine to a rubble of bits. Note that this is subtly different from (and more general than) related terms such as a **memory leak** or **fandango on core** because it doesn't imply an allocation error or overrun condition.

Node:menuitis, Next:mess-dos, Previous:memory smash, Up:= M =

menuitis /men`yoo-i:'tis/ n.

Notional disease suffered by software with an obsessively simple-minded menu interface and no escape. Hackers find this intensely irritating and much prefer the flexibility of command-line or language-style interfaces, especially those customizable via macros or a special-purpose language in which one can encode useful hacks. See **user-obsequious**, **drool-proof paper**, **WIMP environment**, **for the rest of us**.

Node:mess-dos, Next:meta, Previous:menuitis, Up:= M =

mess-dos /mes-dos/ n.

[semi-obsolescent now that DOS is] Derisory term for MS-DOS. Often followed by the ritual banishing "Just say No!" See **MS-DOS**. Most hackers (even many MS-DOS hackers) loathed MS-DOS for its single-tasking nature, its limits on application size, its nasty primitive interface, and its ties to IBMness and Microsoftness (see **fear and loathing**). Also `mess-loss', `messy-dos', `mess-dog', `mess-dross', `mush-dos', and various combinations thereof. In Ireland and the U.K. it is even sometimes called `Domestos' after a brand of toilet cleanser.

Node:meta, Next:meta bit, Previous:mess-dos, Up:= M =

meta /me't*/ or /may't*/ or (Commonwealth) /mee't*/ adj.,pref.

[from analytic philosophy] One level of description up. A metasyntactic variable is a variable in notation used to describe syntax, and meta-language is language used to describe language. This is difficult to explain briefly, but much hacker humor turns on deliberate confusion between meta-levels. See **hacker humor**.

Node:meta bit, Next:metasyntactic variable, Previous:meta, Up:= M =

meta bit n.

The top bit of an 8-bit character, which is on in character values 128-255. Also called **high bit**, **alt bit**, or (rarely) **hobbit**. Some terminals and consoles (see **space-cadet keyboard**) have a META shift key. Others (including, *mirabile dictu*, keyboards on IBM PC-class machines) have an ALT key. See also **bucky bits**.

Historical note: although in modern usage shaped by a universe of 8-bit bytes the meta bit is invariably hex 80 (octal 0200), things were different on earlier machines with 36-bit words and 9-bit bytes. The MIT and Stanford keyboards (see **space-cadet keyboard**) generated hex 100 (octal 400) from their meta keys.

Node:metasyntactic variable, Next:MFTL, Previous:meta bit, Up:= M =

metasyntactic variable n.

A name used in examples and understood to stand for whatever thing is under discussion, or any random member of a class of things under discussion. The word **foo** is the **canonical** example. To avoid confusion, hackers never (well, hardly ever) use `foo' or other words like it as permanent names for anything. In filenames, a common convention is that any filename beginning with a metasyntactic-variable name is a **scratch** file that may be deleted at any time.

Metasyntactic variables are so called because (1) they are variables in the metalanguage used to talk about programs etc; (2) they are variables whose values are often variables (as in usages usages like "the value of f(foo,bar) is the sum of foo and bar"). However, it has been plausibly suggested that the real reason for the term "metasyntactic variable" is that it sounds good.

To some extent, the list of one's preferred metasyntactic variables is a cultural signature. They occur both in series (used for related groups of variables or objects) and as singletons. Here are a few common signatures:

foo, **bar**, **baz**, **quux**, quuux, quuuux...:

MIT/Stanford usage, now found everywhere (thanks largely to early versions of this

lexicon!). At MIT (but not at Stanford), **baz** dropped out of use for a while in the 1970s and '80s. A common recent mutation of this sequence inserts **qux** before **quux**.

bazola, ztesch:

Stanford (from mid-'70s on).

foo, **bar**, thud, grunt:

This series was popular at CMU. Other CMU-associated variables include **gorp**.

foo, **bar**, fum:

This series is reported to be common at XEROX PARC.

fred, jim, sheila, **barney**:

See the entry for **fred**. These tend to be Britishisms.

corge, **grault**, **flarp**:

Popular at Rutgers University and among **GOSMACS** hackers.

zxc, spqr, wombat:

Cambridge University (England).

shme

Berkeley, GeoWorks, Ingres. Pronounced /shme/ with a short /e/.

foo, bar, baz, bongo

Yale, late 1970s.

spam

Python programmers.

snork

Brown University, early 1970s.

foo, **bar**, zot

Helsinki University of Technology, Finland.

blarg, wibble

New Zealand.

toto, titi, tata, tutu

France.

pippo, pluto, paperino

Italy. Pippo /pee'po/ and Paperino /pa-per-ee'-no/ are the Italian names for Goofy and Donald Duck.

aap, noot, mies

The Netherlands. These are the first words a child used to learn to spell on a Dutch spelling board.

Of all these, only `foo' and `bar' are universal (and **baz** nearly so). The compounds **foobar** and `foobaz' also enjoy very wide currency.

Some jargon terms are also used as metasyntactic names; **barf** and **mumble**, for example. See also **Commonwealth Hackish** for discussion of numerous metasyntactic variables found in Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

Node:MFTL, Next:mickey, Previous:metasyntactic variable, Up:= M =

MFTL /M-F-T-L/

[abbreviation: `My Favorite Toy Language'] 1. adj. Describes a talk on a programming language design that is heavy on the syntax (with lots of BNF), sometimes even talks about semantics (e.g., type systems), but rarely, if ever, has any content (see **content-free**). More broadly applied to talks -- even when the topic is not a programming language -- in which the subject matter is gone into in unnecessary and meticulous detail at the sacrifice of any conceptual content. "Well, it was a typical MFTL talk". 2. n. Describes a language about which the developers are passionate (often to the point of proselytic zeal) but no one else cares about. Applied to the language by those outside the originating group. "He cornered me about type resolution in his MFTL."

The first great goal in the mind of the designer of an MFTL is usually to write a compiler for it, then bootstrap the design away from contamination by lesser languages by writing a compiler for it in itself. Thus, the standard put-down question at an MFTL talk is "Has it been used for anything besides its own compiler?" On the other hand, a (compiled) language that cannot even be used to write its own compiler is beneath contempt. (The qualification has become necessary because of the increasing popularity of interpreted languages like **Perl** and **Python**. See **break-even point**.

(On a related note, Doug McIlroy once proposed a test of the generality and utility of a language and the operating system under which it is compiled: "Is the output of a FORTRAN program acceptable as input to the FORTRAN compiler?" In other words, can you write programs that write programs? (See **toolsmith**.) Alarming numbers of (language, OS) pairs fail this test, particularly when the language is FORTRAN; aficionados are quick to point out that **Unix** (even using FORTRAN) passes it handily. That the test could ever be failed is only surprising to those who have had the good fortune to have worked only under modern systems which lack OS-supported and -imposed "file types".)

Node:mickey, Next:mickey mouse program, Previous:MFTL, Up:= M =

mickey n.

The resolution unit of mouse movement. It has been suggested that the `disney' will become a benchmark unit for animation graphics performance.

Node:mickey mouse program, Next:micro-, Previous:mickey, Up:= M =

mickey mouse program n.

North American equivalent of a **noddy** (that is, trivial) program. Doesn't necessarily have the belittling connotations of mainstream slang "Oh, that's just mickey mouse stuff!"; sometimes trivial programs can be very useful.

Node:micro-, Next:MicroDroid, Previous:mickey mouse program, Up:= M =

micro- pref.

1. Very small; this is the root of its use as a quantifier prefix. 2. A quantifier prefix, calling for multiplication by 10^(-6) (see **quantifiers**). Neither of these uses is peculiar to hackers, but hackers tend to fling them both around rather more freely than is countenanced in standard English. It is recorded, for example, that one CS professor used to characterize the standard length of his lectures as a microcentury -- that is, about 52.6 minutes (see also **attoparsec**, **nanoacre**, and especially **microfortnight**). 3. Personal or human-scale -- that is, capable of being maintained or comprehended or manipulated by one human being. This sense is generalized from `microcomputer', and is esp. used in contrast with `macro-' (the corresponding Greek prefix meaning `large'). 4. Local as opposed to global (or **macro-**). Thus a hacker might say that buying a smaller car to reduce pollution only solves a microproblem; the macroproblem of getting to work might be better solved by using mass transit, moving to within walking distance, or (best of all) telecommuting.

Node:MicroDroid, Next:microfloppies, Previous:micro-, Up:= M =

MicroDroid n.

[Usenet] A Microsoft employee, esp. one who posts to various operating-system advocacy newsgroups. MicroDroids post follow-ups to any messages critical of Microsoft's operating systems, and often end up sounding like visiting Mormon missionaries. See also **astroturfing**; compare **microserf**.

Node:microfloppies, Next:microfortnight, Previous:MicroDroid, Up:= M =

microfloppies n.

3.5-inch floppies, as opposed to 5.25-inch **vanilla** or mini-floppies and the now-obsolete 8-inch variety. This term may be headed for obsolescence as 5.25-inchers pass out of use, only to be revived if anybody floats a sub-3-inch floppy standard. See **stiffy**, **minifloppies**.

Node:microfortnight, Next:microLenat, Previous:microfloppies, Up:= M =

microfortnight n.

1/1000000 of the fundamental unit of time in the Furlong/Firkin/Fortnight system of measurement; 1.2096 sec. (A furlong is 1/8th of a mile; a firkin is 1/4th of a barrel; the mass unit of the system is taken to be a firkin of water). The VMS operating system has a lot of tuning parameters that you can set with the SYSGEN utility, and one of these is TIMEPROMPTWAIT, the time the system will wait for an operator to set the correct date and time at boot if it realizes that the current value is bogus. This time is specified in microfortnights!

Multiple uses of the millifortnight (about 20 minutes) and **nanofortnight** have also been reported.

Node:microLenat, Next:microReid, Previous:microfortnight, Up:= M =

microLenat /mi:`-kroh-len'-*t/ n.

The unit of **bogosity**. consensus is that this is the largest unit practical for everyday use. The microLenat, originally invented by David Jefferson, was promulgated as an attack against noted computer scientist Doug Lenat by a **tenured graduate student** at CMU. Doug had failed the student on an important exam because the student gave only "AI is bogus" as his answer to the questions. The slur is generally considered unmerited, but it has become a running gag nevertheless. Some of Doug's friends argue that *of course* a microLenat is bogus, since it is only one millionth of a Lenat. Others have suggested that the unit should be redesignated after the grad student, as the microReid.

Node:microReid, Next:microserf, Previous:microLenat, Up:= M =

microReid /mi:'kroh-reed/ n.

See **microLenat**.

Node:microserf, Next:Microsloth Windows, Previous:microReid, Up:= M =

microserf /mi:'kro-s*rf/

[popularized, though not originated, by Douglas Copeland's book "Microserfs"] A programmer at **Microsoft**, especially a low-level coder with little chance of fame or fortune. Compare **MicroDroid**.

Node:Microsloth Windows, Next:Microsoft, Previous:microserf, Up:= M =

Microsloth Windows /mi:'kroh-sloth` win'dohz/ n.

(Variants combine {Microshift, Macroshaft, Microsuck} with {Windoze, WinDOS}. Hackerism(s) for `Microsoft Windows'. A thirty-two bit extension and graphical shell to a sixteen bit patch to an eight bit operating system originally coded for a four bit microprocessor which was written by a two-bit company that can't stand one bit of competition. Also just called `Windoze', with the implication that you can fall asleep waiting for it to do anything; the latter term is extremely common on Usenet. See **Black Screen of Death** and **Blue Screen of Death**; compare **X**, **sun-stools**.

Node:Microsoft, Next:middle-endian, Previous:Microsloth Windows, Up:= M =

Microsoft

The new **Evil Empire** (the old one was **IBM**). The basic complaints are, as formerly with IBM, that (a) their system designs are horrible botches, (b) we can't get source to fix them, and (c) they throw their weight around a lot. See also **Halloween Documents**.

Node:middle-endian, Next:middle-out implementation, Previous:Microsoft, Up:= M =

middle-endian adj.

Not **big-endian** or **little-endian**. Used of perverse byte orders such as 3-4-1-2 or 2-1-4-3, occasionally found in the packed-decimal formats of minicomputer manufacturers who shall remain nameless. See **NUXI problem**. Non-US hackers use this term to describe the American mm/dd/yy style of writing dates (Europeans write little-endian dd/mm/yy, and Japanese use big-endian yy/mm/dd for Western dates).

Node:middle-out implementation, Next:milliLampson, Previous:middle-endian, Up:= M =

middle-out implementation

See **bottom-up implementation**.

Node:milliLampson, Next:minifloppies, Previous:middle-out implementation, Up:= M =

milliLampson /mil'*-lamp`sn/ n.

A unit of talking speed, abbreviated mL. Most people run about 200 milliLampsons. The eponymous Butler Lampson (a CS theorist and systems implementor highly regarded among hackers) goes at 1000. A few people speak faster. This unit is sometimes used to compare the (sometimes widely disparate) rates at which people can generate ideas and actually emit them in speech. For example, noted computer architect C. Gordon Bell (designer of the PDP-11) is said, with some awe, to think at about 1200 mL but only talk at about 300; he is frequently reduced to fragments of sentences as his mouth tries to keep up with his speeding brain.

Node:minifloppies, Next:MIPS, Previous:milliLampson, Up:= M =

minifloppies n.,obs.

5.25-inch **vanilla** floppy disks, as opposed to 3.5-inch or **microfloppies** and the now-obsolescent 8-inch variety. At one time, this term was a trademark of Shugart Associates for their SA-400 minifloppy drive. Nobody paid any attention. See **stiffy**.

Node:MIPS, Next:misbug, Previous:minifloppies, Up:= M =

MIPS /mips/ n.

[abbreviation] 1. A measure of computing speed; formally, `Million Instructions Per Second' (that's 10^6 per second, not 2^(20)!); often rendered by hackers as `Meaningless Indication of Processor Speed' or in other unflattering ways, such as `Meaningless Information Provided by Salesmen'. This joke expresses an attitude nearly universal among hackers about the value of most **benchmark** claims, said attitude being one of the great cultural divides between hackers and **marketroid**s (see also **BogoMIPS**). The singular is sometimes `1 MIP' even though this is clearly etymologically wrong. See also **KIPS** and **GIPS**. 2. Computers, especially large computers, considered abstractly as sources of **computron**s. "This is just a workstation; the heavy MIPS are hidden in the basement." 3. The corporate name of a particular RISC-chip company; among other things, they designed the processor chips used in **DEC**'s 3100 workstation series. 4. Acronym for `Meaningless Information per Second' (a joke, prob. from sense 1).

Node:misbug, Next:misfeature, Previous:MIPS, Up:= M =

misbug /mis-buhg/ n.

[MIT; rare (like its referent)] An unintended property of a program that turns out to be useful; something that should have been a **bug** but turns out to be a **feature**. Compare **green lightning**. See **miswart**.

Node:misfeature, Next:Missed'em-five, Previous:misbug, Up:= M =

misfeature /mis-fee'chr/ or /mis'fee`chr/ n.

[common] A feature that eventually causes lossage, possibly because it is not adequate for a new situation that has evolved. Since it results from a deliberate and properly implemented feature, a misfeature is not a bug. Nor is it a simple unforeseen side effect; the term implies that the feature in question was carefully planned, but its long-term consequences were not accurately or adequately predicted (which is quite different from not having thought ahead at all). A misfeature can be a particularly stubborn problem to resolve, because fixing it usually involves a substantial philosophical change to the structure of the system involved.

Many misfeatures (especially in user-interface design) arise because the designers/implementors mistake their personal tastes for laws of nature. Often a former feature becomes a misfeature because trade-offs were made whose parameters subsequently change (possibly only in the judgment of the implementors). "Well, yeah, it is kind of a misfeature that file names are limited to six characters, but the original implementors wanted to save directory space and we're stuck with it for now."

Node:Missed'em-five, Next:missile address, Previous:misfeature, Up:= M =

Missed'em-five n.

Pejorative hackerism for AT&T System V Unix, generally used by **BSD** partisans in a bigoted mood. (The synonym `SysVile' is also encountered.) See **software bloat**, **Berzerkeley**.

Node:missile address, Next:miswart, Previous:Missed'em-five, Up:= M =

missile address n.

See **ICBM address**.

Node:miswart, Next:MMF, Previous:missile address, Up:= M =

miswart /mis-wort/ n.

[from **wart** by analogy with **misbug**] A **feature** that superficially appears to be a **wart** but has been determined to be the **Right Thing**. For example, in some versions of the **EMACS** text editor, the `transpose characters' command exchanges the character under the cursor with the one before it on the screen, *except* when the cursor is at the end of a line, in which case the two characters before the cursor are exchanged. While this behavior is perhaps surprising, and certainly inconsistent, it has been found through extensive experimentation to be what most users want. This feature is a miswart.

MMF //

[Usenet; common] Abbreviation: "Make Money Fast". Refers to any kind of scheme which promises participants large profits with little or no risk or effort. Typically, it is a some kind of multi-level marketing operation which involves recruiting more members, or an illegal pyramid scam. The term is also used to refer to any kind of spam which promotes this. For more information, see the Make Money Fast Myth Page.

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mobo /moh'bo/

Written and (rarely) spoken contraction of "motherboard"

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moby /moh'bee/

[MIT: seems to have been in use among model railroad fans years ago. Derived from Melville's "Moby Dick" (some say from `Moby Pickle'). Now common.] 1. adj. Large, immense, complex, impressive. "A Saturn V rocket is a truly moby frob." "Some MIT undergrads pulled off a moby hack at the Harvard-Yale game." (See **Appendix A** for discussion.) 2. n. obs. The maximum address space of a machine (see below). For a 680[234]0 or VAX or most modern 32-bit architectures, it is 4,294,967,296 8-bit bytes (4 gigabytes). 3. A title of address (never of third-person reference), usually used to show admiration, respect, and/or friendliness to a competent hacker. "Greetings, moby Dave. How's that address-book thing for the Mac going?" 4. adj. In backgammon, doubles on the dice, as in `moby sixes', `moby ones', etc. Compare this with **bignum** (sense 3): double sixes are both bignums and moby sixes, but moby ones are not bignums (the use of `moby' to describe double ones is sarcastic). Standard emphatic forms: `Moby foo', `moby win', `moby loss'. `Foby moo': a spoonerism due to Richard Greenblatt. 5. The largest available unit of something which is available in discrete increments. Thus, ordering a "moby Coke" at the local fast-food joint is not just a request for a large Coke, it's an explicit request for the largest size they sell.

This term entered hackerdom with the Fabritek 256K memory added to the MIT AI PDP-6 machine, which was considered unimaginably huge when it was installed in the 1960s (at a time when a more typical memory size for a timesharing system was 72 kilobytes). Thus, a moby is classically 256K 36-bit words, the size of a PDP-6 or PDP-10 moby. Back when address registers were narrow the term was more generally useful, because when a computer had virtual memory mapping, it might actually have more physical memory attached to it than any one program could access directly. One could then say "This computer has 6 mobies" meaning that the ratio of physical memory to address space is 6, without having to say specifically how much memory there actually is. That in turn implied that the computer could timeshare six `full-sized' programs without having to swap programs between memory and disk.

Nowadays the low cost of processor logic means that address spaces are usually larger than the most physical memory you can cram onto a machine, so most systems have much *less* than one theoretical `native' moby of **core**. Also, more modern memory-management techniques (esp. paging) make the `moby count' less significant. However, there is one series of widely-used chips for which the term could stand to be revived -- the Intel 8088 and 80286 with their incredibly **brain-damaged** segmented-memory designs. On these, a `moby' would be the 1-megabyte address span of a segment/offset pair (by coincidence, a PDP-10 moby was exactly 1 megabyte of 9-bit bytes).

Node:mockingbird, Next:mod, Previous:moby, Up:= M =

mockingbird n.

Software that intercepts communications (especially login transactions) between users and hosts and provides system-like responses to the users while saving their responses (especially account IDs and passwords). A special case of **Trojan horse**.

Node:mod, Next:mode, Previous:mockingbird, Up:= M =

mod vt.,n.

[very common] 1. Short for `modify' or `modification'. Very commonly used -- in fact the full terms are considered markers that one is being formal. The plural `mods' is used esp. with reference to bug fixes or minor design changes in hardware or software, most esp. with respect to **patch** sets or a **diff**. 2. Short for **modulo** but used *only* for its techspeak sense.

Node:mode, Next:mode bit, Previous:mod, Up:= M =

mode n.

[common] A general state, usually used with an adjective describing the state. Use of the word `mode' rather than `state' implies that the state is extended over time, and probably also that some activity characteristic of that state is being carried out. "No time to hack; I'm in thesis mode." In its jargon sense, `mode' is most often attributed to people, though it is sometimes applied to programs and inanimate objects. In particular, see **hack mode**, **day mode**, **night mode**, **demo mode**, **fireworks mode**, and **yoyo mode**; also **talk mode**.

One also often hears the verbs `enable' and `disable' used in connection with jargon modes. Thus, for example, a sillier way of saying "I'm going to crash" is "I'm going to enable crash mode now". One might also hear a request to "disable flame mode, please".

In a usage much closer to techspeak, a mode is a special state that certain user interfaces must pass into in order to perform certain functions. For example, in order to insert characters into a document in the Unix editor `vi`, one must type the "i" key, which invokes the "Insert" command. The effect of this command is to put vi into "insert mode", in which typing the "i" key has a quite different effect (to wit, it inserts an "i" into the document). One must then hit another special key, "ESC", in order to leave "insert mode". Nowadays, modeful interfaces are generally considered **losing** but survive in quite a few widely used tools built in less enlightened times.

Node:mode bit, Next:modulo, Previous:mode, Up:= M =

mode bit n.

[common] A **flag**, usually in hardware, that selects between two (usually quite different) modes of operation. The connotations are different from **flag** bit in that mode bits are mainly written during a boot or set-up phase, are seldom explicitly read, and seldom change over the lifetime of an ordinary program. The classic example was the EBCDIC-vs.-ASCII bit (#12) of the Program Status Word of the IBM 360.

Node:modulo, Next:molly-guard, Previous:mode bit, Up:= M =

modulo /mod'yu-loh/ prep.

Except for. An overgeneralization of mathematical terminology; one can consider saying that 4 equals 22 except for the 9s (4 = 22 mod 9). "Well, LISP seems to work okay now, modulo that **GC** bug." "I feel fine today modulo a slight headache."

Node:molly-guard, Next:Mongolian Hordes technique, Previous:modulo, Up:= M =

molly-guard /mol'ee-gard/ n.

[University of Illinois] A shield to prevent tripping of some **Big Red Switch** by clumsy or ignorant hands. Originally used of the plexiglass covers improvised for the BRS on an IBM 4341 after a programmer's toddler daughter (named Molly) frobbed it twice in one day. Later generalized to covers over stop/reset switches on disk drives and networking equipment. In hardware catalogues, you'll see the much less interesting description "guarded button".

Node:Mongolian Hordes technique, Next:monkey up, Previous:molly-guard, Up:= M =

Mongolian Hordes technique n.

[poss. from the Sixties counterculture expression `Mongolian clusterfuck' for a public orgy] Development by **gang bang**. Implies that large numbers of inexperienced programmers are being put on a job better performed by a few skilled ones (but see **bazaar**). Also called `Chinese Army technique'; see also **Brooks's Law**.

Node:monkey up, Next:monkey scratch, Previous:Mongolian Hordes technique, Up:= M =

monkey up vt.

To hack together hardware for a particular task, especially a one-shot job. Connotes an extremely **crufty** and consciously temporary solution. Compare **hack up**, **kluge up**, **cruft together**.

Node:monkey scratch, Next:monstrosity, Previous:monkey up, Up:= M =

monkey, scratch n.

See **scratch monkey**.

Node:monstrosity, Next:monty, Previous:monkey scratch, Up:= M =

monstrosity

1. n. A ridiculously **elephantine** program or system, esp. one that is buggy or only marginally functional. 2. adj. The quality of being monstrous (see `Overgeneralization' in the discussion of jargonification). See also **baroque**.

Node:monty, Next:Moof, Previous:monstrosity, Up:= M =

monty /mon'tee/ n.

1. [US Geological Survey] A program with a ludicrously complex user interface written to perform extremely trivial tasks. An example would be a menu-driven, button clicking, pulldown, pop-up windows program for listing directories. The original monty was an infamous weather-reporting program, Monty the Amazing Weather Man, written at the USGS. Monty had a widget-packed X-window interface with over 200 buttons; and all monty actually *did* was **FTP** files off the network. 2. [Great Britain; commonly capitalized as `Monty' or as `the Full Monty'] 16 megabytes of memory, when fitted to an IBM-PC or compatible. A standard PC-compatible using the AT- or ISA-bus with a normal BIOS cannot access more than 16 megabytes of RAM. Generally used of a PC, Unix workstation, etc. to mean `fully populated with' memory, disk-space or some other desirable resource. This usage may be related to a TV commercial for Del Monte fruit juice, in which one of the characters insisted on "the full Del Monte"; but see the World Wide Words article "The Full Monty" for discussion of the rather complex etymology that may lie behind this. Compare American **moby**.

Node:Moof, Next:Moore's Law, Previous:monty, Up:= M =

Moof /moof/

[Macintosh users] 1. n. The call of a semi-legendary creature, properly called the **dogcow**. (Some previous versions of this entry claimed, incorrectly, that Moof was the name of the *creature*.) 2. adj. Used to flag software that's a hack, something untested and on the edge. On one Apple CD-ROM, certain folders such as "Tools & Apps (Moof!)" and "Development Platforms (Moof!)", are so marked to indicate that they contain software not fully tested or sanctioned by the powers that be. When you open these folders you cross the boundary into hackerland. 3. v. On the Microsoft Network, the term `moof' has gained popularity as a verb meaning `to be suddenly disconnected by the system'. One might say "I got moofed".

Node:Moore's Law, Next:moose call, Previous:Moof, Up:= M =

Moore's Law /morz law/ prov.

The observation that the logic density of silicon integrated circuits has closely followed the curve (bits per square inch) = 2^(t - 1962) where t is time in years; that is, the amount of information storable on a given amount of silicon has roughly doubled every year since the technology was invented. This relation, first uttered in 1964 by semiconductor engineer Gordon Moore (who co-founded Intel four years later) held until the late 1970s, at which point the doubling period slowed to 18 months. The doubling period remained at that value through time of writing (late 1999). Moore's Law is apparently self-fulfilling. The implication is that somebody, somewhere is going to be able to build a better chip then you if you rest on your laurels, so you'd better start pushing hard on the problem. See also **Parkinson's Law of Data**.

Node:moose call, Next:moria, Previous:Moore's Law, Up:= M =

moose call n.

See **whalesong**.

Node:moria, Next:MOTAS, Previous:moose call, Up:= M =

moria /mor'ee-*/ n.

Like **nethack** and **rogue**, one of the large PD Dungeons-and-Dragons-like simulation games, available for a wide range of machines and operating systems. The name is from Tolkien's Mines of Moria; compare **elder days**, **elvish**. The game is extremely addictive and a major consumer of time better used for hacking. See also **nethack**, **rogue**, **Angband**.

Node:MOTAS, Next:MOTOS, Previous:moria, Up:= M =

MOTAS /moh-tahz/ n.

[Usenet: Member Of The Appropriate Sex, after **MOTOS** and **MOTSS**] A potential or (less often) actual sex partner. See also **SO**.

Node:MOTOS, Next:MOTSS, Previous:MOTAS, Up:= M =

MOTOS /moh-tohs/ n.

[acronym from the 1970 U.S. census forms via Usenet: Member Of The Opposite Sex] A potential or (less often) actual sex partner. See **MOTAS**, **MOTSS**, **SO**. Less common than MOTSS or **MOTAS**, which has largely displaced it.

Node:MOTSS, Next:mouse ahead, Previous:MOTOS, Up:= M =

MOTSS /mots/ or /M-O-T-S-S/ n.

[from the 1970 U.S. census forms via Usenet] Member Of The Same Sex, esp. one considered as a possible sexual partner. The gay-issues newsgroup on Usenet is called *soc.motss*. See **MOTOS** and **MOTAS**, which derive from it. See also **SO**.

Node:mouse ahead, Next:mouse around, Previous:MOTSS, Up:= M =

mouse ahead vi.

Point-and-click analog of `type ahead'. To manipulate a computer's pointing device (almost always a mouse in this usage, but not necessarily) and its selection or command buttons before a computer program is ready to accept such input, in anticipation of the program accepting the input. Handling this properly is rare, but it can help make a **WIMP environment** much more usable, assuming the users are familiar with the behavior of the user interface.

Node:mouse around, Next:mouse belt, Previous:mouse ahead, Up:= M =

mouse around vi.

To explore public portions of a large system, esp. a network such as Internet via **FTP** or **TELNET**, looking for interesting stuff to **snarf**.

Node:mouse belt, Next:mouse droppings, Previous:mouse around, Up:= M =

mouse belt n.

See **rat belt**.

Node:mouse droppings, Next:mouse elbow, Previous:mouse belt, Up:= M =

mouse droppings n.

[MS-DOS] Pixels (usually single) that are not properly restored when the mouse pointer moves away from a particular location on the screen, producing the appearance that the mouse pointer has left droppings behind. The major causes for this problem are programs that write to the screen memory corresponding to the mouse pointer's current location without hiding the mouse pointer first, and mouse drivers that do not quite support the graphics mode in use.

Node:mouse elbow, Next:mouso, Previous:mouse droppings, Up:= M =

mouse elbow n.

A tennis-elbow-like fatigue syndrome resulting from excessive use of a **WIMP environment**. Similarly, `mouse shoulder'; GLS reports that he used to get this a lot before he taught himself to be ambimoustrous.

Node:mouso, Next:MS-DOS, Previous:mouse elbow, Up:= M =

mouso /mow'soh/ n.

[by analogy with `typo'] An error in mouse usage resulting in an inappropriate selection or graphic garbage on the screen. Compare **thinko**, **braino**.

Node:MS-DOS, Next:mu, Previous:mouso, Up:= M =

MS-DOS /M-S-dos/ n.

[MicroSoft Disk Operating System] A **clone** of **CP/M** for the 8088 crufted together in 6 weeks by hacker Tim Paterson at Seattle Computer Products, who called the original QDOS (Quick and Dirty Operating System) and is said to have regretted it ever since. Microsoft licensed QDOS order to have something to demo for IBM on time, and the rest is history. Numerous features, including vaguely Unix-like but rather broken support for subdirectories, I/O redirection, and pipelines, were hacked into Microsoft's 2.0 and subsequent versions; as a result, there are two or more incompatible versions of many system calls, and MS-DOS programmers can never agree on basic things like what character to use as an option switch or whether to be case-sensitive. The resulting appalling mess is now the highest-unit-volume OS in history. Often known simply as DOS, which annoys people familiar with other similarly abbreviated operating systems (the name goes back to the mid-1960s, when it was attached to IBM's first disk operating system for the 360). The name further annoys those who know what the term **operating system** does (or ought to) connote; DOS is more properly a set of relatively simple interrupt services. Some people like to pronounce DOS like "dose", as in "I don't work on dose, man!", or to compare it to a dose of brain-damaging drugs (a slogan button in wide circulation among hackers exhorts: "MS-DOS: Just say No!").

See **mess-dos**, **ill-behaved**.

Node:mu, Next:MUD, Previous:MS-DOS, Up:= M =

mu /moo/

The correct answer to the classic trick question "Have you stopped beating your wife yet?". Assuming that you have no wife or you have never beaten your wife, the answer "yes" is wrong because it implies that you used to beat your wife and then stopped, but "no" is worse because it suggests that you have one and are still beating her. According to various Discordians and Douglas Hofstadter the correct answer is usually "mu", a Japanese word alleged to mean "Your question cannot be answered because it depends on incorrect assumptions". Hackers tend to be sensitive to logical inadequacies in language, and many have adopted this suggestion with enthusiasm. The word `mu' is actually from Chinese, meaning `nothing'; it is used in mainstream Japanese in that sense, but native speakers do not recognize the Discordian question-denying use. It almost certainly derives from overgeneralization of the answer in the following well-known Rinzei Zen **koan**:

> A monk asked Joshu, "Does a dog have the Buddha nature?" Joshu retorted, "Mu!"

See also **has the X nature**, **Some AI Koans**, and Douglas Hofstadter's "Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid" (pointer in the **Bibliography** in Appendix C.

Node:MUD, Next:muddie, Previous:mu, Up:= M =

MUD /muhd/ n.

[acronym, Multi-User Dungeon; alt. Multi-User Dimension] 1. A class of **virtual reality** experiments accessible via the Internet. These are real-time chat forums with structure; they have multiple `locations' like an adventure game, and may include combat, traps, puzzles, magic, a simple economic system, and the capability for characters to build more structure onto the database that represents the existing world. 2. vi. To play a MUD. The acronym MUD is often lowercased and/or verbed; thus, one may speak of `going mudding', etc.

Historically, MUDs (and their more recent progeny with names of MU- form) derive from a hack by Richard Bartle and Roy Trubshaw on the University of Essex's DEC-10 in the early 1980s; descendants of that game still exist today and are sometimes generically called *BartleMUD*s. There is a widespread myth (repeated, unfortunately, by earlier versions of this lexicon) that the name MUD was trademarked to the commercial MUD run by Bartle on British Telecom (the motto: "You haven't *lived* 'til you've *died* on MUD!"); however, this is false -- Richard Bartle explicitly placed `MUD' in the public domain in 1985. BT was upset at this, as they had already printed trademark claims on some maps and posters, which were released and created the myth.

Students on the European academic networks quickly improved on the MUD concept, spawning several new MUDs (VAXMUD, AberMUD, LPMUD). Many of these had associated bulletin-board systems for social interaction. Because these had an image as `research' they often survived administrative hostility to BBSs in general. This, together with the fact that Usenet feeds were often spotty and difficult to get in the U.K., made the MUDs major foci of hackish social interaction there.

AberMUD and other variants crossed the Atlantic around 1988 and quickly gained popularity in the U.S.; they became nuclei for large hacker communities with only loose ties to traditional hackerdom (some observers see parallels with the growth of Usenet in the early 1980s). The second wave of MUDs (TinyMUD and variants) tended to emphasize social interaction, puzzles, and cooperative world-building as opposed to combat and competition (in writing, these social MUDs are sometimes referred to as

`MU*', with `MUD' implicitly reserved for the more game-oriented ones). By 1991, over 50% of MUD sites were of a third major variety, LPMUD, which synthesizes the combat/puzzle aspects of AberMUD and older systems with the extensibility of TinyMud. In 1996 the cutting edge of the technology is Pavel Curtis's MOO, even more extensible using a built-in object-oriented language. The trend toward greater programmability and flexibility will doubtless continue.

The state of the art in MUD design is still moving very rapidly, with new simulation designs appearing (seemingly) every month. Around 1991 there was an unsuccessful movement to deprecate the term **MUD** itself, as newer designs exhibit an exploding variety of names corresponding to the different simulation styles being explored. It survived. See also **bonk/oif**, **FOD**, **link-dead**, **mudhead**, **talk mode**.

Node:muddie, Next:mudhead, Previous:MUD, Up:= M =

muddie n.

Syn. **mudhead**. More common in Great Britain, possibly because system administrators there like to mutter "bloody muddies" when annoyed at the species.

Node:mudhead, Next:multician, Previous:muddie, Up:= M =

mudhead n.

Commonly used to refer to a **MUD** player who eats, sleeps, and breathes MUD. Mudheads have been known to fail their degrees, drop out, etc., with the consolation, however, that they made wizard level. When encountered in person, on a MUD, or in a chat system, all a mudhead will talk about is three topics: the tactic, character, or wizard that is supposedly always unfairly stopping him/her from becoming a wizard or beating a favorite MUD; why the specific game he/she has experience with is so much better than any other; and the MUD he or she is writing or going to write because his/her design ideas are so much better than in any existing MUD. See also **wannabee**.

To the anthropologically literate, this term may recall the Zuni/Hopi legend of the mudheads or `koyemshi', mythical half-formed children of an unnatural union. Figures representing them act as clowns in Zuni sacred ceremonies. Others may recall the `High School Madness' sequence from the Firesign Theatre album "Don't Crush That Dwarf, Hand Me the Pliers", in which there is a character named "Mudhead".

Node:multician, Next:Multics, Previous:mudhead, Up:= M =

multician /muhl-ti'shn/ n.

[coined at Honeywell, ca. 1970] Competent user of **Multics**. Perhaps oddly, no one has ever promoted the analogous `Unician'.

Node:Multics, Next:multitask, Previous:multician, Up:= M =

Multics /muhl'tiks/ n.

[from "MULTiplexed Information and Computing Service"] An early time-sharing **operating system** co-designed by a consortium including MIT, GE, and Bell Laboratories as a successor to **CTSS**. The design was first presented in 1965, planned for operation in 1967, first operational in 1969, and took several

more years to achieve respectable performance and stability.

Multics was very innovative for its time -- among other things, it provided a hierarchical file system with access control on individual files and introduced the idea of treating all devices uniformly as special files. It was also the first OS to run on a symmetric multiprocessor, and the only general-purpose system to be awarded a B2 security rating by the NSA (see **Orange Book**).

Bell Labs left the development effort in 1969 after judging that **second-system effect** had bloated Multics to the point of practical unusability. Honeywell commercialized Multics in 1972 after buying out GE's computer group, but it was never very successful: at its peak in the 1980s, there were between 75 and 100 Multics sites, each a multi-million dollar mainframe.

One of the former Multics developers from Bell Labs was Ken Thompson, and **Unix** deliberately carried through and extended many of Multics' design ideas; indeed, Thompson described the very name `Unix' as `a weak pun on Multics'. For this and other reasons, aspects of the Multics design remain a topic of occasional debate among hackers. See also **brain-damaged** and **GCOS**.

MIT ended its development association with Multics in 1977. Honeywell sold its computer business to Bull in the mid 80s, and development on Multics was stopped in 1988. Four Multics sites were known to be still in use as late as 1998. There is a Multics page at http://www.stratus.com/pub/vos/multics/tvv/multics.html.

Node:multitask, Next:mumblage, Previous:Multics, Up:= M =

multitask n.

Often used of humans in the same meaning it has for computers, to describe a person doing several things at once (but see **thrash**). The term `multiplex', from communications technology (meaning to handle more than one channel at the same time), is used similarly.

Node:mumblage, Next:mumble, Previous:multitask, Up:= M =

mumblage /muhm'bl*j/ n.

The topic of one's mumbling (see **mumble**). "All that mumblage" is used like "all that stuff" when it is not quite clear how the subject of discussion works, or like "all that crap" when `mumble' is being used as an implicit replacement for pejoratives.

Node:mumble, Next:munch, Previous:mumblage, Up:= M =

mumble interj.

1. Said when the correct response is too complicated to enunciate, or the speaker has not thought it out. Often prefaces a longer answer, or indicates a general reluctance to get into a long discussion. "Don't you think that we could improve LISP performance by using a hybrid reference-count transaction garbage collector, if the cache is big enough and there are some extra cache bits for the microcode to use?" "Well, mumble ... I'll have to think about it." 2. [MIT] Expression of not-quite-articulated agreement, often used as an informal vote of consensus in a meeting: "So, shall we dike out the COBOL emulation?" "Mumble!" 3. Sometimes used as an expression of disagreement (distinguished from sense 2 by tone of voice and other cues). "I think we should buy a **VAX**." "Mumble!" Common variant: `mumble frotz' (see **frotz**; interestingly, one does not say `mumble frobnitz' even though `frotz' is short for `frobnitz'). 4. Yet

another **metasyntactic variable**, like **foo**. 5. When used as a question ("Mumble?") means "I didn't understand you". 6. Sometimes used in `public' contexts on-line as a placefiller for things one is barred from giving details about. For example, a poster with pre-released hardware in his machine might say "Yup, my machine now has an extra 16M of memory, thanks to the card I'm testing for Mumbleco." 7. A conversational wild card used to designate something one doesn't want to bother spelling out, but which can be **glark**ed from context. Compare **blurgle**. 8. [XEROX PARC] A colloquialism used to suggest that further discussion would be fruitless.

Node:munch, Next:munching, Previous:mumble, Up:= M =

munch vt.

[often confused with **mung**, q.v.] To transform information in a serial fashion, often requiring large amounts of computation. To trace down a data structure. Related to **crunch** and nearly synonymous with **grovel**, but connotes less pain.

Node:munching, Next:munching squares, Previous:munch, Up:= M =

munching n.

Exploration of security holes of someone else's computer for thrills, notoriety, or to annoy the system manager. Compare **cracker**. See also **hacked off**.

Node:munching squares, Next:munchkin, Previous:munching, Up:= M =

munching squares n.

A **display hack** dating back to the PDP-1 (ca. 1962, reportedly discovered by Jackson Wright), which employs a trivial computation (repeatedly plotting the graph Y = X XOR T for successive values of T -- see **HAKMEM** items 146-148) to produce an impressive display of moving and growing squares that devour the screen. The initial value of T is treated as a parameter, which, when well-chosen, can produce amazing effects. Some of these, later (re)discovered on the LISP machine, have been christened `munching triangles' (try AND for XOR and toggling points instead of plotting them), `munching w's', and `munching mazes'. More generally, suppose a graphics program produces an impressive and ever-changing display of some basic form, foo, on a display terminal, and does it using a relatively simple program; then the program (or the resulting display) is likely to be referred to as `munching foos'. [This is a good example of the use of the word **foo** as a **metasyntactic variable**.]

Node:munchkin, Next:mundane, Previous:munching squares, Up:= M =

munchkin /muhnch'kin/ n.

[from the squeaky-voiced little people in L. Frank Baum's "The Wizard of Oz"] A teenage-or-younger micro enthusiast hacking BASIC or something else equally constricted. A term of mild derision -- munchkins are annoying but some grow up to be hackers after passing through a **larval stage**. The term **urchin** is also used. See also **wannabee**, **bitty box**.

Node:mundane, Next:mung, Previous:munchkin, Up:= M =

mundane n.

[from SF fandom] 1. A person who is not in science fiction fandom. 2. A person who is not in the computer industry. In this sense, most often an adjectival modifier as in "in my mundane life...." See also **Real World**.

Node:mung, Next:munge, Previous:mundane, Up:= M =

mung /muhng/ vt.

[in 1960 at MIT, `Mash Until No Good'; sometime after that the derivation from the **recursive acronym** `Mung Until No Good' became standard; but see **munge**] 1. To make changes to a file, esp. large-scale and irrevocable changes. See **BLT**. 2. To destroy, usually accidentally, occasionally maliciously. The system only mungs things maliciously; this is a consequence of **Finagle's Law**. See **scribble**, **mangle**, **trash**, **nuke**. Reports from **Usenet** suggest that the pronunciation /muhnj/ is now usual in speech, but the spelling `mung' is still common in program comments (compare the widespread confusion over the proper spelling of **kluge**). 3. The kind of beans the sprouts of which are used in Chinese food. (That's their real name! Mung beans! Really!)

Like many early hacker terms, this one seems to have originated at **TMRC**; it was already in use there in 1958. Peter Samson (compiler of the original TMRC lexicon) thinks it may originally have been onomatopoeic for the sound of a relay spring (contact) being twanged. However, it is known that during the World Wars, `mung' was U.S. army slang for the ersatz creamed chipped beef better known as `SOS', and it seems quite likely that the word in fact goes back to Scots-dialect **munge**.

Node:munge, Next:Murphy's Law, Previous:mung, Up:= M =

munge /muhnj/ vt.

1. [derogatory] To imperfectly transform information. 2. A comprehensive rewrite of a routine, data structure or the whole program. 3. To modify data in some way the speaker doesn't need to go into right now or cannot describe succinctly (compare **mumble**). 4. To add **spamblock** to an email address.

This term is often confused with **mung**, which probably was derived from it. However, it also appears the word `munge' was in common use in Scotland in the 1940s, and in Yorkshire in the 1950s, as a verb, meaning to munch up into a masticated mess, and as a noun, meaning the result of munging something up (the parallel with the **kluge**/**kludge** pair is amusing).

Node:Murphy's Law, Next:music, Previous:munge, Up:= M =

Murphy's Law prov.

The correct, *original* Murphy's Law reads: "If there are two or more ways to do something, and one of those ways can result in a catastrophe, then someone will do it." This is a principle of defensive design, cited here because it is usually given in mutant forms less descriptive of the challenges of design for **luser**s. For example, you don't make a two-pin plug symmetrical and then label it `THIS WAY UP'; if it matters which way it is plugged in, then you make the design asymmetrical (see also the anecdote under **magic smoke**).

Edward A. Murphy, Jr. was one of the engineers on the rocket-sled experiments that were done by the U.S. Air Force in 1949 to test human acceleration tolerances (USAF project MX981). One experiment

involved a set of 16 accelerometers mounted to different parts of the subject's body. There were two ways each sensor could be glued to its mount, and somebody methodically installed all 16 the wrong way around. Murphy then made the original form of his pronouncement, which the test subject (Major John Paul Stapp) quoted at a news conference a few days later.

Within months `Murphy's Law' had spread to various technical cultures connected to aerospace engineering. Before too many years had gone by variants had passed into the popular imagination, changing as they went. Most of these are variants on "Anything that can go wrong, will"; this is correctly referred to as **Finagle's Law**. The memetic drift apparent in these mutants clearly demonstrates Murphy's Law acting on itself!

Node:music, Next:mutter, Previous:Murphy's Law, Up:= M =

music n.

A common extracurricular interest of hackers (compare **science-fiction fandom**, **oriental food**; see also **filk**). Hackish folklore has long claimed that musical and programming abilities are closely related, and there has been at least one large-scale statistical study that supports this. Hackers, as a rule, like music and often develop musical appreciation in unusual and interesting directions. Folk music is very big in hacker circles; so is electronic music, and the sort of elaborate instrumental jazz/rock that used to be called `progressive' and isn't recorded much any more. The hacker's musical range tends to be wide; many can listen with equal appreciation to (say) Talking Heads, Yes, Gentle Giant, Pat Metheny, Scott Joplin, Tangerine Dream, Dream Theater, King Sunny Ade, The Pretenders, Screaming Trees, or the Brandenburg Concerti. It is also apparently true that hackerdom includes a much higher concentration of talented amateur musicians than one would expect from a similar-sized control group of **mundane** types.

Node:mutter, Next:N, Previous:music, Up:= M =

mutter vt.

To quietly enter a command not meant for the ears, eyes, or fingers of ordinary mortals. Often used in `mutter an **incantation**'. See also **wizard**.

Node:= N =, Next:= O =, Previous:= M =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= N =

- N:
- nadger:
- nagware:
- nailed to the wall:
- nailing jelly:
- naive:
- naive user:
- NAK:
- NANA:
- nano:
- nano-:
- nanoacre:

- nanobot:
- nanocomputer:
- nanofortnight:
- nanotechnology:
- nasal demons:
- nastygram:
- Nathan Hale:
- nature:
- neat hack:
- neats vs. scruffies:
- neep-neep:
- neophilia:
- nerd:
- nerd knob:
- net.-:
- net.god:
- net.personality:
- net.police:
- NetBOLLIX:
- netburp:
- netdead:
- nethack:
- netiquette:
- netlag:
- netnews:
- netrock:
- Netscrape:
- netsplit:
- netter:
- network address:
- network meltdown:
- New Jersey:
- New Testament:
- newbie:
- newgroup wars:
- newline:
- NeWS:
- newsfroup:
- newsgroup:
- nick:
- nickle:
- night mode:
- Nightmare File System:
- NIL:
- Ninety-Ninety Rule:
- nipple mouse:
- NMI:
- no-op:
- noddy:
- node:
- Nominal Semidestructor:
- non-optimal solution:

- nonlinear:
- nontrivial:
- not ready for prime time:
- notwork:
- NP-:
- nroff:
- NSA line eater:
- NSP:
- nude:
- nugry:
- nuke:
- number-crunching:
- numbers:
- NUXI problem:
- nybble:
- nyetwork:

Node:N, Next:nadger, Previous:mutter, Up:= N =

N /N/ quant.

1. A large and indeterminate number of objects: "There were N bugs in that crock!" Also used in its original sense of a variable name: "This crock has N bugs, as N goes to infinity." (The true number of bugs is always at least N + 1; see **Lubarsky's Law of Cybernetic Entomology**.) 2. A variable whose value is inherited from the current context. For example, when a meal is being ordered at a restaurant, N may be understood to mean however many people there are at the table. From the remark "We'd like to order N wonton soups and a family dinner for N - 1" you can deduce that one person at the table wants to eat only soup, even though you don't know how many people there are (see **great-wall**). 3. `Nth': adj. The ordinal counterpart of N, senses 1 and 2. "Now for the Nth and last time..." In the specific context "Nth-year grad student", N is generally assumed to be at least 4, and is usually 5 or more (see **tenured graduate student**). See also **random numbers**, **two-to-the-N**.

Node:nadger, Next:nagware, Previous:N, Up:= N =

nadger /nad'jr/ v.

[UK, from rude slang noun `nadgers' for testicles; compare American & British `bollixed'] Of software or hardware (not people), to twiddle some object in a hidden manner, generally so that it conforms better to some format. For instance, string printing routines on 8-bit processors often take the string text from the instruction stream, thus a print call looks like `jsr print:"Hello world"`. The print routine has to `nadger' the saved instruction pointer so that the processor doesn't try to execute the text as instructions when the subroutine returns. See **adger**.

Node:nagware, Next:nailed to the wall, Previous:nadger, Up:= N =

nagware /nag'weir/ n.

[Usenet] The variety of **shareware** that displays a large screen at the beginning or end reminding you to register, typically requiring some sort of keystroke to continue so that you can't use the software in batch mode. Compare **annoyware**, **crippleware**.

Node:nailed to the wall, Next:nailing jelly, Previous:nagware, Up:= N =

nailed to the wall adj.

[like a trophy] Said of a bug finally eliminated after protracted, and even heroic, effort.

Node:nailing jelly, Next:naive, Previous:nailed to the wall, Up:= N =

nailing jelly vi.

See **like nailing jelly to a tree**.

Node:naive, Next:naive user, Previous:nailing jelly, Up:= N =

naive adj.

1. Untutored in the perversities of some particular program or system; one who still tries to do things in an intuitive way, rather than the right way (in really good designs these coincide, but most designs aren't `really good' in the appropriate sense). This trait is completely unrelated to general maturity or competence, or even competence at any other specific program. It is a sad commentary on the primitive state of computing that the natural opposite of this term is often claimed to be `experienced user' but is really more like `cynical user'. 2. Said of an algorithm that doesn't take advantage of some superior but advanced technique, e.g., the **bubble sort**. It may imply naivete on the part of the programmer, although there are situations where a naive algorithm is preferred, because it is more important to keep the code comprehensible than to go for maximum performance. "I know the linear search is naive, but in this case the list typically only has half a dozen items."

Node:naive user, Next:NAK, Previous:naive, Up:= N =

naive user n.

A **luser**. Tends to imply someone who is ignorant mainly owing to inexperience. When this is applied to someone who *has* experience, there is a definite implication of stupidity.

Node:NAK, Next:NANA, Previous:naive user, Up:= N =

NAK /nak/ interj.

[from the ASCII mnemonic for 0010101] 1. On-line joke answer to **ACK**?: "I'm not here." 2. On-line answer to a request for chat: "I'm not available." 3. Used to politely interrupt someone to tell them you don't understand their point or that they have suddenly stopped making sense. See **ACK**, sense 3. "And then, after we recode the project in COBOL...." "Nak, Nak, Nak! I thought I heard you say COBOL!"

Node:NANA, Next:nano, Previous:NAK, Up:= N =

NANA //

[Usenet] The newsgroups news.admin.net-abuse.*, devoted to fighting **spam** and network abuse. Each individual newsgroup is often referred to by adding a letter to NANA. For example, NANAU would refer to news.admin.net-abuse.usenet.

When spam began to be a serious problem around 1995, and a loose network of anti-spammers formed to combat it, spammers immediately accused them of being the **backbone cabal**, or the Cabal reborn. Though this was not true, spam-fighters ironically accepted the label and the tag line "There is No Cabal" reappeared (later, and now commonly, abbreviated to "TINC"). Nowadays "the Cabal" is generally understood to refer to the NANA regulars.

Node:nano, Next:nano-, Previous:NANA, Up:= N =

nano /nan'oh/ n.

[CMU: from `nanosecond'] A brief period of time. "Be with you in a nano" means you really will be free shortly, i.e., implies what mainstream people mean by "in a jiffy" (whereas the hackish use of `jiffy' is quite different -- see **jiffy**).

Node:nano-, Next:nanoacre, Previous:nano, Up:= N =

nano- pref.

[SI: the next quantifier below **micro-**; meaning * 10^(-9)] Smaller than **micro-**, and used in the same rather loose and connotative way. Thus, one has **nanotechnology** (coined by hacker K. Eric Drexler) by analogy with `microtechnology'; and a few machine architectures have a `nanocode' level below `microcode'. Tom Duff at Bell Labs has also pointed out that "Pi seconds is a nanocentury". See also **quantifiers**, **pico-**, **nanoacre**, **nanobot**, **nanocomputer**, **nanofortnight**.

Node:nanoacre, Next:nanobot, Previous:nano-, Up:= N =

nanoacre /nan'oh-ay`kr/ n.

A unit (about 2 mm square) of real estate on a VLSI chip. The term gets its giggle value from the fact that VLSI nanoacres have costs in the same range as real acres once one figures in design and fabrication-setup costs.

Node:nanobot, Next:nanocomputer, Previous:nanoacre, Up:= N =

nanobot /nan'oh-bot/ n.

A robot of microscopic proportions, presumably built by means of **nanotechnology**. As yet, only used informally (and speculatively!). Also called a `nanoagent'.

Node:nanocomputer, Next:nanofortnight, Previous:nanobot, Up:= N =

nanocomputer /nan'oh-k*m-pyoo'tr/ n.

A computer with molecular-sized switching elements. Designs for mechanical nanocomputers which use

single-molecule sliding rods for their logic have been proposed. The controller for a **nanobot** would be a nanocomputer.

Node:nanofortnight, Next:nanotechnology, Previous:nanocomputer, Up:= N =

nanofortnight n.

[Adelaide University] 1 fortnight * 10^(-9), or about 1.2 msec. This unit was used largely by students doing undergraduate practicals. See **microfortnight**, **attoparsec**, and **micro-**.

Node:nanotechnology, Next:nasal demons, Previous:nanofortnight, Up:= N =

nanotechnology /nan'-oh-tek-no`l*-jee/ n.

A hypothetical fabrication technology in which objects are designed and built with the individual specification and placement of each separate atom. The first unequivocal nanofabrication experiments took place in 1990, for example with the deposition of individual xenon atoms on a nickel substrate to spell the logo of a certain very large computer company. Nanotechnology has been a hot topic in the hacker subculture ever since the term was coined by K. Eric Drexler in his book "Engines of Creation" (Anchor/Doubleday, ISBN 0-385-19973-2), where he predicted that nanotechnology could give rise to replicating assemblers, permitting an exponential growth of productivity and personal wealth (there's an authorized transcription at http://www.foresight.org/EOC/index.html.). See also **blue goo**, **gray goo**, **nanobot**.

Node:nasal demons, Next:nastygram, Previous:nanotechnology, Up:= N =

nasal demons n.

Recognized shorthand on the Usenet group *comp.std.c* for any unexpected behavior of a C compiler on encountering an undefined construct. During a discussion on that group in early 1992, a regular remarked "When the compiler encounters [a given undefined construct] it is legal for it to make demons fly out of your nose" (the implication is that the compiler may choose any arbitrarily bizarre way to interpret the code without violating the ANSI C standard). Someone else followed up with a reference to "nasal demons", which quickly became established.

Node:nastygram, Next:Nathan Hale, Previous:nasal demons, Up:= N =

nastygram /nas'tee-gram/ n.

1. A protocol packet or item of email (the latter is also called a **letterbomb**) that takes advantage of misfeatures or security holes on the target system to do untoward things. 2. Disapproving mail, esp. from a **net.god**, pursuant to a violation of **netiquette** or a complaint about failure to correct some mail- or news-transmission problem. Compare **shitogram**, **mailbomb**. 3. A status report from an unhappy, and probably picky, customer. "What'd Corporate say in today's nastygram?" 4. [deprecated] An error reply by mail from a **daemon**; in particular, a **bounce message**.

Node:Nathan Hale, Next:nature, Previous:nastygram, Up:= N =

Nathan Hale n.

An asterisk (see also **splat**, **ASCII**). Oh, you want an etymology? Notionally, from "I regret that I have only one asterisk for my country!", a misquote of the famous remark uttered by Nathan Hale just before he was hanged. Hale was a (failed) spy for the rebels in the American War of Independence.

Node:nature, Next:neat hack, Previous:Nathan Hale, Up:= N =

nature n.

See **has the X nature**.

Node:neat hack, Next:neats vs. scruffies, Previous:nature, Up:= N =

neat hack n.

[very common] 1. A clever technique. 2. A brilliant practical joke, where neatness is correlated with cleverness, harmlessness, and surprise value. Example: the Caltech Rose Bowl card display switch (see **Appendix A** for discussion). See also **hack**.

Node:neats vs. scruffies, Next:neep-neep, Previous:neat hack, Up:= N =

neats vs. scruffies n.

The label used to refer to one of the continuing **holy wars** in AI research. This conflict tangles together two separate issues. One is the relationship between human reasoning and AI; `neats' tend to try to build systems that `reason' in some way identifiably similar to the way humans report themselves as doing, while `scruffies' profess not to care whether an algorithm resembles human reasoning in the least as long as it works. More importantly, neats tend to believe that logic is king, while scruffies favor looser, more ad-hoc methods driven by empirical knowledge. To a neat, scruffy methods appear promiscuous, successful only by accident, and not productive of insights about how intelligence actually works; to a scruffy, neat methods appear to be hung up on formalism and irrelevant to the hard-to-capture `common sense' of living intelligences.

Node:neep-neep, Next:neophilia, Previous:neats vs. scruffies, Up:= N =

neep-neep /neep neep/ n.

[onomatopoeic, widely spread through SF fandom but reported to have originated at Caltech in the 1970s] One who is fascinated by computers. Less specific than **hacker**, as it need not imply more skill than is required to boot games on a PC. The derived noun `neeping' applies specifically to the long conversations about computers that tend to develop in the corners at most SF-convention parties (the term `neepery' is also in wide use). Fandom has a related proverb to the effect that "Hacking is a conversational black hole!".

Node:neophilia, Next:nerd, Previous:neep-neep, Up:= N =

neophilia /nee`oh-fil'-ee-*/ n.

The trait of being excited and pleased by novelty. Common among most hackers, SF fans, and members of several other connected leading-edge subcultures, including the pro-technology `Whole Earth' wing of the ecology movement, space activists, many members of Mensa, and the Discordian/neo-pagan underground. All these groups overlap heavily and (where evidence is available) seem to share characteristic hacker tropisms for science fiction, **music**, and **oriental food**. The opposite tendency is `neophobia'.

Node:nerd, Next:nerd knob, Previous:neophilia, Up:= N =

nerd n.

1. [mainstream slang] Pejorative applied to anyone with an above-average IQ and few gifts at small talk and ordinary social rituals. 2. [jargon] Term of praise applied (in conscious ironic reference to sense 1) to someone who knows what's really important and interesting and doesn't care to be distracted by trivial chatter and silly status games. Compare the two senses of **computer geek**.

The word itself appears to derive from the lines "And then, just to show them, I'll sail to Ka-Troo / And Bring Back an It-Kutch, a Preep and a Proo, / A Nerkle, a Nerd, and a Seersucker, too!" in the Dr. Seuss book "If I Ran the Zoo" (1950). (The spellings `nurd' and `gnurd' also used to be current at MIT.) How it developed its mainstream meaning is unclear, but sense 1 seems to have entered mass culture in the early 1970s (there are reports that in the mid-1960s it meant roughly "annoying misfit" without the connotation of intelligence).

An IEEE Spectrum article (4/95, page 16) once derived `nerd' in its variant form `knurd' from the word `drunk' backwards, but this bears all the hallmarks of a bogus folk etymology.

Hackers developed sense 2 in self-defense perhaps ten years later, and some actually wear "Nerd Pride" buttons, only half as a joke. At MIT one can find not only buttons but (what else?) pocket protectors bearing the slogan and the MIT seal.

Node:nerd knob, Next:net.-, Previous:nerd, Up:= N =

nerd knob n.

[Cisco] a command in a complex piece of software which is more likely to be used by an extremely experienced user to tweak a setting of one sort or another - a setting which the average user may not even know exists. Nerd knobs tend to be toggles, turning on or off a particular, specific, narrowly defined behavior.

Node:net.-, Next:net.god, Previous:nerd knob, Up:= N =

net.- /net dot/ pref.

[Usenet] Prefix used to describe people and events related to Usenet. From the time before the **Great Renaming**, when most non-local newsgroups had names beginning `net.'. Includes **net.god**s, `net.goddesses' (various charismatic net.women with circles of on-line admirers), `net.lurkers' (see **lurker**), `net.person', `net.parties' (a synonym for **boink**, sense 2), and many similar constructs. See also **net.police**.

Node:net.god, Next:net.personality, Previous:net.-, Up:= N =

net.god /net god/ n.

Accolade referring to anyone who satisfies some combination of the following conditions: has been visible on Usenet for more than 5 years, ran one of the original backbone sites, moderated an important newsgroup, wrote news software, or knows Gene, Mark, Rick, Mel, Henry, Chuq, and Greg personally. See **demigod**. Net.goddesses such as Rissa or the Slime Sisters have (so far) been distinguished more by personality than by authority.

Node:net.personality, Next:net.police, Previous:net.god, Up:= N =

net.personality /net per`sn-al'-*-tee/ n.

Someone who has made a name for him or herself on **Usenet**, through either longevity or attention-getting posts, but doesn't meet the other requirements of **net.god**hood.

Node:net.police, Next:NetBOLLIX, Previous:net.personality, Up:= N =

net.police /net-p*-lees'/ n.

(var. `net.cops') Those Usenet readers who feel it is their responsibility to pounce on and **flame** any posting which they regard as offensive or in violation of their understanding of **netiquette**. Generally used sarcastically or pejoratively. Also spelled `net police'. See also **net.-**, **code police**.

Node:NetBOLLIX, Next:netburp, Previous:net.police, Up:= N =

NetBOLLIX n.

[from bollix: to bungle, or Britsish `bollocks'] **IBM**'s NetBIOS, an extremely **brain-damaged** network protocol that, like **Blue Glue**, is used at commercial shops that don't know any better.

Node:netburp, Next:netdead, Previous:NetBOLLIX, Up:= N =

netburp n.

[IRC] When **netlag** gets really bad, and delays between servers exceed a certain threshhold, the **IRC** network effectively becomes partitioned for a period of time, and large numbers of people seem to be signing off at the same time and then signing back on again when things get better. An instance of this is called a `netburp' (or, sometimes, **netsplit**).

Node:netdead, Next:nethack, Previous:netburp, Up:= N =

netdead n.

[IRC] The state of someone who signs off **IRC**, perhaps during a **netburp**, and doesn't sign back on until later. In the interim, he is "dead to the net". Compare **link-dead**.

Node:nethack, Next:netiquette, Previous:netdead, Up:= N =

nethack /net'hak/ n.

[Unix] A dungeon game similar to **rogue** but more elaborate, distributed in C source over **Usenet** and very popular at Unix sites and on PC-class machines (nethack is probably the most widely distributed of the freeware dungeon games). The earliest versions, written by Jay Fenlason and later considerably enhanced by Andries Brouwer, were simply called `hack'. The name changed when maintenance was taken over by a group of hackers originally organized by Mike Stephenson. There is now an official site one at http://www.nethack.org/. See also **moria**, **rogue**, **Angband**.

Node:netiquette, Next:netlag, Previous:nethack, Up:= N =

netiquette /net'ee-ket/ or /net'i-ket/ n.

[portmanteau, network + etiquette] The conventions of politeness recognized on **Usenet**, such as avoidance of cross-posting to inappropriate groups and refraining from commercial pluggery outside the *biz* groups.

Node:netlag, Next:netnews, Previous:netiquette, Up:= N =

netlag n.

[IRC, MUD] A condition that occurs when the delays in the **IRC** network or on a **MUD** become severe enough that servers briefly lose and then reestablish contact, causing messages to be delivered in bursts, often with delays of up to a minute. (Note that this term has nothing to do with mainstream "jet lag", a condition which hackers tend not to be much bothered by.) Often shortened to just `lag'.

Node:netnews, Next:netrock, Previous:netlag, Up:= N =

netnews /net'n[y]ooz/ n.

1. The software that makes **Usenet** run. 2. The content of Usenet. "I read netnews right after my mail most mornings."

Node:netrock, Next:Netscrape, Previous:netnews, Up:= N =

netrock /net'rok/ n.

[IBM] A **flame**; used esp. on VNET, IBM's internal corporate network.

Node:Netscrape, Next:netsplit, Previous:netrock, Up:= N =

Netscrape n.

[sometimes elaborated to `Netscrape Fornicator', also `Nutscrape'] Standard name-of-insult for Netscape Navigator/Communicator, Netscape's overweight Web browser. Compare **Internet Exploiter**.

Node:netsplit, Next:netter, Previous:Netscrape, Up:= N =

netsplit n.

Syn. **netburp**.

Node:netter, Next:network address, Previous:netsplit, Up:= N =

netter n.

1. Loosely, anyone with a **network address**. 2. More specifically, a **Usenet** regular. Most often found in the plural. "If you post *that* in a technical group, you're going to be flamed by angry netters for the rest of time!"

Node:network address, Next:network meltdown, Previous:netter, Up:= N =

network address n.

(also `net address') As used by hackers, means an address on `the' network (see **the network**; this used to include **bang path** addresses but now almost always implies an **Internet address**). Net addresses are often used in email text as a more concise substitute for personal names; indeed, hackers may come to know each other quite well by network names without ever learning each others' `legal' monikers. Indeed, display of a network address (e.g on business cards) used to function as an important hacker identification signal, like lodge pins among Masons or tie-dyed T-shirts among Grateful Dead fans. In the day of pervasive Internet this is less true, but you can still be fairly sure that anyone with a network address handwritten on his or her convention badge is a hacker.

Node:network meltdown, Next:New Jersey, Previous:network address, Up:= N =

network meltdown n.

A state of complete network overload; the network equivalent of **thrash**ing. This may be induced by a **Chernobyl packet**. See also **broadcast storm**, **kamikaze packet**.

Network meltdown is often a result of network designs that are optimized for a steady state of moderate load and don't cope well with the very jagged, bursty usage patterns of the real world. One amusing instance of this is triggered by the popular and very bloody shoot-'em-up game *Doom* on the PC. When used in multiplayer mode over a network, the game uses broadcast packets to inform other machines when bullets are fired. This causes problems with weapons like the chain gun which fire rapidly -- it can blast the network into a meltdown state just as easily as it shreds opposing monsters.

Node:New Jersey, Next:New Testament, Previous:network meltdown, Up:= N =

New Jersey adj.

[primarily Stanford/Silicon Valley] Brain-damaged or of poor design. This refers to the allegedly wretched quality of such software as C, C++, and Unix (which originated at Bell Labs in Murray Hill, New Jersey). "This compiler bites the bag, but what can you expect from a compiler designed in New

Jersey?" Compare **Berkeley Quality Software**. See also **Unix conspiracy**.

Node:New Testament, Next:newbie, Previous:New Jersey, Up:= N =

New Testament n.

[C programmers] The second edition of K&R's "The C Programming Language" (Prentice-Hall, 1988; ISBN 0-13-110362-8), describing ANSI Standard C. See **K&R**; this version is also called `K&R2'.

Node:newbie, Next:newgroup wars, Previous:New Testament, Up:= N =

newbie /n[y]oo'bee/ n.

[verry common; orig. from British public-school and military slang variant of `new boy'] A Usenet neophyte. This term surfaced in the **newsgroup** *talk.bizarre* but is now in wide use. Criteria for being considered a newbie vary wildly; a person can be called a newbie in one newsgroup while remaining a respected regular in another. The label `newbie' is sometimes applied as a serious insult to a person who has been around Usenet for a long time but who carefully hides all evidence of having a clue. See **B1FF**; see also **gnubie**.

Node:newgroup wars, Next:newline, Previous:newbie, Up:= N =

newgroup wars /n[y]oo'groop worz/ n.

[Usenet] The salvos of dueling `newgroup` and `rmgroup` messages sometimes exchanged by persons on opposite sides of a dispute over whether a **newsgroup** should be created net-wide, or (even more frequently) whether an obsolete one should be removed. These usually settle out within a week or two as it becomes clear whether the group has a natural constituency (usually, it doesn't). At times, especially in the completely anarchic *alt* hierarchy, the names of newsgroups themselves become a form of comment or humor; e.g., the group *alt.swedish.chef.bork.bork.bork* which originated as a birthday joke for a Muppets fan, or any number of specialized abuse groups named after particularly notorious **flamer**s, e.g., *alt.weemba*.

Node:newline, Next:NeWS, Previous:newgroup wars, Up:= N =

newline /n[y]oo'li:n/ n.

1. [techspeak, primarily Unix] The ASCII LF character (0001010), used under **Unix** as a text line terminator. Though the term `newline' appears in ASCII standards, it never caught on in the general computing world before Unix. 2. More generally, any magic character, character sequence, or operation (like Pascal's writeln procedure) required to terminate a text record or separate lines. See **crlf**, **terpri**.

Node:NeWS, Next:newsfroup, Previous:newline, Up:= N =

NeWS /nee'wis/, /n[y]oo'is/ or /n[y]ooz/ n.

[acronym; the `Network Window System'] The road not taken in window systems, an elegant **PostScript**-based environment that would almost certainly have won the standards war with **X** if it hadn't been

proprietary to Sun Microsystems. There is a lesson here that too many software vendors haven't yet heeded. Many hackers insist on the two-syllable pronunciations above as a way of distinguishing NeWS from Usenet news (the **netnews** software).

Node:newsfroup, Next:newsgroup, Previous:NeWS, Up:= N =

newsfroup // n.

[Usenet] Silly synonym for **newsgroup**, originally a typo but now in regular use on Usenet's talk.bizarre, and other lunatic-fringe groups. Compare **hing**, **grilf**, **pr0n** and **filk**.

Node:newsgroup, Next:nick, Previous:newsfroup, Up:= N =

newsgroup n.

[Usenet] One of **Usenet**'s huge collection of topic groups or **fora**. Usenet groups can be `unmoderated' (anyone can post) or `moderated' (submissions are automatically directed to a moderator, who edits or filters and then posts the results). Some newsgroups have parallel **mailing list**s for Internet people with no netnews access, with postings to the group automatically propagated to the list and vice versa. Some moderated groups (especially those which are actually gatewayed Internet mailing lists) are distributed as `digests', with groups of postings periodically collected into a single large posting with an index.

Among the best-known are *comp.lang.c* (the C-language forum), *comp.arch* (on computer architectures), *comp.unix.wizards* (for Unix wizards), *rec.arts.sf.written* and siblings (for science-fiction fans), and *talk.politics.misc* (miscellaneous political discussions and **flamage**).

Node:nick, Next:nickle, Previous:newsgroup, Up:= N =

nick n.

[IRC; very common] Short for nickname. On **IRC**, every user must pick a nick, which is sometimes the same as the user's real name or login name, but is often more fanciful. Compare **handle**, **screen name**.

Node:nickle, Next:night mode, Previous:nick, Up:= N =

nickle /ni'kl/ n.

[from `nickel', common name for the U.S. 5-cent coin] A **nybble** + 1; 5 bits. Reported among developers for Mattel's GI 1600 (the Intellivision games processor), a chip with 16-bit-wide RAM but 10-bit-wide ROM. See also **deckle**, and **nybble** for names of other bit units.

Node:night mode, Next:Nightmare File System, Previous:nickle, Up:= N =

night mode n.

See **phase** (of people).

Node:Nightmare File System, Next:NIL, Previous:night mode, Up:= N =

Nightmare File System n.

Pejorative hackerism for Sun's Network File System (NFS). In any nontrivial network of Suns where there is a lot of NFS cross-mounting, when one Sun goes down, the others often freeze up. Some machine tries to access the down one, and (getting no response) repeats indefinitely. This causes it to appear dead to some messages (what is actually happening is that it is locked up in what should have been a brief excursion to a higher **spl** level). Then another machine tries to reach either the down machine or the pseudo-down machine, and itself becomes pseudo-down. The first machine to discover the down one is now trying both to access the down one and to respond to the pseudo-down one, so it is even harder to reach. This situation snowballs very quickly, and soon the entire network of machines is frozen -- worst of all, the user can't even abort the file access that started the problem! Many of NFS's problems are excused by partisans as being an inevitable result of its statelessness, which is held to be a great feature (critics, of course, call it a great **misfeature**). (ITS partisans are apt to cite this as proof of Unix's alleged bogosity; ITS had a working NFS-like shared file system with none of these problems in the early 1970s.) See also **broadcast storm**.

Node:NIL, Next:Ninety-Ninety Rule, Previous:Nightmare File System, Up:= N =

NIL /nil/

No. Used in reply to a question, particularly one asked using the `-P' convention. Most hackers assume this derives simply from LISP terminology for `false' (see also **T**), but NIL as a negative reply was well-established among radio hams decades before the advent of LISP. The historical connection between early hackerdom and the ham radio world was strong enough that this may have been an influence.

Node:Ninety-Ninety Rule, Next:nipple mouse, Previous:NIL, Up:= N =

Ninety-Ninety Rule n.

"The first 90% of the code accounts for the first 90% of the development time. The remaining 10% of the code accounts for the other 90% of the development time." Attributed to Tom Cargill of Bell Labs, and popularized by Jon Bentley's September 1985 "Bumper-Sticker Computer Science" column in "Communications of the ACM". It was there called the "Rule of Credibility", a name which seems not to have stuck. Other maxims in the same vein include the law attributed to the early British computer scientist Douglas Hartree: "The time from now until the completion of the project tends to become constant."

Node:nipple mouse, Next:NMI, Previous:Ninety-Ninety Rule, Up:= N =

nipple mouse n.

Common term for the pointing device used on IBM ThinkPads and a few other laptop computers. The device, which sits between the `g' and `h' keys on the keyboard, indeed resembles a rubber nipple intended to be tweaked by a forefinger. Many hackers consider these superior to the glide pads found on most laptops, which are harder to control precisely.

Node:NMI, Next:no-op, Previous:nipple mouse, Up:= N =

NMI /N-M-I/ n.

Non-Maskable Interrupt. An IRQ 7 on the PDP-11 or 680[01234]0; the NMI line on an 80[1234]86. In contrast with a **priority interrupt** (which might be ignored, although that is unlikely), an NMI is *never* ignored. Except, that is, on **clone** boxes, where NMI is often ignored on the motherboard because flaky hardware can generate many spurious ones.

Node:no-op, Next:noddy, Previous:NMI, Up:= N =

no-op /noh'op/ n.,v.

alt. NOP /nop/ [no operation] 1. A machine instruction that does nothing (sometimes used in assembler-level programming as filler for data or patch areas, or to overwrite code to be removed in binaries). 2. A person who contributes nothing to a project, or has nothing going on upstairs, or both. As in "He's a no-op." 3. Any operation or sequence of operations with no effect, such as circling the block without finding a parking space, or putting money into a vending machine and having it fall immediately into the coin-return box, or asking someone for help and being told to go away. "Oh, well, that was a no-op." Hot-and-sour soup (see **great-wall**) that is insufficiently either is `no-op soup'; so is wonton soup if everybody else is having hot-and-sour.

Node:noddy, Next:node, Previous:no-op, Up:= N =

noddy /nod'ee/ adj.

[UK: from the children's books] 1. Small and un-useful, but demonstrating a point. Noddy programs are often written by people learning a new language or system. The archetypal noddy program is **hello world**. Noddy code may be used to demonstrate a feature or bug of a compiler. May be used of real hardware or software to imply that it isn't worth using. "This editor's a bit noddy." 2. A program that is more or less instant to produce. In this use, the term does not necessarily connote uselessness, but describes a **hack** sufficiently trivial that it can be written and debugged while carrying on (and during the space of) a normal conversation. "I'll just throw together a noddy **awk** script to dump all the first fields." In North America this might be called a **mickey mouse program**. See **toy program**.

Node:node, Next:Nominal Semidestructor, Previous:noddy, Up:= N =

node n.

1. [Internet, UUCP] A host machine on the network. 2. [MS-DOS BBSes] A dial-in line on a BBS. Thus an MS-DOS **sysop** might say that his BBS has 4 nodes even though it has a single machine and no Internet link, confusing an Internet hacker no end.

Node:Nominal Semidestructor, Next:non-optimal solution, Previous:node, Up:= N =

Nominal Semidestructor n.

Soundalike slang for `National Semiconductor', found among other places in the Networking/2 networking sources. During the late 1970s to mid-1980s this company marketed a series of microprocessors including the NS16000 and NS32000 and several variants. At one point early in the great microprocessor race, the specs on these chips made them look like serious competition for the rising Intel 80x86 and Motorola 680x0 series. Unfortunately, the actual parts were notoriously flaky and never

implemented the full instruction set promised in their literature, apparently because the company couldn't get any of the mask steppings to work as designed. They eventually sank without trace, joining the Zilog Z8000 and a few even more obscure also-rans in the graveyard of forgotten microprocessors. Compare **HP-SUX**, **AIDX**, **buglix**, **Macintrash**, **Telerat**, **ScumOS**, **sun-stools**, **Slowlaris**, **Internet Exploder**.

Node:non-optimal solution, Next:nonlinear, Previous:Nominal Semidestructor, Up:= N =

non-optimal solution n.

(also `sub-optimal solution') An astoundingly stupid way to do something. This term is generally used in deadpan sarcasm, as its impact is greatest when the person speaking looks completely serious. Compare **stunning**. See also **Bad Thing**.

Node:nonlinear, Next:nontrivial, Previous:non-optimal solution, Up:= N =

nonlinear adj.

[scientific computation] 1. Behaving in an erratic and unpredictable fashion; unstable. When used to describe the behavior of a machine or program, it suggests that said machine or program is being forced to run far outside of design specifications. This behavior may be induced by unreasonable inputs, or may be triggered when a more mundane bug sends the computation far off from its expected course. 2. When describing the behavior of a person, suggests a tantrum or a **flame**. "When you talk to Bob, don't mention the drug problem or he'll go nonlinear for hours." In this context, `go nonlinear' connotes `blow up out of proportion' (proportion connotes linearity).

Node:nontrivial, Next:not ready for prime time, Previous:nonlinear, Up:= N =

nontrivial adj.

Requiring real thought or significant computing power. Often used as an understated way of saying that a problem is quite difficult or impractical, or even entirely unsolvable ("Proving P=NP is nontrivial"). The preferred emphatic form is `decidedly nontrivial'. See **trivial**, **uninteresting**, **interesting**.

Node:not ready for prime time, Next:notwork, Previous:nontrivial, Up:= N =

not ready for prime time adj.

Usable, but only just so; not very robust; for internal use only. Said of a program or device. Often connotes that the thing will be made more solid **Real Soon Now**. This term comes from the ensemble name of the original cast of "Saturday Night Live", the "Not Ready for Prime Time Players". It has extra flavor for hackers because of the special (though now semi-obsolescent) meaning of **prime time**. Compare **beta**.

Node:notwork, Next:NP-, Previous:not ready for prime time, Up:= N =

notwork /not'werk/ n.

A network, when it is acting **flaky** or is **down**. Compare **nyetwork**. Said at IBM to have originally

referred to a particular period of flakiness on IBM's VNET corporate network ca. 1988; but there are independent reports of the term from elsewhere.

Node:NP-, Next:nroff, Previous:notwork, Up:= N =

NP- /N-P/ pref.

Extremely. Used to modify adjectives describing a level or quality of difficulty; the connotation is often `more so than it should be' This is generalized from the computer-science terms `NP-hard' and `NP-complete'; NP-complete problems all seem to be very hard, but so far no one has found a proof that they are. NP is the set of Nondeterministic-Polynomial algorithms, those that can be completed by a nondeterministic Turing machine in an amount of time that is a polynomial function of the size of the input; a solution for one NP-complete problem would solve all the others. "Coding a BitBlt implementation to perform correctly in every case is NP-annoying."

Note, however, that strictly speaking this usage is misleading; there are plenty of easy problems in class NP. NP-complete problems are hard not because they are in class NP, but because they are the hardest problems in class NP.

Node:nroff, Next:NSA line eater, Previous:NP-, Up:= N =

nroff /N'rof/

n. [Unix, from "new roff" (see **troff**)] A companion program to the Unix typesetter **troff**, accepting identical input but preparing output for terminals and line printers.

Node:NSA line eater, Next:NSP, Previous:nroff, Up:= N =

NSA line eater n.

The National Security Agency trawling program sometimes assumed to be reading the net for the U.S. Government's spooks. Most hackers used to think it was mythical but believed in acting as though existed just in case. since the mid-1990s it has gradually become known that the NSA actually does this, quite illegaly, through its Echelon program.

The standard countermeasure is to put loaded phrases like `KGB', `Uzi', `nuclear materials', `Palestine', `cocaine', and `assassination' in their **sig block**s in a (probably futile) attempt to confuse and overload the creature. The **GNU** version of **EMACS** actually has a command that randomly inserts a bunch of insidious anarcho-verbiage into your edited text.

As far back as the 1970s there was a mainstream variant of this myth involving a `Trunk Line Monitor', which supposedly used speech recognition to extract words from telephone trunks. This is much harder than noticing keywords in email, and most of the people who originally propagated it had no idea of then-current technology or the storage, signal-processing, or speech recognition needs of such a project. On the basis of mass-storage costs alone it would have been cheaper to hire 50 high-school students and just let them listen in. Twenty years and several orders of technological magnitude later, however, there are clear indications that the NSA has actually deployed such filtering (again, very much against U.S. law).

Node:NSP, Next:nude, Previous:NSA line eater, Up:= N =

NSP /N-S-P/ n.

Common abbreviation for `Network Service Provider', one of the big national or regional companies that maintains a portion of the Internet backbone and resells connectivity to **ISP**s. In 1996, major NSPs include ANS, MCI, UUNET, and Sprint. An Internet wholesaler.

Node:nude, Next:nugry, Previous:NSP, Up:= N =

nude adj.

Said of machines delivered without an operating system (compare **bare metal**). "We ordered 50 systems, but they all arrived nude, so we had to spend a an extra weekend with the installation disks." This usage is a recent innovation reflecting the fact that most IBM-PC clones are now delivered with an operating system pre-installed at the factory. Other kinds of hardware are still normally delivered without OS, so this term is particular to PC support groups.

Node:nugry, Next:nuke, Previous:nude, Up:= N =

nugry /n[y]oo'gree/

[Usenet, 'newbie' + '-gry'] `. n. A **newbie** who posts a **FAQ** in the rec.puzzles newsgroup, especially if it is a variant of the notorious and unanswerable "What, besides `angry' and `hungry', is the third common English word that ends in -GRY?". In the newsgroup, the canonical answer is of course `nugry' itself. Plural is `nusgry' /n[y]oos'gree/. 2. adj. Having the qualities of a nugry.

Node:nuke, Next:number-crunching, Previous:nugry, Up:= N =

nuke /n[y]ook/ vt.

[common] 1. To intentionally delete the entire contents of a given directory or storage volume. "On Unix, `rm -r /usr` will nuke everything in the usr filesystem." Never used for accidental deletion; contrast **blow away**. 2. Syn. for **dike**, applied to smaller things such as files, features, or code sections. Often used to express a final verdict. "What do you want me to do with that 80-meg **wallpaper** file?" "Nuke it." 3. Used of processes as well as files; nuke is a frequent verbal alias for `kill -9` on Unix. 4. On IBM PCs, a bug that results in **fandango on core** can trash the operating system, including the FAT (the in-core copy of the disk block chaining information). This can utterly scramble attached disks, which are then said to have been `nuked'. This term is also used of analogous lossages on Macintoshes and other micros without memory protection.

Node:number-crunching, Next:numbers, Previous:nuke, Up:= N =

number-crunching n.

[common] Computations of a numerical nature, esp. those that make extensive use of floating-point numbers. The only thing **Fortrash** is good for. This term is in widespread informal use outside hackerdom and even in mainstream slang, but has additional hackish connotations: namely, that the computations are mindless and involve massive use of **brute force**. This is not always **evil**, esp. if it involves ray tracing or fractals or some other use that makes **pretty pictures**, esp. if such pictures can be used as **wallpaper**. See also **crunch**.

Node:numbers, Next:NUXI problem, Previous:number-crunching, Up:= N =

numbers n.

[scientific computation] Output of a computation that may not be significant results but at least indicate that the program is running. May be used to placate management, grant sponsors, etc. `Making numbers' means running a program because output -- any output, not necessarily meaningful output -- is needed as a demonstration of progress. See **pretty pictures**, **math-out**, **social science number**.

Node:NUXI problem, Next:nybble, Previous:numbers, Up:= N =

NUXI problem /nuk'see pro'bl*m/ n.

Refers to the problem of transferring data between machines with differing byte-order. The string `UNIX' might look like `NUXI' on a machine with a different `byte sex' (e.g., when transferring data from a **little-endian** to a **big-endian**, or vice-versa). See also **middle-endian**, **swab**, and **bytesexual**.

Node:nybble, Next:nyetwork, Previous:NUXI problem, Up:= N =

nybble /nib'l/ (alt. `nibble') n.

[from v. `nibble' by analogy with `bite' => `byte'] Four bits; one **hex** digit; a half-byte. Though `byte' is now techspeak, this useful relative is still jargon. Compare **byte**; see also **bit**. The more mundane spelling "nibble" is also commonly used. Apparently the `nybble' spelling is uncommon in Commonwealth Hackish, as British orthography would suggest the pronunciation /ni:'bl/.

Following `bit', `byte' and `nybble' there have been quite a few analogical attempts to construct unambiguous terms for bit blocks of other sizes. All of these are strictly jargon, not techspeak, and not very common jargon at that (most hackers would recognize them in context but not use them spontaneously). We collect them here for reference together with the ambiguous techspeak terms `word', `half-word' and `double word'; some (indicated) have substantial information separate entries.

2 bits:

crumb, **quad**, **quarter**, tayste, tydbit

4 bits:

nybble

5 bits:

nickle

10 bits:

deckle

16 bits:

playte, **chawmp** (on a 32-bit machine), word (on a 16-bit machine), half-word (on a 32-

bit machine).

18 bits:

chawmp (on a 36-bit machine), half-word (on a 36-bit machine)

32 bits:

dynner, **gawble** (on a 32-bit machine), word (on a 32-bit machine), longword (on a 16-bit machine).

36:

word (on a 36-bit machine)

48 bits:

gawble (under circumstances that remain obscure)

64 bits

double word (on a 32-bit machine)

The fundamental motivation for most of these jargon terms (aside from the normal hackerly enjoyment of punning wordplay) is the extreme ambiguity of the term `word' and its derivatives.

Node:nyetwork, Next:Ob-, Previous:nybble, Up:= N =

nyetwork /nyet'werk/ n.

[from Russian `nyet' = no] A network, when it is acting **flaky** or is **down**. Compare **notwork**.

Node:= O =, Next:= P =, Previous:= N =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= O =

- Ob-:
- Obfuscated C Contest:
- obi-wan error:
- Objectionable-C:
- obscure:
- octal forty:
- off the trolley:
- off-by-one error:
- offline:
- ogg:
- -oid:
- old fart:
- Old Testament:
- on the gripping hand:

- one-banana problem:
- one-line fix:
- one-liner wars:
- ooblick:
- op:
- open:
- open source:
- open switch:
- operating system:
- optical diff:
- optical grep:
- optimism:
- Oracle the:
- Orange Book:
- oriental food:
- orphan:
- orphaned i-node:
- orthogonal:
- OS:
- OS/2:
- OSS:
- OSU:
- OTOH:
- out-of-band:
- overclock:
- overflow bit:
- overflow pdl:
- overrun:
- overrun screw:

Node:Ob-, Next:Obfuscated C Contest, Previous:nyetwork, Up:= O =

Ob- /ob/ pref.

Obligatory. A piece of **netiquette** acknowledging that the author has been straying from the newsgroup's charter topic. For example, if a posting in alt.sex is a response to a part of someone else's posting that has nothing particularly to do with sex, the author may append `ObSex' (or `Obsex') and toss off a question or vignette about some unusual erotic act. It is considered a sign of great **winnitude** when one's Obs are more interesting than other people's whole postings.

Node:Obfuscated C Contest, Next:obi-wan error, Previous:Ob-, Up:= O =

Obfuscated C Contest n.

(in full, the `International Obfuscated C Code Contest', or IOCCC) An annual contest run since 1984 over Usenet by Landon Curt Noll and friends. The overall winner is whoever produces the most unreadable, creative, and bizarre (but working) C program; various other prizes are awarded at the judges' whim. C's terse syntax and macro-preprocessor facilities give contestants a lot of maneuvering room. The winning programs often manage to be simultaneously (a) funny, (b) breathtaking works of art, and (c) horrible examples of how *not* to code in C.

This relatively short and sweet entry might help convey the flavor of obfuscated C:

```
/*
 * HELLO WORLD program
 * by Jack Applin and Robert Heckendorn, 1985
 * (Note: depends on being able to modify elements of argv[],
 * which is not guaranteed by ANSI and often not possible.)
 */
main(v,c)char**c;{for(v[c++]="Hello, world!\n)";
(!!c)[*c]&&(v--||--c&&execlp(*c,*c,c[!!c]+!!c,!c));
**c=!c)write(!!*c,*c,!!**c);}
```

Here's another good one:

```
/*
 * Program to compute an approximation of pi
 * by Brian Westley, 1988
 * (requires pcc macro concatenation; try gcc -traditional-cpp)
 */

#define _ -F<00||--F-OO--;
int F=00,OO=00;
main(){F_OO();printf("%1.3f\n",4.*-F/OO/OO);}F_OO()
{
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           _ _ _ _ _ _
             _ _ _ _
}
```

Note that this program works by computing its own area. For more digits, write a bigger program. See also **hello world**.

The IOCCC has an official home page at http://www.ioccc.org.

Node:obi-wan error, Next:Objectionable-C, Previous:Obfuscated C Contest, Up:= O =

obi-wan error /oh'bee-won` er'*r/ n.

[RPI, from `off-by-one' and the Obi-Wan Kenobi character in "Star Wars"] A loop of some sort in which the index is off by 1. Common when the index should have started from 0 but instead started from 1. A kind of **off-by-one error**. See also **zeroth**.

Node:Objectionable-C, Next:obscure, Previous:obi-wan error, Up:= O =

Objectionable-C n.

Hackish take on "Objective-C", the name of an object-oriented dialect of C in competition with the better-known C++ (it is used to write native applications on the NeXT machine). Objectionable-C uses a Smalltalk-like syntax, but lacks the flexibility of Smalltalk method calls, and (like many such efforts) comes frustratingly close to attaining the **Right Thing** without actually doing so.

Node:obscure, Next:octal forty, Previous:Objectionable-C, Up:= O =

obscure adj.

Used in an exaggeration of its normal meaning, to imply total incomprehensibility. "The reason for that last crash is obscure." "The `find(1)` command's syntax is obscure!" The phrase `moderately obscure' implies that something could be figured out but probably isn't worth the trouble. The construction `obscure in the extreme' is the preferred emphatic form.

Node:octal forty, Next:off the trolley, Previous:obscure, Up:= O =

octal forty /ok'tl for'tee/ n.

Hackish way of saying "I'm drawing a blank." Octal 40 is the **ASCII** space character, 0100000; by an odd coincidence, **hex** 40 (01000000) is the **EBCDIC** space character. See **wall**.

Node:off the trolley, Next:off-by-one error, Previous:octal forty, Up:= O =

off the trolley adj.

Describes the behavior of a program that malfunctions and goes catatonic, but doesn't actually **crash** or abort. See **glitch**, **bug**, **deep space**, **wedged**.

This term is much older than computing, and is (uncommon) slang elsewhere. A trolley is the small wheel that trolls, or runs against, the heavy wire that carries the current to run a streetcar. It's at the end of the long pole (the trolley pole) that reaches from the roof of the streetcar to the overhead line. When the trolley stops making contact with the wire (from passing through a switch, going over bumpy track, or whatever), the streetcar comes to a halt, (usually) without crashing. The streetcar is then said to be off the trolley, or off the wire. Later on, trolley came to mean the streetcar itself. Since streetcars became common in the 1890s, the term is more than 100 years old. Nowadays, trolleys are only seen on historic streetcars, since modern streetcars use pantographs to contact the wire.

Node:off-by-one error, Next:offline, Previous:off the trolley, Up:= O =

off-by-one error n.

[common] Exceedingly common error induced in many ways, such as by starting at 0 when you should have started at 1 or vice-versa, or by writing `< N` instead of `<= N` or vice-versa. Also applied to giving something to the person next to the one who should have gotten it. Often confounded with **fencepost error**, which is properly a particular subtype of it.

Node:offline, Next:ogg, Previous:off-by-one error, Up:= O =

offline adv.

Not now or not here. "Let's take this discussion offline." Specifically used on **Usenet** to suggest that a discussion be moved off a public newsgroup to email.

Node:ogg, Next:-oid, Previous:offline, Up:= O =

ogg /og/ v.

[CMU] 1. In the multi-player space combat game Netrek, to execute kamikaze attacks against enemy ships which are carrying armies or occupying strategic positions. Named during a game in which one of the players repeatedly used the tactic while playing Orion ship G, showing up in the player list as "Og". This trick has been roundly denounced by those who would return to the good old days when the tactic of dogfighting was dominant, but as Sun Tzu wrote, "What is of supreme importance in war is to attack the enemy's strategy, not his tactics." However, the traditional answer to the newbie question "What does ogg mean?" is just "Pick up some armies and I'll show you." 2. In other games, to forcefully attack an opponent with the expectation that the resources expended will be renewed faster than the opponent will be able to regain his previous advantage. Taken more seriously as a tactic since it has gained a simple name. 3. To do anything forcefully, possibly without consideration of the drain on future resources. "I guess I'd better go ogg the problem set that's due tomorrow." "Whoops! I looked down at the map for a sec and almost ogged that oncoming car."

Node:-oid, Next:old fart, Previous:ogg, Up:= O =

-oid suff.

[from Greek suffix -oid = `in the image of'] 1. Used as in mainstream slang English to indicate a poor imitation, a counterfeit, or some otherwise slightly bogus resemblance. Hackers will happily use it with all sorts of non-Greco/Latin stem words that wouldn't keep company with it in mainstream English. For example, "He's a nerdoid" means that he superficially resembles a nerd but can't make the grade; a `modemoid' might be a 300-baud box (Real Modems run at 28.8 or up); a `computeroid' might be any **bitty box**. The word `keyboid' could be used to describe a **chiclet keyboard**, but would have to be written; spoken, it would confuse the listener as to the speaker's city of origin. 2. More specifically, an indicator for `resembling an android' which in the past has been confined to science-fiction fans and hackers. It too has recently (in 1991) started to go mainstream (most notably in the term `trendoid' for victims of terminal hipness). This is probably traceable to the popularization of the term **droid** in "Star Wars" and its sequels. (See also **windoid**.)

Coinages in both forms have been common in science fiction for at least fifty years, and hackers (who are often SF fans) have probably been making `-oid' jargon for almost that long [though GLS and I can personally confirm only that they were already common in the mid-1970s --ESR].

Node:old fart, Next:Old Testament, Previous:-oid, Up:= O =

old fart n.

Tribal elder. A title self-assumed with remarkable frequency by (esp.) Usenetters who have been programming for more than about 25 years; often appears in **sig block**s attached to Jargon File contributions of great archeological significance. This is a term of insult in the second or third person but one of pride in first person.

Node:Old Testament, Next:on the gripping hand, Previous:old fart, Up:= O =

Old Testament n.

[C programmers] The first edition of **K&R**, the sacred text describing **Classic C**.

Node:on the gripping hand, Next:one-banana problem, Previous:Old Testament, Up:= O =

on the gripping hand

In the progression that starts "On the one hand..." and continues "On the other hand..." mainstream English may add "on the third hand..." even though most people don't have three hands. Among hackers, it is just as likely to be "on the gripping hand". This metaphor supplied the title of Larry Niven & Jerry Pournelle's 1993 SF novel "The Gripping Hand" which involved a species of hostile aliens with three arms (the same species, in fact, referenced in **juggling eggs**). As with **TANSTAAFL** and **con**, this usage is a naturalized import from SF fandom.

Node:one-banana problem, Next:one-line fix, Previous:on the gripping hand, Up:= O =

one-banana problem n.

At mainframe shops, where the computers have operators for routine administrivia, the programmers and hardware people tend to look down on the operators and claim that a trained monkey could do their job. It is frequently observed that the incentives that would be offered said monkeys can be used as a scale to describe the difficulty of a task. A one-banana problem is simple; hence, "It's only a one-banana job at the most; what's taking them so long?"

At IBM, folklore divides the world into one-, two-, and three-banana problems. Other cultures have different hierarchies and may divide them more finely; at ICL, for example, five grapes (a bunch) equals a banana. Their upper limit for the in-house **sysape**s is said to be two bananas and three grapes (another source claims it's three bananas and one grape, but observes "However, this is subject to local variations, cosmic rays and ISO"). At a complication level any higher than that, one asks the manufacturers to send someone around to check things.

See also **Infinite-Monkey Theorem**.

Node:one-line fix, Next:one-liner wars, Previous:one-banana problem, Up:= O =

one-line fix n.

Used (often sarcastically) of a change to a program that is thought to be trivial or insignificant right up to the moment it crashes the system. Usually `cured' by another one-line fix. See also **I didn't change anything!**

Node:one-liner wars, Next:ooblick, Previous:one-line fix, Up:= O =

one-liner wars n.

A game popular among hackers who code in the language APL (see **write-only language** and **line noise**). The objective is to see who can code the most interesting and/or useful routine in one line of operators

chosen from APL's exceedingly **hairy** primitive set. A similar amusement was practiced among **TECO** hackers and is now popular among **Perl** aficionados.

Ken Iverson, the inventor of APL, has been credited with a one-liner that, given a number N, produces a list of the prime numbers from 1 to N inclusive. It looks like this:

(2 = 0 +.= T o.| T) / T <- iN

where `o' is the APL null character, the assignment arrow is a single character, and `i' represents the APL iota.

Here's a **Perl** program that prints primes:

```
perl -le '$_ = 1; (1 x $_) !~ /^(11+)\1+$/ && print while $_++'
```

Node:ooblick, Next:op, Previous:one-liner wars, Up:= O =

ooblick /oo'blik/ n.

[from the Dr. Seuss title "Bartholomew and the Oobleck"; the spelling `oobleck' is still current in the mainstream] A bizarre semi-liquid sludge made from cornstarch and water. Enjoyed among hackers who make batches during playtime at parties for its amusing and extremely non-Newtonian behavior; it pours and splatters, but resists rapid motion like a solid and will even crack when hit by a hammer. Often found near lasers.

Here is a field-tested ooblick recipe contributed by GLS:

1 cup cornstarch
1 cup baking soda
3/4 cup water
N drops of food coloring

This recipe isn't quite as non-Newtonian as a pure cornstarch ooblick, but has an appropriately slimy feel.

Some, however, insist that the notion of an ooblick *recipe* is far too mechanical, and that it is best to add the water in small increments so that the various mixed states the cornstarch goes through as it *becomes* ooblick can be grokked in fullness by many hands. For optional ingredients of this experience, see the "**Ceremonial Chemicals**" section of Appendix B.

Node:op, Next:open, Previous:ooblick, Up:= O =

op /op/ n.

1. In England and Ireland, common verbal abbreviation for `operator', as in system operator. Less common in the U.S., where **sysop** seems to be preferred. 2. [IRC] Someone who is endowed with privileges on **IRC**, not limited to a particular channel. These are generally people who are in charge of the IRC server at their particular site. Sometimes used interchangeably with **CHOP**. Compare **sysop**.

Node:open, Next:open source, Previous:op, Up:= O =

open n.

Abbreviation for `open (or left) parenthesis' -- used when necessary to eliminate oral ambiguity. To read aloud the LISP form (DEFUN FOO (X) (PLUS X 1)) one might say: "Open defun foo, open eks close, open, plus eks one, close close."

Node:open source, Next:open switch, Previous:open, Up:= O =

open source n.

[common; also adj. `open-source'] Term coined in March 1998 following the Mozilla release to describe software distributed in source under licenses guaranteeing anybody rights to freely use, modify, and redistribute, the code. The intent was to be able to sell the hackers' ways of doing software to industry and the mainstream by avoid the negative connotations (to **suit**s) of the term "**free software**". For discussion of the followon tactics and their consequences, see the Open Source Initiative site.

Node:open switch, Next:operating system, Previous:open source, Up:= O =

open switch n.

[IBM: prob. from railroading] An unresolved question, issue, or problem.

Node:operating system, Next:optical diff, Previous:open switch, Up:= O =

operating system n.

[techspeak] (Often abbreviated `OS') The foundation software of a machine; that which schedules tasks, allocates storage, and presents a default interface to the user between applications. The facilities an operating system provides and its general design philosophy exert an extremely strong influence on programming style and on the technical cultures that grow up around its host machines. Hacker folklore has been shaped primarily by the **Unix**, **ITS**, **TOPS-10**, **TOPS-20**/**TWENEX**, **WAITS**, **CP/M**, **MS-DOS**, and **Multics** operating systems (most importantly by ITS and Unix).

Node:optical diff, Next:optical grep, Previous:operating system, Up:= O =

optical diff n.

See **vdiff**.

Node:optical grep, Next:optimism, Previous:optical diff, Up:= O =

optical grep n.

See **vgrep**.

Node:optimism, Next:Oracle the, Previous:optical grep, Up:= O =

optimism n.

What a programmer is full of after fixing the last bug and before discovering the *next* last bug. Fred Brooks's book "The Mythical Man-Month" (See "Brooks's Law") contains the following paragraph that describes this extremely well:

> All programmers are optimists. Perhaps this modern sorcery especially attracts those who believe in happy endings and fairy godmothers. Perhaps the hundreds of nitty frustrations drive away all but those who habitually focus on the end goal. Perhaps it is merely that computers are young, programmers are younger, and the young are always optimists. But however the selection process works, the result is indisputable: "This time it will surely run," or "I just found the last bug.".

See also **Lubarsky's Law of Cybernetic Entomology**.

Node:Oracle the, Next:Orange Book, Previous:optimism, Up:= O =

Oracle, the

The all-knowing, all-wise Internet Oracle *rec.humor.oracle*), or one of the foreign language derivatives of same. Newbies frequently confuse the Oracle with Oracle, a database vendor. As a result, the unmoderated *rec.humor.oracle.d* is frequently crossposted to by the clueless, looking for advice on SQL. As more then one person has said in similar situations, "Don't people bother to look at the newsgroup description line anymore?" (To which the standard response is, "Did people ever read it in the first place?")

Node:Orange Book, Next:oriental food, Previous:Oracle the, Up:= O =

Orange Book n.

The U.S. Government's standards document "Trusted Computer System Evaluation Criteria, DOD standard 5200.28-STD, December, 1985" which characterize secure computing architectures and defines levels A1 (most secure) through D (least). Modern Unixes are roughly C2. See also **crayola books**, **book titles**.

Node:oriental food, Next:orphan, Previous:Orange Book, Up:= O =

oriental food n.

Hackers display an intense tropism towards oriental cuisine, especially Chinese, and especially of the spicier varieties such as Szechuan and Hunan. This phenomenon (which has also been observed in subcultures that overlap heavily with hackerdom, most notably science-fiction fandom) has never been satisfactorily explained, but is sufficiently intense that one can assume the target of a hackish dinner expedition to be the best local Chinese place and be right at least three times out of four. See also **ravs**, **great-wall**, **stir-fried random**, **laser chicken**, **Yu-Shiang Whole Fish**. Thai, Indian, Korean, and Vietnamese cuisines are also quite popular.

Node:orphan, Next:orphaned i-node, Previous:oriental food, Up:= O =

orphan n.

[Unix] A process whose parent has died; one inherited by `init(1)`. Compare **zombie**.

Node:orphaned i-node, Next:orthogonal, Previous:orphan, Up:= O =

orphaned i-node /or'f*nd i:'nohd/ n.

[Unix] 1. [techspeak] A file that retains storage but no longer appears in the directories of a filesystem. 2. By extension, a pejorative for any person no longer serving a useful function within some organization, esp. **lion food** without subordinates.

Node:orthogonal, Next:OS, Previous:orphaned i-node, Up:= O =

orthogonal adj.

[from mathematics] Mutually independent; well separated; sometimes, irrelevant to. Used in a generalization of its mathematical meaning to describe sets of primitives or capabilities that, like a vector basis in geometry, span the entire `capability space' of the system and are in some sense non-overlapping or mutually independent. For example, in architectures such as the PDP-11 or VAX where all or nearly all registers can be used interchangeably in any role with respect to any instruction, the register set is said to be orthogonal. Or, in logic, the set of operators `not' and `or' is orthogonal, but the set `nand', `or', and `not' is not (because any one of these can be expressed in terms of the others). Also used in comments on human discourse: "This may be orthogonal to the discussion, but...."

Node:OS, Next:OS/2, Previous:orthogonal, Up:= O =

OS /O-S/

1. [Operating System] n. An abbreviation heavily used in email, occasionally in speech. 2. n. obs. On ITS, an output spy. See "**OS and JEDGAR**" in Appendix A.

Node:OS/2, Next:OSS, Previous:OS, Up:= O =

OS/2 /O S too/ n.

The anointed successor to MS-DOS for Intel 286- and 386-based micros; proof that IBM/Microsoft couldn't get it right the second time, either. Often called `Half-an-OS'. Mentioning it is usually good for a cheap laugh among hackers -- the design was so **baroque**, and the implementation of 1.x so bad, that 3 years after introduction you could still count the major **app**s shipping for it on the fingers of two hands -- in unary. The 2.x versions are said to have improved somewhat, and informed hackers now rate them superior to Microsoft Windows (an endorsement which, however, could easily be construed as damning with faint praise). See **monstrosity**, **cretinous**, **second-system effect**.

Node:OSS, Next:OSU, Previous:OS/2, Up:= O =

OSS

Written-only acronym for "Open Source Software" (see **open source**. This is a rather ugly **TLA**, and the principals in the open-source movement don't use it, but it has (perhaps inevitably) spread through the trade press like kudzu.

Node:OSU, Next:OTOH, Previous:OSS, Up:= O =

OSU /O-S-U/ n. obs.

[TMRC] Acronym for Officially Sanctioned User; a user who is recognized as such by the computer authorities and allowed to use the computer above the objections of the security monitor.

Node:OTOH, Next:out-of-band, Previous:OSU, Up:= O =

OTOH //

[Usenet; very common] On The Other Hand.

Node:out-of-band, Next:overclock, Previous:OTOH, Up:= O =

out-of-band adj.

[from telecommunications and network theory] 1. In software, describes values of a function which are not in its `natural' range of return values, but are rather signals that some kind of exception has occurred. Many C functions, for example, return a nonnegative integral value, but indicate failure with an out-of-band return value of -1. Compare **hidden flag**, **green bytes**, **fence**. 2. Also sometimes used to describe what communications people call `shift characters', such as the ESC that leads control sequences for many terminals, or the level shift indicators in the old 5-bit Baudot codes. 3. In personal communication, using methods other than email, such as telephones or **snail-mail**.

Node:overclock, Next:overflow bit, Previous:out-of-band, Up:= O =

overclock /oh'vr-klok'/ vt.

To operate a CPU or other digital logic device at a rate higher than it was designed for, under the assumption that the manufacturer put some **slop** into the specification to account for manufacturing tolerances. Overclocking something can result in intermittent **crash**es, and can even burn things out, since power dissipation is directly proportional to **clock** frequency. People who make a hobby of this are sometimes called "overclockers"; they are thrilled that they can run their 450MHz CPU at 500MHz, even though they can only tell the difference by running a **benchmark** program.

Node:overflow bit, Next:overflow pdl, Previous:overclock, Up:= O =

overflow bit n.

1. [techspeak] A **flag** on some processors indicating an attempt to calculate a result too large for a register to hold. 2. More generally, an indication of any kind of capacity overload condition. "Well, the **Ada** description was **baroque** all right, but I could hack it OK until they got to the exception handling ... that set my overflow bit." 3. The hypothetical bit that will be set if a hacker doesn't get to make a trip to the Room of Porcelain Fixtures: "I'd better process an internal interrupt before the overflow bit gets set."

Node:overflow pdl, Next:overrun, Previous:overflow bit, Up:= O =

overflow pdl n.

[MIT] The place where you put things when your **PDL** is full. If you don't have one and too many things get pushed, you forget something. The overflow pdl for a person's memory might be a memo pad. This usage inspired the following doggerel:

> Hey, diddle, diddle
> The overflow pdl
> To get a little more stack;
> If that's not enough
> Then you lose it all,
> And have to pop all the way back.
> -The Great Quux

The term `pdl' (see **PDL**) seems to be primarily an MITism; outside MIT this term is replaced by `overflow **stack**' (but that wouldn't rhyme with `diddle').

Node:overrun, Next:overrun screw, Previous:overflow pdl, Up:= O =

overrun n.

1. [techspeak] Term for a frequent consequence of data arriving faster than it can be consumed, esp. in serial line communications. For example, at 9600 baud there is almost exactly one character per millisecond, so if a **silo** can hold only two characters and the machine takes longer than 2 msec to get to service the interrupt, at least one character will be lost. 2. Also applied to non-serial-I/O communications. "I forgot to pay my electric bill due to mail overrun." "Sorry, I got four phone calls in 3 minutes last night and lost your message to overrun." When **thrash**ing at tasks, the next person to make a request might be told "Overrun!" Compare **firehose syndrome**. 3. More loosely, may refer to a **buffer overflow** not necessarily related to processing time (as in **overrun screw**).

Node:overrun screw, Next:P-mail, Previous:overrun, Up:= O =

overrun screw n.

[C programming] A variety of **fandango on core** produced by scribbling past the end of an array (C implementations typically have no checks for this error). This is relatively benign and easy to spot if the array is static; if it is auto, the result may be to **smash the stack** -- often resulting in **heisenbug**s of the most diabolical subtlety. The term `overrun screw' is used esp. of scribbles beyond the end of arrays allocated with `malloc(3)`; this typically trashes the allocation header for the next block in the **arena**, producing massive lossage within malloc and often a core dump on the next operation to use `stdio(3)` or `malloc(3)` itself. See **spam**, **overrun**; see also **memory leak**, **memory smash**, **aliasing bug**, **precedence lossage**, **fandango on core**, **secondary damage**.

Node:= P =, Next:= Q =, Previous:= O =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= P =

- P-mail:

- P.O.D.:
- padded cell:
- page in:
- page out:
- pain in the net:
- Pangloss parity:
- paper-net:
- param:
- PARC:
- parent message:
- parity errors:
- Parkinson's Law of Data:
- parm:
- parse:
- Pascal:
- pastie:
- patch:
- patch pumpkin:
- patch space:
- path:
- pathological:
- payware:
- PBD:
- PC-ism:
- PD:
- PDL:
- PDP-10:
- PDP-20:
- PEBKAC:
- peek:
- pencil and paper:
- Pentagram Pro:
- Pentium:
- peon:
- percent-S:
- perf:
- perfect programmer syndrome:
- Perl:
- person of no account:
- pessimal:
- pessimizing compiler:
- peta-:
- PETSCII:
- PFY:
- phage:
- phase:
- phase of the moon:
- phase-wrapping:
- PHB:
- phreaker:
- phreaking:
- pico-:

- pig-tail:
- pilot error:
- ping:
- Ping O' Death:
- ping storm:
- pink wire:
- pipe:
- pistol:
- pixel sort:
- pizza box:
- plaid screen:
- plain-ASCII:
- plan file:
- platinum-iridium:
- playpen:
- playte:
- plingnet:
- plokta:
- plonk:
- plug-and-pray:
- plugh:
- plumbing:
- PM:
- pnambic:
- pod:
- point-and-drool interface:
- pointy hat:
- pointy-haired:
- poke:
- poll:
- polygon pusher:
- POM:
- pop:
- POPJ:
- poser:
- post:
- postcardware:
- posting:
- postmaster:
- PostScript:
- pound on:
- power cycle:
- power hit:
- PPN:
- pr0n:
- precedence lossage:
- prepend:
- prestidigitization:
- pretty pictures:
- prettyprint:
- pretzel key:
- priesthood:

- prime time:
- print:
- printing discussion:
- priority interrupt:
- profile:
- progasm:
- proggy:
- proglet:
- program:
- Programmer's Cheer:
- programming:
- programming fluid:
- propeller head:
- propeller key:
- proprietary:
- protocol:
- provocative maintenance:
- prowler:
- pseudo:
- pseudoprime:
- pseudosuit:
- psychedelicware:
- psyton:
- pubic directory:
- puff:
- pumpkin holder:
- pumpking:
- punched card:
- punt:
- Purple Book:
- purple wire:
- push:
- Python:

Node:P-mail, Next:P.O.D., Previous:overrun screw, Up:= P =

P-mail n.

[rare] Physical mail, as opposed to **email**. Synonymous with **snail-mail**, but much less common.

Node:P.O.D., Next:padded cell, Previous:P-mail, Up:= P =

P.O.D. /P-O-D/

[rare] Acronym for `Piece Of Data' (as opposed to a code section). See also **pod**.

Node:padded cell, Next:page in, Previous:P.O.D., Up:= P =

padded cell n.

Where you put **luser**s so they can't hurt anything. A program that limits a luser to a carefully restricted subset of the capabilities of the host system (for example, the `rsh(1)` utility on USG Unix). Note that this is different from an **iron box** because it is overt and not aimed at enforcing security so much as protecting others (and the luser) from the consequences of the luser's boundless naivete (see **naive**). Also `padded cell environment'.

Node:page in, Next:page out, Previous:padded cell, Up:= P =

page in v.

[MIT] 1. To become aware of one's surroundings again after having paged out (see **page out**). Usually confined to the sarcastic comment: "Eric pages in, **film at 11**!" 2. Syn. `swap in'; see **swap**.

Node:page out, Next:pain in the net, Previous:page in, Up:= P =

page out vi.

[MIT] 1. To become unaware of one's surroundings temporarily, due to daydreaming or preoccupation. "Can you repeat that? I paged out for a minute." See **page in**. Compare **glitch**, **thinko**. 2. Syn. `swap out'; see **swap**.

Node:pain in the net, Next:Pangloss parity, Previous:page out, Up:= P =

pain in the net n.

A **flamer**.

Node:Pangloss parity, Next:paper-net, Previous:pain in the net, Up:= P =

Pangloss parity n.

[from Dr. Pangloss, the eternal optimist in Voltaire's "Candide"] In corporate DP shops, a common condition of severe but equally shared **lossage** resulting from the theory that as long as everyone in the organization has the exactly the *same* model of obsolete computer, everything will be fine.

Node:paper-net, Next:param, Previous:Pangloss parity, Up:= P =

paper-net n.

Hackish way of referring to the postal service, analogizing it to a very slow, low-reliability network. Usenet **sig block**s sometimes include a "Paper-Net:" header just before the sender's postal address; common variants of this are "Papernet" and "P-Net". Note that the standard **netiquette** guidelines discourage this practice as a waste of bandwidth, since netters are quite unlikely to casually use postal addresses. Compare **voice-net**, **snail-mail**, **P-mail**.

Node:param, Next:PARC, Previous:paper-net, Up:= P =

param /p*-ram'/ n.

[common] Shorthand for `parameter'. See also **parm**; compare **arg**, **var**.

Node:PARC, Next:parent message, Previous:param, Up:= P =

PARC n.

See **XEROX PARC**.

Node:parent message, Next:parity errors, Previous:PARC, Up:= P =

parent message n.

What a **followup** follows up.

Node:parity errors, Next:Parkinson's Law of Data, Previous:parent message, Up:= P =

parity errors pl.n.

Little lapses of attention or (in more severe cases) consciousness, usually brought on by having spent all night and most of the next day hacking. "I need to go home and crash; I'm starting to get a lot of parity errors." Derives from a relatively common but nearly always correctable transient error in memory hardware. It predates RAM; in fact, this term is reported to have already have been in use in its jargoin sense back in the 1960s when magnetic cores ruled. Parity errors can also afflict mass storage and serial communication lines; this is more serious because not always correctable.

Node:Parkinson's Law of Data, Next:parm, Previous:parity errors, Up:= P =

Parkinson's Law of Data prov.

"Data expands to fill the space available for storage"; buying more memory encourages the use of more memory-intensive techniques. It has been observed since the mid-1980s that the memory usage of evolving systems tends to double roughly once every 18 months. Fortunately, memory density available for constant dollars also tends to about double once every 18 months (see **Moore's Law**); unfortunately, the laws of physics guarantee that the latter cannot continue indefinitely.

Node:parm, Next:parse, Previous:Parkinson's Law of Data, Up:= P =

parm /parm/ n.

Further-compressed form of **param**. This term is an IBMism, and written use is almost unknown outside IBM shops; spoken /parm/ is more widely distributed, but the synonym **arg** is favored among hackers. Compare **arg**, **var**.

Node:parse, Next:Pascal, Previous:parm, Up:= P =

parse [from linguistic terminology] vt.

1. To determine the syntactic structure of a sentence or other utterance (close to the standard English meaning). "That was the one I saw you." "I can't parse that." 2. More generally, to understand or comprehend. "It's very simple; you just kretch the glims and then aos the zotz." "I can't parse that." 3. Of fish, to have to remove the bones yourself. "I object to parsing fish", means "I don't want to get a whole fish, but a sliced one is okay". A `parsed fish' has been deboned. There is some controversy over whether `unparsed' should mean `bony', or also mean `deboned'.

Node:Pascal, Next:pastie, Previous:parse, Up:= P =

Pascal n.

An Algol-descended language designed by Niklaus Wirth on the CDC 6600 around 1967-68 as an instructional tool for elementary programming. This language, designed primarily to keep students from shooting themselves in the foot and thus extremely restrictive from a general-purpose-programming point of view, was later promoted as a general-purpose tool and, in fact, became the ancestor of a large family of languages including Modula-2 and **Ada** (see also **bondage-and-discipline language**). The hackish point of view on Pascal was probably best summed up by a devastating (and, in its deadpan way, screamingly funny) 1981 paper by Brian Kernighan (of **K&R** fame) entitled "Why Pascal is Not My Favorite Programming Language", which was turned down by the technical journals but circulated widely via photocopies. It was eventually published in "Comparing and Assessing Programming Languages", edited by Alan Feuer and Narain Gehani (Prentice-Hall, 1984). Part of his discussion is worth repeating here, because its criticisms are still apposite to Pascal itself after ten years of improvement and could also stand as an indictment of many other bondage-and-discipline languages. At the end of a summary of the case against Pascal, Kernighan wrote:

> 9. There is no escape
>
> This last point is perhaps the most important. The language is inadequate but circumscribed, because there is no way to escape its limitations. There are no casts to disable the type-checking when necessary. There is no way to replace the defective run-time environment with a sensible one, unless one controls the compiler that defines the "standard procedures". The language is closed.
>
> People who use Pascal for serious programming fall into a fatal trap. Because the language is impotent, it must be extended. But each group extends Pascal in its own direction, to make it look like whatever language they really want. Extensions for separate compilation, FORTRAN-like COMMON, string data types, internal static variables, initialization, octal numbers, bit operators, etc., all add to the utility of the language for one group but destroy its portability to others.
>
> I feel that it is a mistake to use Pascal for anything much beyond its original target. In its pure form, Pascal is a toy language, suitable for teaching but not for real programming.

Pascal has since been almost entirely displaced (by **C**) from the niches it had acquired in serious applications and systems programming, but retains some popularity as a hobbyist language in the MS-DOS and Macintosh worlds.

Node:pastie, Next:patch, Previous:Pascal, Up:= P =

pastie /pay'stee/ n.

An adhesive-backed label designed to be attached to a key on a keyboard to indicate some non-standard character which can be accessed through that key. Pasties are likely to be used in APL environments, where almost every key is associated with a special character. A pastie on the R key, for example, might remind the user that it is used to generate the rho character. The term properly refers to nipple-concealing devices formerly worn by strippers in concession to indecent-exposure laws; compare **tits on a keyboard**.

Node:patch, Next:patch pumpkin, Previous:pastie, Up:= P =

patch

1. n. A temporary addition to a piece of code, usually as a **quick-and-dirty** remedy to an existing bug or misfeature. A patch may or may not work, and may or may not eventually be incorporated permanently into the program. Distinguished from a **diff** or **mod** by the fact that a patch is generated by more primitive means than the rest of the program; the classical examples are instructions modified by using the front panel switches, and changes made directly to the binary executable of a program originally written in an **HLL**. Compare **one-line fix**. 2. vt. To insert a patch into a piece of code. 3. [in the Unix world] n. A **diff** (sense 2). 4. A set of modifications to binaries to be applied by a patching program. IBM operating systems often receive updates to the operating system in the form of absolute hexadecimal patches. If you have modified your OS, you have to disassemble these back to the source. The patches might later be corrected by other patches on top of them (patches were said to "grow scar tissue"). The result was often a convoluted **patch space** and headaches galore. 5. [Unix] the `patch(1)` program, written by Larry Wall, which automatically applies a patch (sense 3) to a set of source code.

There is a classic story of a **tiger team** penetrating a secure military computer that illustrates the danger inherent in binary patches (or, indeed, any patches that you can't -- or don't -- inspect and examine before installing). They couldn't find any **trap door**s or any way to penetrate security of IBM's OS, so they made a site visit to an IBM office (remember, these were official military types who were purportedly on official business), swiped some IBM stationery, and created a fake patch. The patch was actually the trapdoor they needed. The patch was distributed at about the right time for an IBM patch, had official stationery and all accompanying documentation, and was dutifully installed. The installation manager very shortly thereafter learned something about proper procedures.

Node:patch pumpkin, Next:patch space, Previous:patch, Up:= P =

patch pumpkin n.

[Perl hackers] A notional token passed around among the members of a project. Possession of the patch pumpkin means one has the exclusive authority to make changes on the project's master source tree. The implicit assumption is that `pumpkin holder' status is temporary and rotates periodically among senior project members.

This term comes from the Perl development community, but has been sighted elsewhere. It derives from a stuffed-toy pumpkin that was passed around at a development shop years ago as the access control for a shared backup-tape drive.

Node:patch space, Next:path, Previous:patch pumpkin, Up:= P =

patch space n.

An unused block of bits left in a binary so that it can later be modified by insertion of machine-language instructions there (typically, the patch space is modified to contain new code, and the superseded code is

patched to contain a jump or call to the patch space). The near-universal use of compilers and interpreters has made this term rare; it is now primarily historical outside IBM shops. See **patch** (sense 4), **zap** (sense 4), **hook**.

Node:path, Next:pathological, Previous:patch space, Up:= P =

path n.

1. A **bang path** or explicitly routed **Internet address**; a node-by-node specification of a link between two machines. Though these are now obsolete as a form of addressing, they still show up in diagnostics and trace headers ocvcasionally (e.g. in NNTP headers). 2. [Unix] A filename, fully specified relative to the root directory (as opposed to relative to the current directory; the latter is sometimes called a `relative path'). This is also called a `pathname'. 3. [Unix and MS-DOS] The `search path', an environment variable specifying the directories in which the **shell** (COMMAND.COM, under MS-DOS) should look for commands. Other, similar constructs abound under Unix (for example, the C preprocessor has a `search path' it uses in looking for `#include` files).

Node:pathological, Next:payware, Previous:path, Up:= P =

pathological adj.

1. [scientific computation] Used of a data set that is grossly atypical of normal expected input, esp. one that exposes a weakness or bug in whatever algorithm one is using. An algorithm that can be broken by pathological inputs may still be useful if such inputs are very unlikely to occur in practice. 2. When used of test input, implies that it was purposefully engineered as a worst case. The implication in both senses is that the data is spectacularly ill-conditioned or that someone had to explicitly set out to break the algorithm in order to come up with such a crazy example. 3. Also said of an unlikely collection of circumstances. "If the network is down and comes up halfway through the execution of that command by root, the system may just crash." "Yes, but that's a pathological case." Often used to dismiss the case from discussion, with the implication that the consequences are acceptable, since they will happen so infrequently (if at all) that it doesn't seem worth going to the extra trouble to handle that case (see sense 1).

Node:payware, Next:PBD, Previous:pathological, Up:= P =

payware /pay'weir/ n.

Commercial software. Oppose **shareware** or **freeware**.

Node:PBD, Next:PC-ism, Previous:payware, Up:= P =

PBD /P-B-D/ n.

[abbrev. of `Programmer Brain Damage'] Applied to bug reports revealing places where the program was obviously broken by an incompetent or short-sighted programmer. Compare **UBD**; see also **brain-damaged**.

Node:PC-ism, Next:PD, Previous:PBD, Up:= P =

PC-ism /P-C-izm/ n.

A piece of code or coding technique that takes advantage of the unprotected single-tasking environment in IBM PCs and the like running DOS, e.g., by busy-waiting on a hardware register, direct diddling of screen memory, or using hard timing loops. Compare **ill-behaved**, **vaxism**, **unixism**. Also, `PC-ware' n., a program full of PC-isms on a machine with a more capable operating system. Pejorative.

Node:PD, Next:PDL, Previous:PC-ism, Up:= P =

PD /P-D/ adj.

[common] Abbreviation for `public domain', applied to software distributed over **Usenet** and from Internet archive sites. Much of this software is not in fact public domain in the legal sense but travels under various copyrights granting reproduction and use rights to anyone who can **snarf** a copy. See **copyleft**.

Node:PDL, Next:PDP-10, Previous:PD, Up:= P =

PDL /P-D-L/, /pid'l/, /p*d'l/ or /puhd'l/

1. n. `Program Design Language'. Any of a large class of formal and profoundly useless pseudo-languages in which **management** forces one to design programs. Too often, management expects PDL descriptions to be maintained in parallel with the code, imposing massive overhead to little or no benefit. See also **flowchart**. 2. v. To design using a program design language. "I've been pdling so long my eyes won't focus beyond 2 feet." 3. n. `Page Description Language'. Refers to any language which is used to control a graphics device, usually a laserprinter. The most common example is, of course, Adobe's **PostScript** language, but there are many others, such as Xerox InterPress, etc. 4. In ITS days, the preferred MITism for **stack**. See **overflow pdl**. 5. Dave Lebling, one of the co-authors of **Zork**; (his **network address** on the ITS machines was at one time pdl@dms).

Node:PDP-10, Next:PDP-20, Previous:PDL, Up:= P =

PDP-10 n.

[Programmed Data Processor model 10] The machine that made timesharing real. It looms large in hacker folklore because of its adoption in the mid-1970s by many university computing facilities and research labs, including the MIT AI Lab, Stanford, and CMU. Some aspects of the instruction set (most notably the bit-field instructions) are still considered unsurpassed. The 10 was eventually eclipsed by the VAX machines (descendants of the PDP-11) when **DEC** recognized that the 10 and VAX product lines were competing with each other and decided to concentrate its software development effort on the more profitable VAX. The machine was finally dropped from DEC's line in 1983, following the failure of the Jupiter Project at DEC to build a viable new model. (Some attempts by other companies to market clones came to nothing; see **Foonly** and **Mars**.) This event spelled the doom of **ITS** and the technical cultures that had spawned the original Jargon File, but by mid-1991 it had become something of a badge of honorable old-timerhood among hackers to have cut one's teeth on a PDP-10. See **TOPS-10**, **ITS**, **BLT**, **DDT**, **DPB**, **EXCH**, **HAKMEM**, **LDB**, **pop**, **push**. See also http://www.inwap.com/pdp10/.

Node:PDP-20, Next:PEBKAC, Previous:PDP-10, Up:= P =

PDP-20 n.

The most famous computer that never was. **PDP-10** computers running the **TOPS-10** operating system were labeled `DECsystem-10' as a way of differentiating them from the PDP-11. Later on, those systems running **TOPS-20** were labeled `DECSYSTEM-20' (the block capitals being the result of a lawsuit brought against DEC by Singer, which once made a computer called `system-10'), but contrary to popular lore there was never a `PDP-20'; the only difference between a 10 and a 20 was the operating system and the color of the paint. Most (but not all) machines sold to run TOPS-10 were painted `Basil Blue', whereas most TOPS-20 machines were painted `Chinese Red' (often mistakenly called orange).

Node:PEBKAC, Next:peek, Previous:PDP-20, Up:= P =

PEBKAC /peb'kak/

[Abbrev., "Problem Exists Between Keyboard And Chair"] Used by support people, particularly at call centers and help desks. Not used with the public. Denotes pilot error as the cause of the crash, especially stupid errors that even a **luser** could figure out. Very derogatory. Usage: "Did you ever figure out why that guy couldn't print?" "Yeah, he kept cancelling the operation before it could finish. PEBKAC."

Node:peek, Next:pencil and paper, Previous:PEBKAC, Up:= P =

peek n.,vt.

(and **poke**) The commands in most microcomputer BASICs for directly accessing memory contents at an absolute address; often extended to mean the corresponding constructs in any **HLL** (peek reads memory, poke modifies it). Much hacking on small, non-MMU micros used to consist of `peek'ing around memory, more or less at random, to find the location where the system keeps interesting stuff. Long (and variably accurate) lists of such addresses for various computers circulated (see **interrupt list**). The results of `poke's at these addresses may be highly useful, mildly amusing, useless but neat, or (most likely) total **lossage** (see **killer poke**).

Since a **real operating system** provides useful, higher-level services for the tasks commonly performed with peeks and pokes on micros, and real languages tend not to encourage low-level memory groveling, a question like "How do I do a peek in C?" is diagnostic of the **newbie**. (Of course, OS kernels often have to do exactly this; a real kernel hacker would unhesitatingly, if unportably, assign an absolute address to a pointer variable and indirect through it.)

Node:pencil and paper, Next:Pentagram Pro, Previous:peek, Up:= P =

pencil and paper n.

An archaic information storage and transmission device that works by depositing smears of graphite on bleached wood pulp. More recent developments in paper-based technology include improved `write-once' update devices which use tiny rolling heads similar to mouse balls to deposit colored pigment. All these devices require an operator skilled at so-called `handwriting' technique. These technologies are ubiquitous outside hackerdom, but nearly forgotten inside it. Most hackers had terrible handwriting to begin with, and years of keyboarding tend to have encouraged it to degrade further. Perhaps for this reason, hackers deprecate pencil-and-paper technology and often resist using it in any but the most trivial contexts.

Node:Pentagram Pro, Next:Pentium, Previous:pencil and paper, Up:= P =

Pentagram Pro n.

A humorous corruption of "Pentium Pro", with a Satanic reference, implying that the chip is inherently **evil**. Often used with "666 MHz"; there is a T-shirt. See **Pentium**

Node:Pentium, Next:peon, Previous:Pentagram Pro, Up:= P =

Pentium n.

The name given to Intel's P5 chip, the successor to the 80486. The name was chosen because of difficulties Intel had in trademarking a number. It suggests the number five (implying 586) while (according to Intel) conveying a meaning of strength "like titanium". Among hackers, the plural is frequently `pentia'. See also **Pentagram Pro**.

Intel did not stick to this convention when naming its P6 processor the Pentium Pro; many believe this is due to difficulties in selling a chip with "sex" in its name. Successor chips have been called `Pentium II' and `Pentium III'.

Node:peon, Next:percent-S, Previous:Pentium, Up:= P =

peon n.

A person with no special (**root** or **wheel**) privileges on a computer system. "I can't create an account on *foovax* for you; I'm only a peon there."

Node:percent-S, Next:perf, Previous:peon, Up:= P =

percent-S /per-sent' es'/ n.

[From the code in C's `printf(3)` library function used to insert an arbitrary string argument] An unspecified person or object. "I was just talking to some percent-s in administration." Compare **random**.

Node:perf, Next:perfect programmer syndrome, Previous:percent-S, Up:= P =

perf /perf/ n.

Syn. **chad** (sense 1). The term `perfory' /per'f*-ree/ is also heard. The term **perf** may also refer to the perforations themselves, rather than the chad they produce when torn (philatelists use it this way).

Node:perfect programmer syndrome, Next:Perl, Previous:perf, Up:= P =

perfect programmer syndrome n.

Arrogance; the egotistical conviction that one is above normal human error. Most frequently found among programmers of some native ability but relatively little experience (especially new graduates; their perceptions may be distorted by a history of excellent performance at solving **toy problem**s). "Of course my program is correct, there is no need to test it." "Yes, I can see there may be a problem here, but *I'll* never type `rm -r /` while in **root mode**."

Node:Perl, Next:person of no account, Previous:perfect programmer syndrome, Up:= P =

Perl /perl/ n.

[Practical Extraction and Report Language, a.k.a. Pathologically Eclectic Rubbish Lister] An interpreted language developed by Larry Wall (<larry@wall.org>, author of `patch(1)` and `rn(1)`) and distributed over Usenet. Superficially resembles **awk**, but is much hairier, including many facilities reminiscent of `sed(1)` and shells and a comprehensive Unix system-call interface. Unix sysadmins, who are almost always incorrigible hackers, generally consider it one of the **languages of choice**, and it is by far the most widely used tool for making `live' web pages via CGI. Perl has been described, in a parody of a famous remark about `lex(1)`, as the "Swiss-Army chainsaw" of Unix programming. Though Perl is very useful, it would be a stretch to describe it as pretty or **elegant**; people who like clean, spare design generally prefer **Python**. See also **Camel Book**, **TMTOWTDI**.

Node:person of no account, Next:pessimal, Previous:Perl, Up:= P =

person of no account n.

[University of California at Santa Cruz] Used when referring to a person with no **network address**, frequently to forestall confusion. Most often as part of an introduction: "This is Bill, a person of no account, but he used to be bill@random.com". Compare **return from the dead**.

Node:pessimal, Next:pessimizing compiler, Previous:person of no account, Up:= P =

pessimal /pes'im-l/ adj.

[Latin-based antonym for `optimal'] Maximally bad. "This is a pessimal situation." Also `pessimize' vt. To make as bad as possible. These words are the obvious Latin-based antonyms for `optimal' and `optimize', but for some reason they do not appear in most English dictionaries, although `pessimize' is listed in the OED.

Node:pessimizing compiler, Next:peta-, Previous:pessimal, Up:= P =

pessimizing compiler /pes'*-mi:z`ing k*m-pi:l'r/ n.

A compiler that produces object [antonym of techspeak `optimizing compiler'] code that is worse than the straightforward or obvious hand translation. The implication is that the compiler is actually trying to optimize the program, but through excessive cleverness is doing the opposite. A few pessimizing compilers have been written on purpose, however, as pranks or burlesques.

Node:peta-, Next:PETSCII, Previous:pessimizing compiler, Up:= P =

peta- /pe't*/ pref

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:PETSCII, Next:PFY, Previous:peta-, Up:= P =

PETSCII /pet'skee/ n. obs.

[abbreviation of PET ASCII] The variation (many would say perversion) of the **ASCII** character set used by the Commodore Business Machines PET series of personal computers and the later Commodore C64, C16, C128, and VIC20 machines. The PETSCII set used left-arrow and up-arrow (as in old-style ASCII) instead of underscore and caret, placed the unshifted alphabet at positions 65-90, put the shifted alphabet at positions 193-218, and added graphics characters.

Node:PFY, Next:phage, Previous:PETSCII, Up:= P =

PFY n.

[Usenet; common] Abbreviation for `Pimply-Faced Youth'. A **BOFH** in training, esp. one apprenticed to an elder BOFH aged in evil.

Node:phage, Next:phase, Previous:PFY, Up:= P =

phage n.

A program that modifies other programs or databases in unauthorized ways; esp. one that propagates a **virus** or **Trojan horse**. See also **worm**, **mockingbird**. The analogy, of course, is with phage viruses in biology.

Node:phase, Next:phase of the moon, Previous:phage, Up:= P =

phase

1. n. The offset of one's waking-sleeping schedule with respect to the standard 24-hour cycle; a useful concept among people who often work at night and/or according to no fixed schedule. It is not uncommon to change one's phase by as much as 6 hours per day on a regular basis. "What's your phase?" "I've been getting in about 8 P.M. lately, but I'm going to **wrap around** to the day schedule by Friday." A person who is roughly 12 hours out of phase is sometimes said to be in `night mode'. (The term `day mode' is also (but less frequently) used, meaning you're working 9 to 5 (or, more likely, 10 to 6).) The act of altering one's cycle is called `changing phase'; `phase shifting' has also been recently reported from Caltech. 2. `change phase the hard way': To stay awake for a very long time in order to get into a different phase. 3. `change phase the easy way': To stay asleep, etc. However, some claim that either staying awake longer or sleeping longer is easy, and that it is *shortening* your day or night that is really hard (see **wrap around**). The `jet lag' that afflicts travelers who cross many time-zone boundaries may be attributed to two distinct causes: the strain of travel per se, and the strain of changing phase. Hackers who suddenly find that they must change phase drastically in a short period of time, particularly the hard way, experience something very like jet lag without traveling.

Node:phase of the moon, Next:phase-wrapping, Previous:phase, Up:= P =

phase of the moon n.

Used humorously as a random parameter on which something is said to depend. Sometimes implies unreliability of whatever is dependent, or that reliability seems to be dependent on conditions nobody has been able to determine. "This feature depends on having the channel open in mumble mode, having the foo switch set, and on the phase of the moon." See also **heisenbug**.

True story: Once upon a time there was a program bug that really did depend on the phase of the moon. There was a little subroutine that had traditionally been used in various programs at MIT to calculate an approximation to the moon's true phase. GLS incorporated this routine into a LISP program that, when it wrote out a file, would print a timestamp line almost 80 characters long. Very occasionally the first line of the message would be too long and would overflow onto the next line, and when the file was later read back in the program would **barf**. The length of the first line depended on both the precise date and time and the length of the phase specification when the timestamp was printed, and so the bug literally depended on the phase of the moon!

The first paper edition of the Jargon File (Steele-1983) included an example of one of the timestamp lines that exhibited this bug, but the typesetter `corrected' it. This has since been described as the phase-of-the-moon-bug bug.

However, beware of assumptions. A few years ago, engineers of CERN (European Center for Nuclear Research) were baffled by some errors in experiments conducted with the LEP particle accelerator. As the formidable amount of data generated by such devices is heavily processed by computers before being seen by humans, many people suggested the software was somehow sensitive to the phase of the moon. A few desperate engineers discovered the truth; the error turned out to be the result of a tiny change in the geometry of the 27km circumference ring, physically caused by the deformation of the Earth by the passage of the Moon! This story has entered physics folklore as a Newtonian vengeance on particle physics and as an example of the relevance of the simplest and oldest physical laws to the most modern science.

Node:phase-wrapping, Next:PHB, Previous:phase of the moon, Up:= P =

phase-wrapping n.

[MIT] Syn. **wrap around**, sense 2.

Node:PHB, Next:phreaker, Previous:phase-wrapping, Up:= P =

PHB /P-H-B/

[Usenet; common; rarely spoken] Abbreviation, "Pointy-Haired Boss". From the **Dilbert** character, the archetypal halfwitted middle-**management** type. See also **pointy-haired**.

Node:phreaker, Next:phreaking, Previous:PHB, Up:= P =

phreaker /freek'r/ n.

One who engages in **phreaking**.

Node:phreaking, Next:pico-, Previous:phreaker, Up:= P =

phreaking /freek'ing/ n.

[from `phone phreak'] 1. The art and science of **cracking** the phone network (so as, for example, to make free long-distance calls). 2. By extension, security-cracking in any other context (especially, but not exclusively, on communications networks) (see **cracking**).

At one time phreaking was a semi-respectable activity among hackers; there was a gentleman's agreement that phreaking as an intellectual game and a form of exploration was OK, but serious theft of services was taboo. There was significant crossover between the hacker community and the hard-core phone phreaks who ran semi-underground networks of their own through such media as the legendary "TAP Newsletter". This ethos began to break down in the mid-1980s as wider dissemination of the techniques put them in the hands of less responsible phreaks. Around the same time, changes in the phone network made old-style technical ingenuity less effective as a way of hacking it, so phreaking came to depend more on overtly criminal acts such as stealing phone-card numbers. The crimes and punishments of gangs like the `414 group' turned that game very ugly. A few old-time hackers still phreak casually just to keep their hand in, but most these days have hardly even heard of `blue boxes' or any of the other paraphernalia of the great phreaks of yore.

Node:pico-, Next:pig-tail, Previous:phreaking, Up:= P =

pico- pref.

[SI: a quantifier meaning * 10^-12] Smaller than **nano-**; used in the same rather loose connotative way as **nano-** and **micro-**. This usage is not yet common in the way **nano-** and **micro-** are, but should be instantly recognizable to any hacker. See also **quantifiers**, **micro-**.

Node:pig-tail, Next:pilot error, Previous:pico-, Up:= P =

pig-tail

[radio hams] A short piece of cable with two connectors on each end for converting between one connector type and another. Common pig-tails are 9-to-25-pin serial-port converters and cables to connect PCMCIA network cards to an RJ-45 network cable.

Node:pilot error, Next:ping, Previous:pig-tail, Up:= P =

pilot error n.

[Sun: from aviation] A user's misconfiguration or misuse of a piece of software, producing apparently buglike results (compare **UBD**). "Joe Luser reported a bug in sendmail that causes it to generate bogus headers." "That's not a bug, that's pilot error. His `sendmail.cf` is hosed."

Node:ping, Next:Ping O' Death, Previous:pilot error, Up:= P =

ping

[from the submariners' term for a sonar pulse] 1. n. Slang term for a small network message (ICMP ECHO) sent by a computer to check for the presence and alertness of another. The Unix command `ping(8)` can be used to do this manually (note that `ping(8)`'s author denies the widespread folk etymology that the name was ever intended as acronym for `Packet INternet Groper'). Occasionally used as a phone greeting. See **ACK**, also **ENQ**. 2. vt. To verify the presence of. 3. vt. To get the attention of. 4. vt. To send a message to all members of a **mailing list** requesting an **ACK** (in order to verify that everybody's addresses are reachable). "We haven't heard much of anything from Geoff, but he did respond with an ACK both times I pinged jargon-friends." 5. n. A quantum packet of happiness. People who are very happy tend to exude pings; furthermore, one can intentionally create pings and aim them at a needy party (e.g., a depressed person). This sense of ping may appear as an exclamation; "Ping!" (I'm

happy; I am emitting a quantum of happiness; I have been struck by a quantum of happiness). The form "pingfulness", which is used to describe people who exude pings, also occurs. (In the standard abuse of language, "pingfulness" can also be used as an exclamation, in which case it's a much stronger exclamation than just "ping"!). Oppose **blargh**.

The funniest use of `ping' to date was described in January 1991 by Steve Hayman on the Usenet group *comp.sys.next*. He was trying to isolate a faulty cable segment on a TCP/IP Ethernet hooked up to a NeXT machine, and got tired of having to run back to his console after each cabling tweak to see if the ping packets were getting through. So he used the sound-recording feature on the NeXT, then wrote a script that repeatedly invoked `ping(8)`, listened for an echo, and played back the recording on each returned packet. Result? A program that caused the machine to repeat, over and over, "Ping ... ping ... ping ..." as long as the network was up. He turned the volume to maximum, ferreted through the building with one ear cocked, and found a faulty tee connector in no time.

Node:Ping O' Death, Next:ping storm, Previous:ping, Up:= P =

Ping O' Death n.

A notorious **exploit** that (when first discovered) could be easily used to crash a wide variety of machines by overunning size limits in their TCP/IP stacks. First revealed in late 1996. The open-source Unix community patched its systems to remove the vulnerability within days or weeks, the closed-source OS vendors generally took months. While the difference in response times repeated a pattern familiar from other security incidents, the accompanying glare of Web-fueled publicity proved unusually embarrassing to the OS vendors and so passed into history and myth. The term is now used to refer to any nudge delivered by network wizards over the network that causes bad things to happen on the system being nudged. For the full story on the original exploit, see http://www.insecure.org/sploits/ping-o-death.html.

Compare with 'kamikaze packet,' 'Finger of Death' and 'Chernobyl packet.'

Node:ping storm, Next:pink wire, Previous:Ping O' Death, Up:= P =

ping storm n.

A form of **DoS attack** consisting of a flood of **ping** requests (normally used to check network conditions) designed to disrupt the normal activity of a system. This act is sometimes called `ping lashing' or `ping flood'. Compare **mail storm**, **broadcast storm**.

Node:pink wire, Next:pipe, Previous:ping storm, Up:= P =

pink wire n.

[from the pink PTFE wire used in military equipment] As **blue wire**, but used in military applications. 2. vi. To add a pink wire to a board.

Node:pipe, Next:pistol, Previous:pink wire, Up:= P =

pipe n.

[common] Idiomatically, one's connection to the Internet; in context, the expansion "bit pipe" is understood. A "fat pipe" is a line with T1 or higher capacity. A person with a 28.8 modem might be heard

to complain "I need a bigger pipe".

Node:pistol, Next:pixel sort, Previous:pipe, Up:= P =

pistol n.

[IBM] A tool that makes it all too easy for you to shoot yourself in the foot. "Unix `rm *` makes such a nice pistol!"

Node:pixel sort, Next:pizza box, Previous:pistol, Up:= P =

pixel sort n.

[Commodore users] Any compression routine which irretrievably loses valuable data in the process of **crunch**ing it. Disparagingly used for `lossy' methods such as JPEG. The theory, of course, is that these methods are only used on photographic images in which minor loss-of-data is not visible to the human eye. The term `pixel sort' implies distrust of this theory. Compare **bogo-sort**.

Node:pizza box, Next:plaid screen, Previous:pixel sort, Up:= P =

pizza box n.

[Sun] The largish thin box housing the electronics in (especially Sun) desktop workstations, so named because of its size and shape and the dimpled pattern that looks like air holes.

Two meg single-platter removable disk packs used to be called pizzas, and the huge drive they were stuck into was referred to as a pizza oven. It's an index of progress that in the old days just the disk was pizza-sized, while now the entire computer is.

Node:plaid screen, Next:plain-ASCII, Previous:pizza box, Up:= P =

plaid screen n.

[XEROX PARC] A `special effect' that occurs when certain kinds of **memory smash**es overwrite the control blocks or image memory of a bit-mapped display. The term "salt and pepper" may refer to a different pattern of similar origin. Though the term as coined at PARC refers to the result of an error, some of the **X** demos induce plaid-screen effects deliberately as a **display hack**.

Node:plain-ASCII, Next:plan file, Previous:plaid screen, Up:= P =

plain-ASCII /playn-as'kee/

Syn. **flat-ASCII**.

Node:plan file, Next:platinum-iridium, Previous:plain-ASCII, Up:= P =

plan file n.

[Unix] On systems that support **finger**, the `.plan' file in a user's home directory is displayed when the user is fingered. This feature was originally intended to be used to keep potential fingerers apprised of one's location and near-future plans, but has been turned almost universally to humorous and self-expressive purposes (like a **sig block**). See also **Hacking X for Y**.

A recent innovation in plan files has been the introduction of "scrolling plan files" which are one-dimensional animations made using only the printable ASCII character set, carriage return and line feed, avoiding terminal specific escape sequences, since the **finger** command will (for security reasons; see **letterbomb**) not pass the escape character.

Scrolling .plan files have become art forms in miniature, and some sites have started competitions to find who can create the longest running, funniest, and most original animations. Various animation characters include:

```
Centipede:
     mmmmme
Lorry/Truck:
     oo-oP
Andalusian Video Snail:
     _@/
```

and a compiler (ASP) is available on Usenet for producing them. See also **twirling baton**.

Node:platinum-iridium, Next:playpen, Previous:plan file, Up:= P =

platinum-iridium adj.

Standard, against which all others of the same category are measured. Usage: silly. The notion is that one of whatever it is has actually been cast in platinum-iridium alloy and placed in the vault beside the Standard Kilogram at the International Bureau of Weights and Measures near Paris. (From 1889 to 1960, the meter was defined to be the distance between two scratches in a platinum-iridium bar kept in that same vault -- this replaced an earlier definition as 10^(-7) times the distance between the North Pole and the Equator along a meridian through Paris; unfortunately, this had been based on an inexact value of the circumference of the Earth. From 1960 to 1984 it was defined to be 1650763.73 wavelengths of the orange-red line of krypton-86 propagating in a vacuum. It is now defined as the length of the path traveled by light in a vacuum in the time interval of 1/299,792,458 of a second. The kilogram is now the only unit of measure officially defined in terms of a unique artifact.) "This garbage-collection algorithm has been tested against the platinum-iridium cons cell in Paris." Compare **golden**.

Node:playpen, Next:playte, Previous:platinum-iridium, Up:= P =

playpen n.

[IBM] A room where programmers work. Compare **salt mines**.

Node:playte, Next:plingnet, Previous:playpen, Up:= P =

playte /playt/

16 bits, by analogy with **nybble** and **byte**. Usage: rare and extremely silly. See also **dynner** and **crumb**. General discussion of such terms is under **nybble**.

Node:plingnet, Next:plokta, Previous:playte, Up:= P =

plingnet /pling'net/ n.

Syn. **UUCPNET**. Also see **Commonwealth Hackish**, which uses `pling' for **bang** (as in **bang path**).

Node:plokta, Next:plonk, Previous:plingnet, Up:= P =

plokta /plok't*/ v.

[acronym: Press Lots Of Keys To Abort] To press random keys in an attempt to get some response from the system. One might plokta when the abort procedure for a program is not known, or when trying to figure out if the system is just sluggish or really hung. Plokta can also be used while trying to figure out any unknown key sequence for a particular operation. Someone going into `plokta mode' usually places both hands flat on the keyboard and mashes them down, hoping for some useful response.

A slightly more directed form of plokta can often be seen in mail messages or Usenet articles from new users -- the text might end with

```
^X^C
q
quit
:q
^C
end
x
exit
ZZ
^D
?
help
```

as the user vainly tries to find the right exit sequence, with the incorrect tries piling up at the end of the message....

Node:plonk, Next:plug-and-pray, Previous:plokta, Up:= P =

plonk excl.,vt.

[Usenet: possibly influenced by British slang `plonk' for cheap booze, or `plonker' for someone behaving stupidly (latter is lit. equivalent to Yiddish `schmuck')] The sound a **newbie** makes as he falls to the bottom of a **kill file**. While it originated in the **newsgroup** *talk.bizarre*, this term (usually written "*plonk*") is now (1994) widespread on Usenet as a form of public ridicule.

Node:plug-and-pray, Next:plugh, Previous:plonk, Up:= P =

plug-and-pray adj.,vi.

Parody of the techspeak term `plug-and-play', describing a PC peripheral card which is claimed to have no need for hardware configuration via DIP switches, and which should be work as soon as it is inserted in the PC. Unfortunately, even the PCI bus is not up to pulling this off reliably, and people who have to do installation or troubleshoot PCs soon find themselves longing for the DIP switches.

Node:plugh, Next:plumbing, Previous:plug-and-pray, Up:= P =

plugh /ploogh/ v.

[from the **ADVENT** game] See **xyzzy**.

Node:plumbing, Next:PM, Previous:plugh, Up:= P =

plumbing n.

[Unix] Term used for **shell** code, so called because of the prevalence of `pipelines' that feed the output of one program to the input of another. Under Unix, user utilities can often be implemented or at least prototyped by a suitable collection of pipelines and temp-file grinding encapsulated in a shell script; this is much less effort than writing C every time, and the capability is considered one of Unix's major winning features. A few other OSs such as IBM's VM/CMS support similar facilities. Esp. used in the construction `hairy plumbing' (see **hairy**). "You can kluge together a basic spell-checker out of `sort(1)`, `comm(1)`, and `tr(1)` with a little plumbing." See also **tee**.

Node:PM, Next:pnambic, Previous:plumbing, Up:= P =

PM /P-M/

1. v. (from `preventive maintenance') To bring down a machine for inspection or test purposes. See **provocative maintenance**; see also **scratch monkey**. 2. n. Abbrev. for `Presentation Manager', an **elephantine** OS/2 graphical user interface.

Node:pnambic, Next:pod, Previous:PM, Up:= P =

pnambic /p*-nam'bik/

[Acronym from the scene in the film version of "The Wizard of Oz" in which the true nature of the wizard is first discovered: "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain."] 1. A stage of development of a process or function that, owing to incomplete implementation or to the complexity of the system, requires human interaction to simulate or replace some or all of the actions, inputs, or outputs of the process or function. 2. Of or pertaining to a process or function whose apparent operations are wholly or partially falsified. 3. Requiring **prestidigitization**.

The ultimate pnambic product was "Dan Bricklin's Demo", a program which supported flashy user-interface design prototyping. There is a related maxim among hackers: "Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from a rigged demo." See **magic**, sense 1, for illumination of this point.

Node:pod, Next:point-and-drool interface, Previous:pnambic, Up:= P =

pod n.

[allegedly from abbreviation POD for `Prince Of Darkness'] A Diablo 630 (or, latterly, any letter-quality impact printer). From the DEC-10 PODTYPE program used to feed formatted text to it. Not to be confused with **P.O.D.**.

Node:point-and-drool interface, Next:pointy hat, Previous:pod, Up:= P =

point-and-drool interface n.

Parody of the techspeak term `point-and-shoot interface', describing a windows, icons, and mouse-based interface such as is found on the Macintosh. The implication, of course, is that such an interface is only suitable for idiots. See **for the rest of us**, **WIMP environment**, **Macintrash**, **drool-proof paper**. Also `point-and-grunt interface'.

Node:pointy hat, Next:pointy-haired, Previous:point-and-drool interface, Up:= P =

pointy hat n.

See **wizard hat**. This synonym specifically refers to the wizards of Unseen University in Terry Pratchett's "Discworld" serious of humorous fantasies; these books are extremely popular among hackers.

Node:pointy-haired, Next:poke, Previous:pointy hat, Up:= P =

pointy-haired adj.

[after the character in the **Dilbert** comic strip] Describes the extreme form of the property that separates **suit**s and **marketroid**s from hackers. Compare **brain-dead**; **demented**; see **PHB**. Always applied to people, never to ideas. The plural form is often used as a noun. "The pointy-haireds ordered me to use Windows NT, but I set up a Linux server with Samba instead."

Node:poke, Next:poll, Previous:pointy-haired, Up:= P =

poke n.,vt.

See **peek**.

Node:poll, Next:polygon pusher, Previous:poke, Up:= P =

poll v.,n.

1. [techspeak] The action of checking the status of an input line, sensor, or memory location to see if a particular external event has been registered. 2. To repeatedly call or check with someone: "I keep polling him, but he's not answering his phone; he must be swapped out." 3. To ask. "Lunch? I poll for a takeout order daily."

Node:polygon pusher, Next:POM, Previous:poll, Up:= P =

polygon pusher n.

A chip designer who spends most of his or her time at the physical layout level (which requires drawing *lots* of multi-colored polygons). Also `rectangle slinger'.

Node:POM, Next:pop, Previous:polygon pusher, Up:= P =

POM /P-O-M/ n.

Common abbreviation for **phase of the moon**. Usage: usually in the phrase `POM-dependent', which means **flaky**.

Node:pop, Next:POPJ, Previous:POM, Up:= P =

pop /pop/

[from the operation that removes the top of a stack, and the fact that procedure return addresses are usually saved on the stack] (also capitalized `POP') 1. vt. To remove something from a **stack** or **PDL**. If a person says he/she has popped something from his stack, that means he/she has finally finished working on it and can now remove it from the list of things hanging overhead. 2. When a discussion gets to a level of detail so deep that the main point of the discussion is being lost, someone will shout "Pop!", meaning "Get back up to a higher level!" The shout is frequently accompanied by an upthrust arm with a finger pointing to the ceiling. 3. [all-caps, as `POP'] Point of Presence, a bank of dial-in lines allowing customers to make (local) calls into an ISP. This is borderline techspeak.

Node:POPJ, Next:poser, Previous:pop, Up:= P =

POPJ /pop'J/ n.,v.

[from a **PDP-10** return-from-subroutine instruction] To return from a digression. By verb doubling, "Popj, popj" means roughly "Now let's see, where were we?" See **RTI**.

Node:poser, Next:post, Previous:POPJ, Up:= P =

poser n.

A **wannabee**; not hacker slang, but used among crackers, phreaks and **warez d00dz**. Not as negative as **lamer** or **leech**. Probably derives from a similar usage among punk-rockers and metalheads, putting down those who "talk the talk but don't walk the walk".

Node:post, Next:postcardware, Previous:poser, Up:= P =

post v.

To send a message to a **mailing list** or **newsgroup**. Distinguished in context from `mail'; one might ask, for example: "Are you going to post the patch or mail it to known users?"

Node:postcardware, Next:posting, Previous:post, Up:= P =

postcardware n.

A kind of **shareware** that borders on **freeware**, in that the author requests only that satisfied users send a postcard of their home town or something. (This practice, silly as it might seem, serves to remind users that they are otherwise getting something for nothing, and may also be psychologically related to real estate `sales' in which $1 changes hands just to keep the transaction from being a gift.)

Node:posting, Next:postmaster, Previous:postcardware, Up:= P =

posting n.

Noun corresp. to v. **post** (but note that **post** can be nouned). Distinguished from a `letter' or ordinary **email** message by the fact that it is broadcast rather than point-to-point. It is not clear whether messages sent to a small mailing list are postings or email; perhaps the best dividing line is that if you don't know the names of all the potential recipients, it is a posting.

Node:postmaster, Next:PostScript, Previous:posting, Up:= P =

postmaster n.

The email contact and maintenance person at a site connected to the Internet or UUCPNET. Often, but not always, the same as the **admin**. The Internet standard for electronic mail (**RFC**-822) requires each machine to have a `postmaster' address; usually it is aliased to this person.

Node:PostScript, Next:pound on, Previous:postmaster, Up:= P =

PostScript n.

A Page Description Language (**PDL**), based on work originally done by John Gaffney at Evans and Sutherland in 1976, evolving through `JaM' (`John and Martin', Martin Newell) at **XEROX PARC**, and finally implemented in its current form by John Warnock et al. after he and Chuck Geschke founded Adobe Systems Incorporated in 1982. PostScript gets its leverage by using a full programming language, rather than a series of low-level escape sequences, to describe an image to be printed on a laser printer or other output device (in this it parallels **EMACS**, which exploited a similar insight about editing tasks). It is also noteworthy for implementing on-the fly rasterization, from Bezier curve descriptions, of high-quality fonts at low (e.g. 300 dpi) resolution (it was formerly believed that hand-tuned bitmap fonts were required for this task). Hackers consider PostScript to be among the most elegant hacks of all time, and the combination of technical merits and widespread availability has made PostScript the language of choice for graphical output.

Node:pound on, Next:power cycle, Previous:PostScript, Up:= P =

pound on vt.

Syn. **bang on**.

Node:power cycle, Next:power hit, Previous:pound on, Up:= P =

power cycle vt.

(also, `cycle power' or just `cycle') To power off a machine and then power it on immediately, with the intention of clearing some kind of **hung** or **gronk**ed state. Syn. **120 reset**; see also **Big Red Switch**. Compare **Vulcan nerve pinch**, **bounce** (sense 4), and **boot**, and see the "**Some AI Koans**" (in Appendix A) about Tom Knight and the novice.

Node:power hit, Next:PPN, Previous:power cycle, Up:= P =

power hit n.

A spike or drop-out in the electricity supplying your machine; a power **glitch**. These can cause crashes and even permanent damage to your machine(s).

Node:PPN, Next:pr0n, Previous:power hit, Up:= P =

PPN /P-P-N/, /pip'n/ n. obs.

[from `Project-Programmer Number'] A user-ID under **TOPS-10** and its various mutant progeny at SAIL, BBN, CompuServe, and elsewhere. Old-time hackers from the PDP-10 era sometimes use this to refer to user IDs on other systems as well.

Node:pr0n, Next:precedence lossage, Previous:PPN, Up:= P =

pr0n //

[Usenet, IRC] Pornography. Originally this referred only to Internet porn but since then it has expanded to refer to just about anything. The term comes from the **warez kiddies** tendency to replace letters with numbers. At some point on IRC someone mistyped, swapped the middle two letters, and the name stuck, then propagated over into mainstream hacker usage. Compare **filk**, **grilf**, **hing** and **newsfroup**.

Node:precedence lossage, Next:prepend, Previous:pr0n, Up:= P =

precedence lossage /pre's*-dens los'*j/ n.

[C programmers] Coding error in an expression due to unexpected grouping of arithmetic or logical operators by the compiler. Used esp. of certain common coding errors in C due to the nonintuitively low precedence levels of `&`, `|`, `^`, `<<`, and `>>` (for this reason, experienced C programmers deliberately forget the language's **baroque** precedence hierarchy and parenthesize defensively). Can always be avoided by suitable use of parentheses. **LISP** fans enjoy pointing out that this can't happen in *their* favorite language, which eschews precedence entirely, requiring one to use explicit parentheses everywhere. See **aliasing bug**, **memory leak**, **memory smash**, **smash the stack**, **fandango on core**, **overrun screw**.

Node:prepend, Next:prestidigitization, Previous:precedence lossage, Up:= P =

prepend /pree`pend'/ vt.

[by analogy with `append'] To prefix. As with `append' (but not `prefix' or `suffix' as a verb), the direct object is always the thing being added and not the original word (or character string, or whatever). "If you prepend a semicolon to the line, the translation routine will pass it through unaltered."

Node:prestidigitization, Next:pretty pictures, Previous:prepend, Up:= P =

prestidigitization /pres`t*-di`j*-ti:-zay'sh*n/ n.

1. The act of putting something into digital notation via sleight of hand. 2. Data entry through legerdemain.

Node:pretty pictures, Next:prettyprint, Previous:prestidigitization, Up:= P =

pretty pictures n.

[scientific computation] The next step up from **numbers**. Interesting graphical output from a program that may not have any sensible relationship to the system the program is intended to model. Good for showing to **management**.

Node:prettyprint, Next:pretzel key, Previous:pretty pictures, Up:= P =

prettyprint /prit'ee-print/ v.

(alt. `pretty-print') 1. To generate `pretty' human-readable output from a **hairy** internal representation; esp. used for the process of **grind**ing (sense 1) program code, and most esp. for LISP code. 2. To format in some particularly slick and nontrivial way.

Node:pretzel key, Next:priesthood, Previous:prettyprint, Up:= P =

pretzel key n.

[Mac users] See **feature key**.

Node:priesthood, Next:prime time, Previous:pretzel key, Up:= P =

priesthood n. obs.

[TMRC] The select group of system managers responsible for the operation and maintenance of a batch operated computer system. On these computers, a user never had direct access to a computer, but had to submit his/her data and programs to a priest for execution. Results were returned days or even weeks later. See **acolyte**.

Node:prime time, Next:print, Previous:priesthood, Up:= P =

prime time n.

[from TV programming] Normal high-usage hours on a system or network. Back in the days of big timesharing machines `prime time' was when lots of people were competing for limited cycles, usually the day shift. Avoidance of prime time was traditionally given as a major reason for **night mode** hacking. The term fell into disuse during the early PC era, but has been revived to refer to times of day or evening at which the Internet tends to be heavily loaded, making Web access slow. The hackish tendency to late-night **hacking run**s has changed not a bit.

Node:print, Next:printing discussion, Previous:prime time, Up:= P =

print v.

To output, even if to a screen. If a hacker says that a program "printed a message", he means this; if he refers to printing a file, he probably means it in the conventional sense of writing to a hardcopy device (compounds like `print job' and `printout', on the other hand, always refer to the latter). This very common term is likely a holdover from the days when printing terminals were the norm, perpetuated by programming language constructs like **C**'s printf(3). See senses 1 and 2 of **tty**.

Node:printing discussion, Next:priority interrupt, Previous:print, Up:= P =

printing discussion n.

[XEROX PARC] A protracted, low-level, time-consuming, generally pointless discussion of something only peripherally interesting to all.

Node:priority interrupt, Next:profile, Previous:printing discussion, Up:= P =

priority interrupt n.

[from the hardware term] Describes any stimulus compelling enough to yank one right out of **hack mode**. Classically used to describe being dragged away by an **SO** for immediate sex, but may also refer to more mundane interruptions such as a fire alarm going off in the near vicinity. Also called an **NMI** (non-maskable interrupt), especially in PC-land.

Node:profile, Next:progasm, Previous:priority interrupt, Up:= P =

profile n.

1. A control file for a program, esp. a text file automatically read from each user's home directory and intended to be easily modified by the user in order to customize the program's behavior. Used to avoid **hardcoded** choices (see also **dot file**, **rc file**). 2. [techspeak] A report on the amounts of time spent in each routine of a program, used to find and **tune** away the **hot spot**s in it. This sense is often verbed. Some profiling modes report units other than time (such as call counts) and/or report at granularities other than per-routine, but the idea is similar. 3.[techspeak] A subset of a standard used for a particular purpose. This sense confuses hackers who wander into the weird world of ISO standards no end!

Node:progasm, Next:proggy, Previous:profile, Up:= P =

progasm /proh'gaz-m/ n.

[University of Wisconsin] The euphoria experienced upon the completion of a program or other computer-related project.

Node:proggy, Next:proglet, Previous:progasm, Up:= P =

proggy n.

1. Any computer program that is considered a full application. 2. Any computer program that is made up of or otherwise contains **proglet**s. 3. Any computer program that is large enough to be normally distributed as an RPM or **tarball**.

Node:proglet, Next:program, Previous:proggy, Up:= P =

proglet /prog'let/ n.

[UK] A short *extempore* program written to meet an immediate, transient need. Often written in BASIC, rarely more than a dozen lines long, and containing no subroutines. The largest amount of code that can be written off the top of one's head, that does not need any editing, and that runs correctly the first time (this amount varies significantly according to one's skill and the language one is using). Compare **toy program**, **noddy**, **one-liner wars**.

Node:program, Next:Programmer's Cheer, Previous:proglet, Up:= P =

program n.

1. A magic spell cast over a computer allowing it to turn one's input into error messages. 2. An exercise in experimental epistemology. 3. A form of art, ostensibly intended for the instruction of computers, which is nevertheless almost inevitably a failure if other programmers can't understand it.

Node:Programmer's Cheer, Next:programming, Previous:program, Up:= P =

Programmer's Cheer

"Shift to the left! Shift to the right! Pop up, push down! Byte! Byte! Byte!" A joke so old it has hair on it.

Node:programming, Next:programming fluid, Previous:Programmer's Cheer, Up:= P =

programming n.

1. The art of debugging a blank sheet of paper (or, in these days of on-line editing, the art of debugging an empty file). "Bloody instructions which, being taught, return to plague their inventor" ("Macbeth", Act 1, Scene 7) 2. A pastime similar to banging one's head against a wall, but with fewer opportunities for reward. 3. The most fun you can have with your clothes on. 4. The least fun you can have with your clothes off.

Node:programming fluid, Next:propeller head, Previous:programming, Up:= P =

programming fluid n.

1. Coffee. 2. Cola. 3. Any caffeinacious stimulant. Many hackers consider these essential for those all-night hacking runs. See **wirewater**.

Node:propeller head, Next:propeller key, Previous:programming fluid, Up:= P =

propeller head n.

Used by hackers, this is syn. with **computer geek**. Non-hackers sometimes use it to describe all techies. Prob. derives from SF fandom's tradition (originally invented by old-time fan Ray Faraday Nelson) of propeller beanies as fannish insignia (though nobody actually wears them except as a joke).

Node:propeller key, Next:proprietary, Previous:propeller head, Up:= P =

propeller key n.

[Mac users] See **feature key**.

Node:proprietary, Next:protocol, Previous:propeller key, Up:= P =

proprietary adj.

1. In **marketroid**-speak, superior; implies a product imbued with exclusive magic by the unmatched brilliance of the company's own hardware or software designers. 2. In the language of hackers and users, inferior; implies a product not conforming to open-systems standards, and thus one that puts the customer at the mercy of a vendor able to gouge freely on service and upgrade charges after the initial sale has locked the customer in. Often in the phrase "proprietary crap". 3. Synonym for closed-source, e.g. software issued in binary without source and under a restructive license.

Since the coining of the term **open source**, many hackers have made a conscious effort to distinguish between `proprietary' and `commercial' software. It is possible for software to be commercial (that is, intended to make a profit for the producers) without being proprietary. The reverse is also possible, for example in binary-only freeware.

Node:protocol, Next:provocative maintenance, Previous:proprietary, Up:= P =

protocol n.

As used by hackers, this never refers to niceties about the proper form for addressing letters to the Papal Nuncio or the order in which one should use the forks in a Russian-style place setting; hackers don't care about such things. It is used instead to describe any set of rules that allow different machines or pieces of software to coordinate with each other without ambiguity. So, for example, it does include niceties about the proper form for addressing packets on a network or the order in which one should use the forks in the Dining Philosophers Problem. It implies that there is some common message format and an accepted set of primitives or commands that all parties involved understand, and that transactions among them follow predictable logical sequences. See also **handshaking**, **do protocol**.

Node:provocative maintenance, Next:prowler, Previous:protocol, Up:= P =

provocative maintenance n.

[common ironic mutation of `preventive maintenance'] Actions performed upon a machine at regularly scheduled intervals to ensure that the system remains in a usable state. So called because it is all too often performed by a **field servoid** who doesn't know what he is doing; such `maintenance' often *induces* problems, or otherwise results in the machine's remaining in an *un*usable state for an indeterminate amount of time. See also **scratch monkey**.

Node:prowler, Next:pseudo, Previous:provocative maintenance, Up:= P =

prowler n.

[Unix] A **daemon** that is run periodically (typically once a week) to seek out and erase **core** files, truncate administrative logfiles, nuke `lost+found` directories, and otherwise clean up the **cruft** that tends to pile up in the corners of a file system. See also **GFR**, **reaper**, **skulker**.

Node:pseudo, Next:pseudoprime, Previous:prowler, Up:= P =

pseudo /soo'doh/ n.

[Usenet: truncation of `pseudonym'] 1. An electronic-mail or **Usenet** persona adopted by a human for amusement value or as a means of avoiding negative repercussions of one's net.behavior; a `nom de Usenet', often associated with forged postings designed to conceal message origins. Perhaps the best-known and funniest hoax of this type is **B1FF**. See also **tentacle**. 2. Notionally, a **flamage**-generating AI program simulating a Usenet user. Many flamers have been accused of actually being such entities, despite the fact that no AI program of the required sophistication yet exists. However, in 1989 there was a famous series of forged postings that used a phrase-frequency-based travesty generator to simulate the styles of several well-known flamers; it was based on large samples of their back postings (compare **Dissociated Press**). A significant number of people were fooled by the forgeries, and the debate over their authenticity was settled only when the perpetrator came forward to publicly admit the hoax.

Node:pseudoprime, Next:pseudosuit, Previous:pseudo, Up:= P =

pseudoprime n.

A backgammon prime (six consecutive occupied points) with one point missing. This term is an esoteric pun derived from number theory: a number that passes a certain kind of "primality test" may be called a `pseudoprime' (all primes pass any such test, but so do some composite numbers), and any number that passes several is, in some sense, almost certainly prime. The hacker backgammon usage stems from the idea that a pseudoprime is almost as good as a prime: it will do the same job unless you are unlucky.

Node:pseudosuit, Next:psychedelicware, Previous:pseudoprime, Up:= P =

pseudosuit /soo'doh-s[y]oot`/ n.

A **suit** wannabee; a hacker who has decided that he wants to be in management or administration and

begins wearing ties, sport coats, and (shudder!) suits voluntarily. It's his funeral. See also **lobotomy**.

Node:psychedelicware, Next:psyton, Previous:pseudosuit, Up:= P =

psychedelicware /si:`k*-del'-ik-weir/ n.

[UK] Syn. **display hack**. See also **smoking clover**.

Node:psyton, Next:pubic directory, Previous:psychedelicware, Up:= P =

psyton /si:'ton/ n.

[TMRC] The elementary particle carrying the sinister force. The probability of a process losing is proportional to the number of psytons falling on it. Psytons are generated by observers, which is why demos are more likely to fail when lots of people are watching. [This term appears to have been largely superseded by **bogon**; see also **quantum bogodynamics**. --ESR]

Node:pubic directory, Next:puff, Previous:psyton, Up:= P =

pubic directory /pyoob'ik d*-rek't*-ree/) n.

[NYU] (also `pube directory' /pyoob' d*-rek't*-ree/) The `pub' (public) directory on a machine that allows **FTP** access. So called because it is the default location for **SEX** (sense 1). "I'll have the source in the pube directory by Friday."

Node:puff, Next:pumpkin holder, Previous:pubic directory, Up:= P =

puff vt.

To decompress data that has been crunched by Huffman coding. At least one widely distributed Huffman decoder program was actually *named* `PUFF', but these days it is usually packaged with the encoder. Oppose **huff**, see **inflate**.

Node:pumpkin holder, Next:pumpking, Previous:puff, Up:= P =

pumpkin holder n.

See **patch pumpkin**.

Node:pumpking, Next:punched card, Previous:pumpkin holder, Up:= P =

pumpking n.

Syn. for **pumpkin holder**; see **patch pumpkin**.

Node:punched card, Next:punt, Previous:pumpking, Up:= P =

punched card n.obs.

[techspeak] (alt. `punch card') The signature medium of computing's **Stone Age**, now obsolescent outside of some IBM shops. The punched card actually predated computers considerably, originating in 1801 as a control device for mechanical looms. The version patented by Hollerith and used with mechanical tabulating machines in the 1890 U.S. Census was a piece of cardboard about 90 mm by 215 mm. There is a widespread myth that it was designed to fit in the currency trays used for that era's larger dollar bills, but recent investigations have falsified this.

IBM (which originated as a tabulating-machine manufacturer) married the punched card to computers, encoding binary information as patterns of small rectangular holes; one character per column, 80 columns per card. Other coding schemes, sizes of card, and hole shapes were tried at various times.

The 80-column width of most character terminals is a legacy of the IBM punched card; so is the size of the quick-reference cards distributed with many varieties of computers even today. See **chad**, **chad box**, **eighty-column mind**, **green card**, **dusty deck**, **lace card**, **card walloper**.

Node:punt, Next:Purple Book, Previous:punched card, Up:= P =

punt v.

[from the punch line of an old joke referring to American football: "Drop back 15 yards and punt!"] 1. To give up, typically without any intention of retrying. "Let's punt the movie tonight." "I was going to hack all night to get this feature in, but I decided to punt" may mean that you've decided not to stay up all night, and may also mean you're not ever even going to put in the feature. 2. More specifically, to give up on figuring out what the **Right Thing** is and resort to an inefficient hack. 3. A design decision to defer solving a problem, typically because one cannot define what is desirable sufficiently well to frame an algorithmic solution. "No way to know what the right form to dump the graph in is -- we'll punt that for now." 4. To hand a tricky implementation problem off to some other section of the design. "It's too hard to get the compiler to do that; let's punt to the runtime system." 5. To knock someone off an Internet or chat connection; a `punter' thus, is a person or program that does this.

Node:Purple Book, Next:purple wire, Previous:punt, Up:= P =

Purple Book n.

1. The "System V Interface Definition". The covers of the first editions were an amazingly nauseating shade of off-lavender. 2. Syn. **Wizard Book**. Donald Lewine's "POSIX Programmer's Guide" (O'Reilly, 1991, ISBN 0-937175-73-0). See also **book titles**.

Node:purple wire, Next:push, Previous:Purple Book, Up:= P =

purple wire n.

[IBM] Wire installed by Field Engineers to work around problems discovered during testing or debugging. These are called `purple wires' even when (as is frequently the case) their actual physical color is yellow.... Compare **blue wire**, **yellow wire**, and **red wire**.

Node:push, Next:Python, Previous:purple wire, Up:= P =

push

[from the operation that puts the current information on a stack, and the fact that procedure return addresses are saved on a stack] (Also PUSH /push/ or PUSHJ /push'J/, the latter based on the PDP-10 procedure call instruction.) 1. To put something onto a **stack** or **PDL**. If one says that something has been pushed onto one's stack, it means that the Damoclean list of things hanging over ones's head has grown longer and heavier yet. This may also imply that one will deal with it *before* other pending items; otherwise one might say that the thing was `added to my queue'. 2. vi. To enter upon a digression, to save the current discussion for later. Antonym of **pop**; see also **stack**, **PDL**.

Node:Python, Next:quad, Previous:push, Up:= P =

Python /pi:'thon/

In the words of its author, "the other scripting language" (other than **Perl**, that is). Python's design is notably clean, elegant, and well thought through; it tends to attract the sort of programmers who find Perl grubby and exiguous. Python's relationship with Perl is rather like the BSD community's relationship to Linux - it's the smaller party in a (usually friendly) rivalry, but the average quality of its developers is generally conceded to be rather higher than in the larger community it competes with. There's a Python resource page at http://www.python.org. See also **Guido**.

Node:= Q =, Next:= R =, Previous:= P =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= Q =

- quad:
- quadruple bucky:
- quantifiers:
- quantum bogodynamics:
- quarter:
- ques:
- quick-and-dirty:
- quine:
- quote chapter and verse:
- quotient:
- quux:
- qux:
- QWERTY:

Node:quad, Next:quadruple bucky, Previous:Python, Up:= Q =

quad n.

1. Two bits; syn. for **quarter**, **crumb**, **tayste**. 2. A four-pack of anything (compare **hex**, sense 2). 3. The rectangle or box glyph used in the APL language for various arcane purposes mostly related to I/O. Former Ivy-Leaguers and Oxford types are said to associate it with nostalgic memories of dear old University.

quadruple bucky n. obs.

1. On an MIT **space-cadet keyboard**, use of all four of the shifting keys (control, meta, hyper, and super) while typing a character key. 2. On a Stanford or MIT keyboard in **raw mode**, use of four shift keys while typing a fifth character, where the four shift keys are the control and meta keys on *both* sides of the keyboard. This was very difficult to do! One accepted technique was to press the left-control and left-meta keys with your left hand, the right-control and right-meta keys with your right hand, and the fifth key with your nose.

Quadruple-bucky combinations were very seldom used in practice, because when one invented a new command one usually assigned it to some character that was easier to type. If you want to imply that a program has ridiculously many commands or features, you can say something like: "Oh, the command that makes it spin the tapes while whistling Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is quadruple-bucky-cokebottle." See **double bucky**, **bucky bits**, **cokebottle**.

---

quantifiers

In techspeak and jargon, the standard metric prefixes used in the SI (Système International) conventions for scientific measurement have dual uses. With units of time or things that come in powers of 10, such as money, they retain their usual meanings of multiplication by powers of 1000 = 10^3. But when used with bytes or other things that naturally come in powers of 2, they usually denote multiplication by powers of 1024 = 2^(10).

Here are the SI magnifying prefixes, along with the corresponding binary interpretations in common use:

```
prefix  decimal  binary
kilo-   1000^1   1024^1 = 2^10 = 1,024

mega-   1000^2   1024^2 = 2^20 = 1,048,576

giga-   1000^3   1024^3 = 2^30 = 1,073,741,824

tera-   1000^4   1024^4 = 2^40 = 1,099,511,627,776

peta-   1000^5   1024^5 = 2^50 = 1,125,899,906,842,624

exa-    1000^6   1024^6 = 2^60 = 1,152,921,504,606,846,976

zetta-  1000^7   1024^7 = 2^70 = 1,180,591,620,717,411,303,424

yotta-  1000^8   1024^8 = 2^80 = 1,208,925,819,614,629,174,706,176
```

Here are the SI fractional prefixes:

```
prefix  decimal     jargon usage
milli-  1000^-1     (seldom used in jargon)
micro-  1000^-2     small or human-scale (see micro-)
nano-   1000^-3     even smaller (see nano-)
pico-   1000^-4     even smaller yet (see pico-)
femto-  1000^-5     (not used in jargon---yet)
atto-   1000^-6     (not used in jargon---yet)
zepto-  1000^-7     (not used in jargon---yet)
yocto-  1000^-8     (not used in jargon---yet)
```

The prefixes zetta-, yotta-, zepto-, and yocto- have been included in these tables purely for completeness and giggle value; they were adopted in 1990 by the `19th Conference Generale des Poids et Mesures'. The binary peta- and exa- loadings, though well established, are not in jargon use either -- yet. The prefix milli-, denoting multiplication by 1/1000, has always been rare in jargon (there is, however, a standard joke about the `millihelen' -- notionally, the amount of beauty required to launch one ship). See the entries on **micro-**, **pico-**, and **nano-** for more information on connotative jargon use of these terms. `Femto' and `atto' (which, interestingly, derive not from Greek but from Danish) have not yet acquired jargon loadings, though it is easy to predict what those will be once computing technology enters the required realms of magnitude (however, see **attoparsec**).

There are, of course, some standard unit prefixes for powers of 10. In the following table, the `prefix' column is the international standard suffix for the appropriate power of ten; the `binary' column lists jargon abbreviations and words for the corresponding power of 2. The B-suffixed forms are commonly used for byte quantities; the words `meg' and `gig' are nouns that may (but do not always) pluralize with `s'.

prefix	*decimal*	*binary*	*pronunciation*
kilo-	k	K, KB,	/kay/
mega-	M	M, MB, meg	/meg/
giga-	G	G, GB, gig	/gig/,/jig/

Confusingly, hackers often use K or M as though they were suffix or numeric multipliers rather than a prefix; thus "2K dollars", "2M of disk space". This is also true (though less commonly) of G.

Note that the formal SI metric prefix for 1000 is `k'; some use this strictly, reserving `K' for multiplication by 1024 (KB is thus `kilobytes').

K, M, and G used alone refer to quantities of bytes; thus, 64G is 64 gigabytes and `a K' is a kilobyte (compare mainstream use of `a G' as short for `a grand', that is, $1000). Whether one pronounces `gig' with hard or soft `g' depends on what one thinks the proper pronunciation of `giga-' is.

Confusing 1000 and 1024 (or other powers of 2 and 10 close in magnitude) -- for example, describing a memory in units of 500K or 524K instead of 512K -- is a sure sign of the **marketroid**. One example of this: it is common to refer to the capacity of 3.5" **microfloppies** as `1.44 MB' In fact, this is a completely **bogus** number. The correct size is 1440 KB, that is, 1440 * 1024 = 1474560 bytes. So the `mega' in `1.44 MB' is compounded of two `kilos', one of which is 1024 and the other of which is 1000. The correct number of megabytes would of course be 1440 / 1024 = 1.40625. Alas, this fine point is probably lost on the world forever.

[1993 update: hacker Morgan Burke has proposed, to general approval on Usenet, the following additional prefixes:

groucho
: 10^(-30)

harpo
: 10^(-27)

harpi
: 10^(27)

grouchi
: 10^(30)

We observe that this would leave the prefixes zeppo-, gummo-, and chico- available for future expansion. Sadly, there is little immediate prospect that Mr. Burke's eminently sensible proposal will be ratified.]

[1999 upate: there is an IEC proposal for binary multipliers, but no evidence that any of its proposals are in live use.]

Node:quantum bogodynamics, Next:quarter, Previous:quantifiers, Up:= Q =

quantum bogodynamics /kwon'tm boh`goh-di:-nam'iks/ n.

A theory that characterizes the universe in terms of bogon sources (such as politicians, used-car salesmen, TV evangelists, and **suit**s in general), bogon sinks (such as taxpayers and computers), and bogosity potential fields. Bogon absorption, of course, causes human beings to behave mindlessly and machines to fail (and may also cause both to emit secondary bogons); however, the precise mechanics of the bogon-computron interaction are not yet understood and remain to be elucidated. Quantum bogodynamics is most often invoked to explain the sharp increase in hardware and software failures in the presence of suits; the latter emit bogons, which the former absorb. See **bogon**, **computron**, **suit**, **psyton**.

Node:quarter, Next:ques, Previous:quantum bogodynamics, Up:= Q =

quarter n.

Two bits. This in turn comes from the `pieces of eight' famed in pirate movies -- Spanish silver crowns that could be broken into eight pie-slice-shaped `bits' to make change. Early in American history the Spanish coin was considered equal to a dollar, so each of these `bits' was considered worth 12.5 cents. Syn. **tayste**, **crumb**, **quad**. Usage: rare. General discussion of such terms is under **nybble**.

Node:ques, Next:quick-and-dirty, Previous:quarter, Up:= Q =

ques /kwes/

1. n. The question mark character (`?`, ASCII 0111111). 2. interj. What? Also frequently verb-doubled as "Ques ques?" See **wall**.

Node:quick-and-dirty, Next:quine, Previous:ques, Up:= Q =

quick-and-dirty adj.

[common] Describes a **crock** put together under time or user pressure. Used esp. when you want to convey that you think the fast way might lead to trouble further down the road. "I can have a quick-and-dirty fix in place tonight, but I'll have to rewrite the whole module to solve the underlying design problem." See also **kluge**.

Node:quine, Next:quote chapter and verse, Previous:quick-and-dirty, Up:= Q =

quine /kwi:n/ n.

[from the name of the logician Willard van Orman Quine, via Douglas Hofstadter] A program that generates a copy of its own source text as its complete output. Devising the shortest possible quine in some given programming language is a common hackish amusement. (We ignore some variants of BASIC in which a program consisting of a single empty string literal reproduces itself trivially.) Here is one classic quine:

```
((lambda (x)
```

```
  (list x (list (quote quote) x)))
 (quote
    (lambda (x)
      (list x (list (quote quote) x)))))
```

This one works in LISP or Scheme. It's relatively easy to write quines in other languages such as Postscript which readily handle programs as data; much harder (and thus more challenging!) in languages like C which do not. Here is a classic C quine for ASCII machines:

```
char*f="char*f=%c%s%c;main()
{printf(f,34,f,34,10);}%c";
main(){printf(f,34,f,34,10);}
```

For excruciatingly exact quinishness, remove the interior line breaks. Here is another elegant quine in ANSI C:

```
#define q(k)main(){return!puts(#k"\nq("#k")");*}
q(#define q(k)main(){return!puts(#k"\nq("#k")");})
*
```

Some infamous **Obfuscated C Contest** entries have been quines that reproduced in exotic ways. There is an amusing Quine Home Page.

Node:quote chapter and verse, Next:quotient, Previous:quine, Up:= Q =

quote chapter and verse v.

[by analogy with the mainstream phrase] To cite a relevant excerpt from an appropriate **bible**. "I don't care if `rn` gets it wrong; `Followup-To: poster' is explicitly permitted by **RFC**-1036. I'll quote chapter and verse if you don't believe me." See also **legalese**, **language lawyer**, **RTFS** (sense 2).

Node:quotient, Next:quux, Previous:quote chapter and verse, Up:= Q =

quotient n.

See **coefficient of X**.

Node:quux, Next:qux, Previous:quotient, Up:= Q =

quux /kwuhks/ n.

[Mythically, from the Latin semi-deponent verb quuxo, quuxare, quuxandum iri; noun form variously `quux' (plural `quuces', anglicized to `quuxes') and `quuxu' (genitive plural is `quuxuum', for four u-letters out of seven in all, using up all the `u' letters in Scrabble).] 1. Originally, a **metasyntactic variable** like **foo** and **foobar**. Invented by Guy Steele for precisely this purpose when he was young and naive and not yet interacting with the real computing community. Many people invent such words; this one seems simply to have been lucky enough to have spread a little. In an eloquent display of poetic justice, it has returned to the originator in the form of a nickname. 2. interj. See **foo**; however, denotes very little disgust, and is uttered mostly for the sake of the sound of it. 3. Guy Steele in his persona as `The Great Quux', which is somewhat infamous for light verse and for the `Crunchly' cartoons. 4. In some circles, used as a punning opposite of `crux'. "Ah, that's the quux of the matter!" implies that the point is *not* crucial (compare **tip of the ice-cube**). 5. quuxy: adj. Of or pertaining to a quux.

Node:qux, Next:QWERTY, Previous:quux, Up:= Q =

qux /kwuhks/

The fourth of the standard **metasyntactic variable**, after **baz** and before the quu(u...)x series. See **foo**, **bar**, **baz**, **quux**. This appears to be a recent mutation from **quux**, and many versions (especially older versions) of the standard series just run **foo**, **bar**, **baz**, **quux**, ...

Node:QWERTY, Next:rabbit job, Previous:qux, Up:= Q =

QWERTY /kwer'tee/ adj.

[from the keycaps at the upper left] Pertaining to a standard English-language typewriter keyboard (sometimes called the Sholes keyboard after its inventor), as opposed to Dvorak or non-US-ASCII layouts or a **space-cadet keyboard** or APL keyboard.

Historical note: The QWERTY layout is a fine example of a **fossil**. It is sometimes said that it was designed to slow down the typist, but this is wrong; it was designed to allow *faster* typing -- under a constraint now long obsolete. In early typewriters, fast typing using nearby type-bars jammed the mechanism. So Sholes fiddled the layout to separate the letters of many common digraphs (he did a far from perfect job, though; `th', `tr', `ed', and `er', for example, each use two nearby keys). Also, putting the letters of `typewriter' on one line allowed it to be typed with particular speed and accuracy for **demo**s. The jamming problem was essentially solved soon afterward by a suitable use of springs, but the keyboard layout lives on.

The QWERTY keyboard has also spawned some unhelpful economic myths about how technical standards get and stay established; see http://www.reasonmag.com/9606/Fe.QWERTY.html.

Node:= R =, Next:= S =, Previous:= Q =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= R =

- rabbit job:
- rain dance:
- rainbow series:
- random:
- Random Number God:
- random numbers:
- randomness:
- rape:
- rare mode:
- raster blaster:
- raster burn:
- rasterbation:
- rat belt:
- rat dance:
- rave:
- rave on!:
- ravs:

- raw mode:
- RBL:
- rc file:
- RE:
- read-only user:
- README file:
- real:
- real estate:
- real hack:
- real operating system:
- Real Programmer:
- Real Soon Now:
- real time:
- real user:
- Real World:
- reality check:
- reality-distortion field:
- reaper:
- recompile the world:
- rectangle slinger:
- recursion:
- recursive acronym:
- Red Book:
- red wire:
- regexp:
- register dancing:
- rehi:
- reincarnation cycle of:
- reinvent the wheel:
- relay rape:
- religion of CHI:
- religious issues:
- replicator:
- reply:
- restriction:
- retcon:
- RETI:
- retrocomputing:
- return from the dead:
- RFC:
- RFE:
- rib site:
- rice box:
- Right Thing:
- rip:
- ripoff:
- RL:
- roach:
- robocanceller:
- robot:
- robust:
- rococo:

- rogue:
- room-temperature IQ:
- root:
- root mode:
- rot13:
- rotary debugger:
- round tape:
- RSN:
- RTBM:
- RTFAQ:
- RTFB:
- RTFM:
- RTFS:
- RTI:
- RTM:
- RTS:
- rude:
- runes:
- runic:
- rusty iron:
- rusty memory:
- rusty wire:

Node:rabbit job, Next:rain dance, Previous:QWERTY, Up:= R =

rabbit job n.

[Cambridge] A batch job that does little, if any, real work, but creates one or more copies of itself, breeding like rabbits. Compare **wabbit**, **fork bomb**.

Node:rain dance, Next:rainbow series, Previous:rabbit job, Up:= R =

rain dance n.

1. Any ceremonial action taken to correct a hardware problem, with the expectation that nothing will be accomplished. This especially applies to reseating printed circuit boards, reconnecting cables, etc. "I can't boot up the machine. We'll have to wait for Greg to do his rain dance." 2. Any arcane sequence of actions performed with computers or software in order to achieve some goal; the term is usually restricted to rituals that include both an **incantation** or two and physical activity or motion. Compare **magic**, **voodoo programming**, **black art**, **cargo cult programming**, **wave a dead chicken**; see also **casting the runes**.

Node:rainbow series, Next:random, Previous:rain dance, Up:= R =

rainbow series n.

Any of several series of technical manuals distinguished by cover color. The original rainbow series was the NCSC security manuals (see **Orange Book**, **crayola books**); the term has also been commonly applied to the PostScript reference set (see **Red Book**, **Green Book**, **Blue Book**, **White Book**). Which books are meant by "`the' rainbow series" unqualified is thus dependent on one's local technical culture.

Node:random, Next:Random Number God, Previous:rainbow series, Up:= R =

random adj.

1. Unpredictable (closest to mathematical definition); weird. "The system's been behaving pretty randomly." 2. Assorted; undistinguished. "Who was at the conference?" "Just a bunch of random business types." 3. (pejorative) Frivolous; unproductive; undirected. "He's just a random loser." 4. Incoherent or inelegant; poorly chosen; not well organized. "The program has a random set of misfeatures." "That's a random name for that function." "Well, all the names were chosen pretty randomly." 5. In no particular order, though deterministic. "The I/O channels are in a pool, and when a file is opened one is chosen randomly." 6. Arbitrary. "It generates a random name for the scratch file." 7. Gratuitously wrong, i.e., poorly done and for no good apparent reason. For example, a program that handles file name defaulting in a particularly useless way, or an assembler routine that could easily have been coded using only three registers, but redundantly uses seven for values with non-overlapping lifetimes, so that no one else can invoke it without first saving four extra registers. What **randomness**! 8. n. A random hacker; used particularly of high-school students who soak up computer time and generally get in the way. 9. n. Anyone who is not a hacker (or, sometimes, anyone not known to the hacker speaking); the noun form of sense 2. "I went to the talk, but the audience was full of randoms asking bogus questions". 10. n. (occasional MIT usage) One who lives at Random Hall. See also **J. Random**, **some random X**. 11. [UK] Conversationally, a non sequitur or something similarly out-of-the-blue. As in: "Stop being so random!" This sense equates to `hatstand', taken from the Viz comic character "Roger Irrelevant - He's completely Hatstand."

Node:Random Number God, Next:random numbers, Previous:random, Up:= R =

Random Number God

[rec.games.roguelike.angband; often abbreviated `RNG'] The malign force which lurks behind the random number generator in **Angband** (and by extension elsewhere). A dark god that demands sacrifices and toys with its victims. "I just found a really great item; I suppose the RNG is about to punish me..." Apparently, Angband's random number generator occasionally gets locked in a repetition, so you get something with a 3% chance happening 8 times in a row. Improbable, but far too common to be pure chance. Compare **Shub-Internet**.

Node:random numbers, Next:randomness, Previous:Random Number God, Up:= R =

random numbers n.

When one wishes to specify a large but random number of things, and the context is inappropriate for **N**, certain numbers are preferred by hacker tradition (that is, easily recognized as placeholders). These include the following:

17

Long described at MIT as `the least random number'; see 23.

23

Sacred number of Eris, Goddess of Discord (along with 17 and 5).

42

The Answer to the Ultimate Question of Life, the Universe, and Everything. (Note that this answer is completely fortuitous. :-))

69

From the sexual act. This one was favored in MIT's ITS culture.

105

69 hex = 105 decimal, and 69 decimal = 105 octal.

666

The Number of the Beast.

For further enlightenment, study the "Principia Discordia", "**The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy**", "The Joy of Sex", and the Christian Bible (Revelation 13:18). See also **Discordianism** or consult your pineal gland. See also **for values of**.

Node:randomness, Next:rape, Previous:random numbers, Up:= R =

randomness n.

1. An inexplicable misfeature; gratuitous inelegance. 2. A **hack** or **crock** that depends on a complex combination of coincidences (or, possibly, the combination upon which the crock depends for its accidental failure to malfunction). "This hack can output characters 40-57 by putting the character in the four-bit accumulator field of an XCT and then extracting six bits -- the low 2 bits of the XCT opcode are the right thing." "What randomness!" 3. Of people, synonymous with `flakiness'. The connotation is that the person so described is behaving weirdly, incompetently, or inappropriately for reasons which are (a) too tiresome to bother inquiring into, (b) are probably as inscrutable as quantum phenomena anyway, and (c) are likely to pass with time. "Maybe he has a real complaint, or maybe it's just randomness. See if he calls back."

Despite the negative connotations jargon uses of this term have, it is worth noting that randomness can actually be a valuable resource, very useful for applications in cryptography and elsewhere. Computers are so thoroughly deterministic that they have a hard time generating high-quality randomess, so hackers have sometimes felt the need to built special-purpose contraptions for this purpose alone. One well-known website offers random bits generated by radioactive decay. Another derives random bits from images of Lava Lite lamps. (Hackers invariably find the latter hilarious. If you have to ask why, you'll never get it.)

Node:rape, Next:rare mode, Previous:randomness, Up:= R =

rape vt.

1. To **screw** someone or something, violently; in particular, to destroy a program or information irrecoverably. Often used in describing file-system damage. "So-and-so was running a program that did absolute disk I/O and ended up raping the master directory." 2. To strip a piece of hardware for parts. 3. [CMU/Pitt] To mass-copy files from an anonymous ftp site. "Last night I raped Simtel's dskutl directory."

Node:rare mode, Next:raster blaster, Previous:rape, Up:= R =

rare mode adj.

[Unix] CBREAK mode (character-by-character with interrupts enabled). Distinguished from **raw mode** and **cooked mode**; the phrase "a sort of half-cooked (rare?) mode" is used in the V7/BSD manuals to describe the mode. Usage: rare.

Node:raster blaster, Next:raster burn, Previous:rare mode, Up:= R =

raster blaster n.

[Cambridge] Specialized hardware for **bitblt** operations (a **blitter**). Allegedly inspired by `Rasta Blasta', British slang for the sort of portable stereo Americans call a `boom box' or `ghetto blaster'.

Node:raster burn, Next:rasterbation, Previous:raster blaster, Up:= R =

raster burn n.

Eyestrain brought on by too many hours of looking at low-res, poorly tuned, or glare-ridden monitors, esp. graphics monitors. See **terminal illness**.

Node:rasterbation, Next:rat belt, Previous:raster burn, Up:= R =

rasterbation n.

[portmanteau: raster + masturbation] The gratuituous use of comuputer generated images and effects in movies and graphic art which would have been better without them. Especially employed as a term of abuse by Photoshop/GIMP users and graphic artists.

Node:rat belt, Next:rat dance, Previous:rasterbation, Up:= R =

rat belt n.

A cable tie, esp. the sawtoothed, self-locking plastic kind that you can remove only by cutting (as opposed to a random twist of wire or a twist tie or one of those humongous metal clip frobs). Small cable ties are `mouse belts'.

Node:rat dance, Next:rave, Previous:rat belt, Up:= R =

rat dance n.

[From the **Dilbert** comic strip of November 14, 1995] A **hacking run** that produces results which, while superficially coherent, have little or nothing to do with its original objectives. There are strong connotations that the coding process and the objectives themselves were pretty **random**. (In the original comic strip, the Ratbert is invited to dance on Dilbert's keyboard in order to produce bugs for him to fix, and authors a Web browser instead.) Compare **Infinite-Monkey Theorem**.

This term seems to have become widely recognized quite rapidly after the original strip, a fact which testifies to Dilbert's huge popularity among hackers. All too many find the perverse incentives and

Kafkaesque atmosphere of Dilbert's mythical workplace reflective of their own experiences.

Node:rave, Next:rave on!, Previous:rat dance, Up:= R =

rave vi.

[WPI] 1. To persist in discussing a specific subject. 2. To speak authoritatively on a subject about which one knows very little. 3. To complain to a person who is not in a position to correct the difficulty. 4. To purposely annoy another person verbally. 5. To evangelize. See **flame**. 6. Also used to describe a less negative form of blather, such as friendly bullshitting. `Rave' differs slightly from **flame** in that `rave' implies that it is the persistence or obliviousness of the person speaking that is annoying, while **flame** implies somewhat more strongly that the tone or content is offensive as well.

Node:rave on!, Next:ravs, Previous:rave, Up:= R =

rave on! imp.

Sarcastic invitation to continue a **rave**, often by someone who wishes the raver would get a clue but realizes this is unlikely.

Node:ravs, Next:raw mode, Previous:rave on!, Up:= R =

ravs /ravz/, also `Chinese ravs' n.

[primarily MIT/Boston usage] Jiao-zi (steamed or boiled) or Guo-tie (pan-fried). A Chinese appetizer, known variously in the plural as dumplings, pot stickers (the literal translation of guo-tie), and (around Boston) `Peking Ravioli'. The term `rav' is short for `ravioli', and among hackers always means the Chinese kind rather than the Italian kind. Both consist of a filling in a pasta shell, but the Chinese kind includes no cheese, uses a thinner pasta, has a pork-vegetable filling (good ones include Chinese chives), and is cooked differently, either by steaming or frying. A rav or dumpling can be cooked any way, but a potsticker is always the pan-fried kind (so called because it sticks to the frying pot and has to be scraped off). "Let's get hot-and-sour soup and three orders of ravs." See also **oriental food**.

Node:raw mode, Next:RBL, Previous:ravs, Up:= R =

raw mode n.

A mode that allows a program to transfer bits directly to or from an I/O device (or, under **bogus** operating systems that make a distinction, a disk file) without any processing, abstraction, or interpretation by the operating system. Compare **rare mode**, **cooked mode**. This is techspeak under Unix, jargon elsewhere.

Node:RBL, Next:rc file, Previous:raw mode, Up:= R =

RBL /R-B-L/

Abbreviation: "Realtime Blackhole List". A service that allows people to blacklist sites for emitting **spam**, and makes the blacklist available in real time to electronic-mail transport programs that know how to use RBL so they can filter out mail from those sites. Drastic (and controversial) but effective. There is

an RBL home page.

Node:rc file, Next:RE, Previous:RBL, Up:= R =

rc file /R-C fi:l/ n.

[Unix: from `runcom files' on the **CTSS** system 1962-63, via the startup script `/etc/rc`] Script file containing startup instructions for an application program (or an entire operating system), usually a text file containing commands of the sort that might have been invoked manually once the system was running but are to be executed automatically each time the system starts up. See also **dot file**, **profile** (sense 1).

Node:RE, Next:read-only user, Previous:rc file, Up:= R =

RE /R-E/ n.

Common spoken and written shorthand for **regexp**.

Node:read-only user, Next:README file, Previous:RE, Up:= R =

read-only user n.

Describes a **luser** who uses computers almost exclusively for reading Usenet, bulletin boards, and/or email, rather than writing code or purveying useful information. See **twink**, **terminal junkie**, **lurker**.

Node:README file, Next:real, Previous:read-only user, Up:= R =

README file n.

Hacker's-eye introduction traditionally included in the top-level directory of a Unix source distribution, containing a pointer to more detailed documentation, credits, miscellaneous revision history, notes, etc. (The file may be named README, or READ.ME, or rarely ReadMe or readme.txt or some other variant.) In the Mac and PC worlds, software is not usually distributed in source form, and the README is more likely to contain user-oriented material like last-minute documentation changes, error workarounds, and restrictions. When asked, hackers invariably relate the README convention to the famous scene in Lewis Carroll's "Alice's Adventures In Wonderland" in which Alice confronts magic munchies labeled "Eat Me" and "Drink Me".

Node:real, Next:real estate, Previous:README file, Up:= R =

real adj.

Not simulated. Often used as a specific antonym to **virtual** in any of its jargon senses.

Node:real estate, Next:real hack, Previous:real, Up:= R =

real estate n.

May be used for any critical resource measured in units of area. Most frequently used of `chip real estate', the area available for logic on the surface of an integrated circuit (see also **nanoacre**). May also be used of floor space in a **dinosaur pen**, or even space on a crowded desktop (whether physical or electronic).

Node:real hack, Next:real operating system, Previous:real estate, Up:= R =

real hack n.

A **crock**. This is sometimes used affectionately; see **hack**.

Node:real operating system, Next:Real Programmer, Previous:real hack, Up:= R =

real operating system n.

The sort the speaker is used to. People from the BSDophilic academic community are likely to issue comments like "System V? Why don't you use a *real* operating system?", people from the commercial/industrial Unix sector are known to complain "BSD? Why don't you use a *real* operating system?", and people from IBM object "Unix? Why don't you use a *real* operating system?" Only **MS-DOS** is universally considered unreal. See **holy wars**, **religious issues**, **proprietary**, **Get a real computer!**

Node:Real Programmer, Next:Real Soon Now, Previous:real operating system, Up:= R =

Real Programmer n.

[indirectly, from the book "Real Men Don't Eat Quiche"] A particular sub-variety of hacker: one possessed of a flippant attitude toward complexity that is arrogant even when justified by experience. The archetypal `Real Programmer' likes to program on the **bare metal** and is very good at same, remembers the binary opcodes for every machine he has ever programmed, thinks that HLLs are sissy, and uses a debugger to edit his code because full-screen editors are for wimps. Real Programmers aren't satisfied with code that hasn't been **bum**med into a state of **tense**ness just short of rupture. Real Programmers never use comments or write documentation: "If it was hard to write", says the Real Programmer, "it should be hard to understand." Real Programmers can make machines do things that were never in their spec sheets; in fact, they are seldom really happy unless doing so. A Real Programmer's code can awe with its fiendish brilliance, even as its crockishness appalls. Real Programmers live on junk food and coffee, hang line-printer art on their walls, and terrify the crap out of other programmers -- because someday, somebody else might have to try to understand their code in order to change it. Their successors generally consider it a **Good Thing** that there aren't many Real Programmers around any more. For a famous (and somewhat more positive) portrait of a Real Programmer, see "**The Story of Mel**" in Appendix A. The term itself was popularized by a 1983 Datamation article "Real Programmers Don't Use Pascal" by Ed Post, still circulating on Usenet and Internet in on-line form. You can browse "Real Programmers Don't Use Pascal" from the Datamation home page http://www.datamation.com.

Node:Real Soon Now, Next:real time, Previous:Real Programmer, Up:= R =

Real Soon Now adv.

[orig. from SF's fanzine community, popularized by Jerry Pournelle's column in "BYTE"] 1. Supposed to

be available (or fixed, or cheap, or whatever) real soon now according to somebody, but the speaker is quite skeptical. 2. When one's gods, fates, or other time commitments permit one to get to it (in other words, don't hold your breath). Often abbreviated RSN. Compare **copious free time**.

Node:real time, Next:real user, Previous:Real Soon Now, Up:= R =

real time

1. [techspeak] adj. Describes an application which requires a program to respond to stimuli within some small upper limit of response time (typically milli- or microseconds). Process control at a chemical plant is the **canonical** example. Such applications often require special operating systems (because everything else must take a back seat to response time) and speed-tuned hardware. 2. adv. In jargon, refers to doing something while people are watching or waiting. "I asked her how to find the calling procedure's program counter on the stack and she came up with an algorithm in real time."

Node:real user, Next:Real World, Previous:real time, Up:= R =

real user n.

1. A commercial user. One who is paying *real* money for his computer usage. 2. A non-hacker. Someone using the system for an explicit purpose (a research project, a course, etc.) other than pure exploration. See **user**. Hackers who are also students may also be real users. "I need this fixed so I can do a problem set. I'm not complaining out of randomness, but as a real user." See also **luser**.

Node:Real World, Next:reality check, Previous:real user, Up:= R =

Real World n.

1. Those institutions at which `programming' may be used in the same sentence as `FORTRAN', `**COBOL**', `RPG', `**IBM**', `DBASE', etc. Places where programs do such commercially necessary but intellectually uninspiring things as generating payroll checks and invoices. 2. The location of non-programmers and activities not related to programming. 3. A bizarre dimension in which the standard dress is shirt and tie and in which a person's working hours are defined as 9 to 5 (see **code grinder**). 4. Anywhere outside a university. "Poor fellow, he's left MIT and gone into the Real World." Used pejoratively by those not in residence there. In conversation, talking of someone who has entered the Real World is not unlike speaking of a deceased person. It is also noteworthy that on the campus of Cambridge University in England, there is a gaily-painted lamp-post which bears the label `REALITY CHECKPOINT'. It marks the boundary between university and the Real World; check your notions of reality before passing. This joke is funnier because the Cambridge `campus' is actually coextensive with the center of Cambridge town. See also **fear and loathing**, **mundane**, and **uninteresting**.

Node:reality check, Next:reality-distortion field, Previous:Real World, Up:= R =

reality check n.

1. The simplest kind of test of software or hardware; doing the equivalent of asking it what 2 + 2 is and seeing if you get 4. The software equivalent of a **smoke test**. 2. The act of letting a **real user** try out prototype software. Compare **sanity check**.

Node:reality-distortion field, Next:reaper, Previous:reality check, Up:= R =

reality-distortion field n.

An expression used to describe the persuasive ability of managers like Steve Jobs (the term originated at Apple in the 1980s to describe his peculiar charisma). Those close to these managers become passionately committed to possibly insane projects, without regard to the practicality of their implementation or competitive forces in the marketpace.

Node:reaper, Next:recompile the world, Previous:reality-distortion field, Up:= R =

reaper n.

A **prowler** that **GFR**s files. A file removed in this way is said to have been `reaped'.

Node:recompile the world, Next:rectangle slinger, Previous:reaper, Up:= R =

recompile the world

The surprisingly large amount of work that needs to be done as the result of any small but globally visible program change. "The world" may mean the entirety of some huge program, or may in theory refer to every program of a certain class in the entire known universe. For instance, "Add one #define to stdio.h, and you have to recompile the world." This means that any minor change to the standard-I/O header file theoretically mandates recompiling every C program in existence, even if only to verify that the change didn't screw something else up. In practice, you may not actually have to recompile the world, but the implication is that some human cleverness is required to figure out what parts can be safely left out.

Node:rectangle slinger, Next:recursion, Previous:recompile the world, Up:= R =

rectangle slinger n.

See **polygon pusher**.

Node:recursion, Next:recursive acronym, Previous:rectangle slinger, Up:= R =

recursion n.

See **recursion**. See also **tail recursion**.

Node:recursive acronym, Next:Red Book, Previous:recursion, Up:= R =

recursive acronym n.

A hackish (and especially MIT) tradition is to choose acronyms/abbreviations that refer humorously to themselves or to other acronyms/abbreviations. The classic examples were two MIT editors called EINE ("EINE Is Not EMACS") and ZWEI ("ZWEI Was EINE Initially"). More recently, there is a Scheme compiler called LIAR (Liar Imitates Apply Recursively), and **GNU** (q.v., sense 1) stands for "GNU's Not Unix!" -- and a company with the name Cygnus, which expands to "Cygnus, Your GNU Support"

(though Cygnus people say this is a **backronym**). See also **mung**, **EMACS**.

Node:Red Book, Next:red wire, Previous:recursive acronym, Up:= R =

Red Book n.

1. Informal name for one of the four standard references on **PostScript** ("PostScript Language Reference Manual", Adobe Systems (Addison-Wesley, 1985; QA76.73.P67P67; ISBN 0-201-10174-2, or the 1990 second edition ISBN 0-201-18127-4); the others are known as the **Green Book**, the **Blue Book**, and the **White Book** (sense 2). 2. Informal name for one of the 3 standard references on Smalltalk ("Smalltalk-80: The Interactive Programming Environment" by Adele Goldberg (Addison-Wesley, 1984; QA76.8.S635G638; ISBN 0-201-11372-4); this too is associated with blue and green books). 3. Any of the 1984 standards issued by the CCITT eighth plenary assembly. These include, among other things, the X.400 email spec and the Group 1 through 4 fax standards. 4. The new version of the **Green Book** (sense 4) -- IEEE 1003.1-1990, a.k.a ISO 9945-1 -- is (because of the color and the fact that it is printed on A4 paper) known in the USA as "the Ugly Red Book That Won't Fit On The Shelf" and in Europe as "the Ugly Red Book That's A Sensible Size". 5. The NSA "Trusted Network Interpretation" companion to the **Orange Book**. 6. Nemeth, Snyder, Seebass, Hein; "Unix System Administration Handbook, Second Edition" (Prentice Hall PTR, New Jersey; 1995; QA76.76.063N45; ISBN 0-13-151051-7). See also **book titles**.

Node:red wire, Next:regexp, Previous:Red Book, Up:= R =

red wire n.

[IBM] Patch wires installed by programmers who have no business mucking with the hardware. It is said that the only thing more dangerous than a hardware guy with a code patch is a **softy** with a soldering iron.... Compare **blue wire**, **yellow wire**, **purple wire**.

Node:regexp, Next:register dancing, Previous:red wire, Up:= R =

regexp /reg'eksp/ n.

[Unix] (alt. `regex' or `reg-ex') 1. Common written and spoken abbreviation for `regular expression', one of the wildcard patterns used, e.g., by Unix utilities such as `grep(1)`, `sed(1)`, and `awk(1)`. These use conventions similar to but more elaborate than those described under **glob**. For purposes of this lexicon, it is sufficient to note that regexps also allow complemented character sets using `^`; thus, one can specify `any non-alphabetic character' with `[^A-Za-z]`. 2. Name of a well-known PD regexp-handling package in portable C, written by revered Usenetter Henry Spencer <henry@zoo.toronto.edu>.

Node:register dancing, Next:rehi, Previous:regexp, Up:= R =

register dancing n.

Many older processor architectures suffer from a serious shortage of general-purpose registers. This is especially a problem for compiler-writers, because their generated code needs places to store temporaries for things like intermediate values in expression evaluation. Some designs with this problem, like the Intel 80x86, do have a handful of special-purpose registers that can be pressed into service, providing suitable care is taken to avoid unpleasant side effects on the state of the processor: while the special-purpose

register is being used to hold an intermediate value, a delicate minuet is required in which the previous value of the register is saved and then restored just before the official function (and value) of the special-purpose register is again needed.

Node:rehi, Next:reincarnation cycle of, Previous:register dancing, Up:= R =

rehi

[IRC, MUD] "Hello again." Very commonly used to greet people upon returning to an IRC channel after **channel hopping**.

Node:reincarnation cycle of, Next:reinvent the wheel, Previous:rehi, Up:= R =

reincarnation, cycle of n.

See **cycle of reincarnation**.

Node:reinvent the wheel, Next:relay rape, Previous:reincarnation cycle of, Up:= R =

reinvent the wheel v.

To design or implement a tool equivalent to an existing one or part of one, with the implication that doing so is silly or a waste of time. This is often a valid criticism. On the other hand, automobiles don't use wooden rollers, and some kinds of wheel have to be reinvented many times before you get them right. On the third hand, people reinventing the wheel do tend to come up with the moral equivalent of a trapezoid with an offset axle.

Node:relay rape, Next:religion of CHI, Previous:reinvent the wheel, Up:= R =

relay rape n.

The hijacking of a third party's unsecured mail server to deliver **spam**.

Node:religion of CHI, Next:religious issues, Previous:relay rape, Up:= R =

religion of CHI /ki:/ n.

[Case Western Reserve University] Yet another hackish parody religion (see also **Church of the SubGenius**, **Discordianism**). In the mid-70s, the canonical "Introduction to Programming" courses at CWRU were taught in Algol, and student exercises were punched on cards and run on a Univac 1108 system using a homebrew operating system named CHI. The religion had no doctrines and but one ritual: whenever the worshipper noted that a digital clock read 11:08, he or she would recite the phrase "It is 11:08; ABS, ALPHABETIC, ARCSIN, ARCCOS, ARCTAN." The last five words were the first five functions in the appropriate chapter of the Algol manual; note the special pronunciations /obz/ and /ark'sin/ rather than the more common /ahbz/ and /ark'si:n/. Using an alarm clock to warn of 11:08's arrival was **considered harmful**.

Node:religious issues, Next:replicator, Previous:religion of CHI, Up:= R =

religious issues n.

Questions which seemingly cannot be raised without touching off **holy wars**, such as "What is the best operating system (or editor, language, architecture, shell, mail reader, news reader)?", "What about that Heinlein guy, eh?", "What should we add to the new Jargon File?" See **holy wars**; see also **theology**, **bigot**.

This term is a prime example of **ha ha only serious**. People actually develop the most amazing and religiously intense attachments to their tools, even when the tools are intangible. The most constructive thing one can do when one stumbles into the crossfire is mumble **Get a life!** and leave -- unless, of course, one's *own* unassailably rational and obviously correct choices are being slammed.

Node:replicator, Next:reply, Previous:religious issues, Up:= R =

replicator n.

Any construct that acts to produce copies of itself; this could be a living organism, an idea (see **meme**), a program (see **quine**, **worm**, **wabbit**, **fork bomb**, and **virus**), a pattern in a cellular automaton (see **life**, sense 1), or (speculatively) a robot or **nanobot**. It is even claimed by some that **Unix** and **C** are the symbiotic halves of an extremely successful replicator; see **Unix conspiracy**.

Node:reply, Next:restriction, Previous:replicator, Up:= R =

reply n.

See **followup**.

Node:restriction, Next:retcon, Previous:reply, Up:= R =

restriction n.

A **bug** or design error that limits a program's capabilities, and which is sufficiently egregious that nobody can quite work up enough nerve to describe it as a **feature**. Often used (esp. by **marketroid** types) to make it sound as though some crippling bogosity had been intended by the designers all along, or was forced upon them by arcane technical constraints of a nature no mere user could possibly comprehend (these claims are almost invariably false).

Old-time hacker Joseph M. Newcomer advises that whenever choosing a quantifiable but arbitrary restriction, you should make it either a power of 2 or a power of 2 minus 1. If you impose a limit of 107 items in a list, everyone will know it is a random number -- on the other hand, a limit of 15 or 16 suggests some deep reason (involving 0- or 1-based indexing in binary) and you will get less **flamage** for it. Limits which are round numbers in base 10 are always especially suspect.

Node:retcon, Next:RETI, Previous:restriction, Up:= R =

retcon /ret'kon/

[short for `retroactive continuity', from the Usenet newsgroup *rec.arts.comics*] 1. n. The common

situation in pulp fiction (esp. comics or soap operas) where a new story `reveals' things about events in previous stories, usually leaving the `facts' the same (thus preserving continuity) while completely changing their interpretation. For example, revealing that a whole season of "Dallas" was a dream was a retcon. 2. vt. To write such a story about a character or fictitious object. "Byrne has retconned Superman's cape so that it is no longer unbreakable." "Marvelman's old adventures were retconned into synthetic dreams." "Swamp Thing was retconned from a transformed person into a sentient vegetable." "Darth Vader was retconned into Luke Skywalker's father in "The Empire Strikes Back".

[This term is included because it is a good example of hackish linguistic innovation in a field completely unrelated to computers. The word `retcon' will probably spread through comics fandom and lose its association with hackerdom within a couple of years; for the record, it started here. --ESR]

[1993 update: some comics fans on the net now claim that retcon was independently in use in comics fandom before *rec.arts.comics*. In lexicography, nothing is ever simple. --ESR]

Node:RETI, Next:retrocomputing, Previous:retcon, Up:= R =

RETI v.

Syn. **RTI**

Node:retrocomputing, Next:return from the dead, Previous:RETI, Up:= R =

retrocomputing /ret'-roh-k*m-pyoo'ting/ n.

Refers to emulations of way-behind-the-state-of-the-art hardware or software, or implementations of never-was-state-of-the-art; esp. if such implementations are elaborate practical jokes and/or parodies, written mostly for **hack value**, of more `serious' designs. Perhaps the most widely distributed retrocomputing utility was the `pnch(6)` or `bcd(6)` program on V7 and other early Unix versions, which would accept up to 80 characters of text argument and display the corresponding pattern in **punched card** code. Other well-known retrocomputing hacks have included the programming language **INTERCAL**, a **JCL**-emulating shell for Unix, the card-punch-emulating editor named 029, and various elaborate PDP-11 hardware emulators and RT-11 OS emulators written just to keep an old, sourceless **Zork** binary running.

A tasty selection of retrocomputing programs are made available at the Retrocomputing Museum, http://www.ccil.org/retro.

Node:return from the dead, Next:RFC, Previous:retrocomputing, Up:= R =

return from the dead v.

To regain access to the net after a long absence. Compare **person of no account**.

Node:RFC, Next:RFE, Previous:return from the dead, Up:= R =

RFC /R-F-C/ n.

[Request For Comment] One of a long-established series of numbered Internet informational documents and standards widely followed by commercial software and freeware in the Internet and Unix

communities. Perhaps the single most influential one has been RFC-822 (the Internet mail-format standard). The RFCs are unusual in that they are floated by technical experts acting on their own initiative and reviewed by the Internet at large, rather than formally promulgated through an institution such as ANSI. For this reason, they remain known as RFCs even once adopted as standards.

The RFC tradition of pragmatic, experience-driven, after-the-fact standard writing done by individuals or small working groups has important advantages over the more formal, committee-driven process typical of ANSI or ISO. Emblematic of some of these advantages is the existence of a flourishing tradition of `joke' RFCs; usually at least one a year is published, usually on April 1st. Well-known joke RFCs have included 527 ("ARPAWOCKY", R. Merryman, UCSD; 22 June 1973), 748 ("Telnet Randomly-Lose Option", Mark R. Crispin; 1 April 1978), and 1149 ("A Standard for the Transmission of IP Datagrams on Avian Carriers", D. Waitzman, BBN STC; 1 April 1990). The first was a Lewis Carroll pastiche; the second a parody of the TCP-IP documentation style, and the third a deadpan skewering of standards-document legalese, describing protocols for transmitting Internet data packets by carrier pigeon.

The RFCs are most remarkable for how well they work -- they manage to have neither the ambiguities that are usually rife in informal specifications, nor the committee-perpetrated misfeatures that often haunt formal standards, and they define a network that has grown to truly worldwide proportions.

Node:RFE, Next:rib site, Previous:RFC, Up:= R =

RFE /R-F-E/ n.

1. [techspeak] Request For Enhancement (compare **RFC**). 2. [from `Radio Free Europe', Bellcore and Sun] Radio Free Ethernet, a system (originated by Peter Langston) for broadcasting audio among Sun SPARCstations over the ethernet.

Node:rib site, Next:rice box, Previous:RFE, Up:= R =

rib site n.

[by analogy with **backbone site**] A machine that has an on-demand high-speed link to a **backbone site** and serves as a regional distribution point for lots of third-party traffic in email and Usenet news. Compare **leaf site**, **backbone site**.

Node:rice box, Next:Right Thing, Previous:rib site, Up:= R =

rice box n.

[from ham radio slang] Any Asian-made commodity computer, esp. an 80x86-based machine built to IBM PC-compatible ISA or EISA-bus standards.

Node:Right Thing, Next:rip, Previous:rice box, Up:= R =

Right Thing n.

That which is *compellingly* the correct or appropriate thing to use, do, say, etc. Often capitalized, always emphasized in speech as though capitalized. Use of this term often implies that in fact reasonable people may disagree. "What's the right thing for LISP to do when it sees `(mod a 0)`? Should it return `a`, or give a divide-by-0 error?" Oppose **Wrong Thing**.

Node:rip, Next:ripoff, Previous:Right Thing, Up:= R =

rip v.

1. To extract the digital representation of a piece of music from an audio CD. Software that does this is often called a "CD ripper". 2. [Amiga hackers] To extract sound or graphics from a program that they have been compiled/assembled into, or which generates them at run-time. In the case of older Amiga games this entails searching through memory shortly after a reboot. This sense has been in use for many years and probably gave rise to the (now more common) sense 1.

Node:ripoff, Next:RL, Previous:rip, Up:= R =

ripoff n.

Synonym for **chad**, sense 1.

Node:RL, Next:roach, Previous:ripoff, Up:= R =

RL // n.

[MUD community] Real Life. "Firiss laughs in RL" means that Firiss's player is laughing. Compare **meatspace**; oppose **VR**.

Node:roach, Next:robocanceller, Previous:RL, Up:= R =

roach vt.

[Bell Labs] To destroy, esp. of a data structure. Hardware gets **toast**ed or **fried**, software gets roached.

Node:robocanceller, Next:robot, Previous:roach, Up:= R =

robocanceller /roh-boh-kan'sel-*r/

A program that monitors Usenet feeds, attempting to detect and elimnate **spam** by sending appropriate cancel messages . Robocancellers may use the **Breidbart Index** as a trigger. Programming them is not a game for amateurs; see **ARMM**. See also **Dave the Resurrector**.

Node:robot, Next:robust, Previous:robocanceller, Up:= R =

robot n.

See **bot**.

Node:robust, Next:rococo, Previous:robot, Up:= R =

robust adj.

Said of a system that has demonstrated an ability to recover gracefully from the whole range of exceptional inputs and situations in a given environment. One step below **bulletproof**. Carries the additional connotation of elegance in addition to just careful attention to detail. Compare **smart**, oppose **brittle**.

Node:rococo, Next:rogue, Previous:robust, Up:= R =

rococo adj.

Terminally **baroque**. Used to imply that a program has become so encrusted with the software equivalent of gold leaf and curlicues that they have completely swamped the underlying design. Called after the later and more extreme forms of Baroque architecture and decoration prevalent during the mid-1700s in Europe. Alan Perlis said: "Every program eventually becomes rococo, and then rubble." Compare **critical mass**.

Node:rogue, Next:room-temperature IQ, Previous:rococo, Up:= R =

rogue

1. [Unix] n. A Dungeons-and-Dragons-like game using character graphics, written under BSD Unix and subsequently ported to other Unix systems. The original BSD `curses(3)` screen-handling package was hacked together by Ken Arnold primarily to support games, and the development of `rogue(6)` popularized its use; it has since become one of Unix's most important and heavily used application libraries. Nethack, Omega, Larn, Angband, and an entire subgenre of computer dungeon games (all known as `roguelikes') all took off from the inspiration provided by `rogue(6)`; the popular Windows game Diablo, though graphics-intensive, has very similar play logic. See also **nethack**. 2. [Usenet] adj. An **ISP** which permits net abuse (usually in the form of **spam**ming) by its customers, or which itself engages in such activities. Rogue ISPs are sometimes subject to **IDP**s or **UDP**s. Sometimes deliberately mispelled as "rouge". See also **nethack**, **moria**, **Angband**.

Node:room-temperature IQ, Next:root, Previous:rogue, Up:= R =

room-temperature IQ quant.

[IBM] 80 or below (nominal room temperature is 72 degrees Fahrenheit, 22 degrees Celsius). Used in describing the expected intelligence range of the **luser**. "Well, but how's this interface going to play with the room-temperature IQ crowd?" See **drool-proof paper**. This is a much more insulting phrase in countries that use Celsius thermometers.

Node:root, Next:root mode, Previous:room-temperature IQ, Up:= R =

root n.

[Unix] 1. The **superuser** account (with user name `root') that ignores permission bits, user number 0 on a Unix system. The term **avatar** is also used. 2. The top node of the system directory structure; historically the home directory of the root user, but probably named after the root of an (inverted) tree. 3. By extension, the privileged system-maintenance login on any OS. See **root mode**, **go root**, see also **wheel**.

Node:root mode, Next:rot13, Previous:root, Up:= R =

root mode n.

Syn. with **wizard mode** or `wheel mode'. Like these, it is often generalized to describe privileged states in systems other than OSes.

Node:rot13, Next:rotary debugger, Previous:root mode, Up:= R =

rot13 /rot ther'teen/ n.,v.

[Usenet: from `rotate alphabet 13 places'] The simple Caesar-cypher encryption that replaces each English letter with the one 13 places forward or back along the alphabet, so that "The butler did it!" becomes "Gur ohgyre qvq vg!" Most Usenet news reading and posting programs include a rot13 feature. It is used to enclose the text in a sealed wrapper that the reader must choose to open -- e.g., for posting things that might offend some readers, or **spoiler**s. A major advantage of rot13 over rot(N) for other N is that it is self-inverse, so the same code can be used for encoding and decoding. See also **spoiler space**, which has partly displaced rot13 since non-Unix-based newsreaders became common.

Node:rotary debugger, Next:round tape, Previous:rot13, Up:= R =

rotary debugger n.

[Commodore] Essential equipment for those late-night or early-morning debugging sessions. Mainly used as sustenance for the hacker. Comes in many decorator colors, such as Sausage, Pepperoni, and Garbage. See **ANSI standard pizza**.

Node:round tape, Next:RSN, Previous:rotary debugger, Up:= R =

round tape n.

Industry-standard 1/2-inch magnetic tape (7- or 9-track) on traditional circular reels. See **macrotape**, oppose **square tape**.

Node:RSN, Next:RTBM, Previous:round tape, Up:= R =

RSN /R-S-N/ adj.

See **Real Soon Now**.

Node:RTBM, Next:RTFAQ, Previous:RSN, Up:= R =

RTBM /R-T-B-M/ imp.

[Unix] Commonwealth Hackish variant of **RTFM**; expands to `Read The Bloody Manual'. RTBM is often the entire text of the first reply to a question from a **newbie**; the *second* would escalate to "RTFM".

Node:RTFAQ, Next:RTFB, Previous:RTBM, Up:= R =

RTFAQ /R-T-F-A-Q/ imp.

[Usenet: primarily written, by analogy with **RTFM**] Abbrev. for `Read the FAQ!', an exhortation that the person addressed ought to read the newsgroup's **FAQ list** before posting questions.

Node:RTFB, Next:RTFM, Previous:RTFAQ, Up:= R =

RTFB /R-T-F-B/ imp.

[Unix] Abbreviation for `Read The Fucking Binary'. Used when neither documentation nor source for the problem at hand exists, and the only thing to do is use some debugger or monitor and directly analyze the assembler or even the machine code. "No source for the buggy port driver? Aaargh! I *hate* proprietary operating systems. Time to RTFB."

Of the various RTF? forms, `RTFB' is the least pejorative against anyone asking a question for which RTFB is the answer; the anger here is directed at the absence of both source *and* adequate documentation.

Node:RTFM, Next:RTFS, Previous:RTFB, Up:= R =

RTFM /R-T-F-M/ imp.

[Unix] Abbreviation for `Read The Fucking Manual'. 1. Used by **guru**s to brush off questions they consider trivial or annoying. Compare **Don't do that then!**. 2. Used when reporting a problem to indicate that you aren't just asking out of **randomness**. "No, I can't figure out how to interface Unix to my toaster, and yes, I have RTFM." Unlike sense 1, this use is considered polite. See also **FM**, **RTFAQ**, **RTFB**, **RTFS**, **STFW**, **RTM**, all of which mutated from RTFM, and compare **UTSL**.

Node:RTFS, Next:RTI, Previous:RTFM, Up:= R =

RTFS /R-T-F-S/

[Unix] 1. imp. Abbreviation for `Read The Fucking Source'. Variant form of **RTFM**, used when the problem at hand is not necessarily obvious and not answerable from the manuals -- or the manuals are not yet written and maybe never will be. For even trickier situations, see **RTFB**. Unlike RTFM, the anger inherent in RTFS is not usually directed at the person asking the question, but rather at the people who failed to provide adequate documentation. 2. imp. `Read The Fucking Standard'; this oath can only be used when the problem area (e.g., a language or operating system interface) has actually been codified in a ratified standards document. The existence of these standards documents (and the technically inappropriate but politically mandated compromises that they inevitably contain, and the impenetrable **legalese** in which they are invariably written, and the unbelievably tedious bureaucratic process by which they are produced) can be unnerving to hackers, who are used to a certain amount of ambiguity in the specifications of the systems they use. (Hackers feel that such ambiguities are acceptable as long as the **Right Thing** to do is obvious to any thinking observer; sadly, this casual attitude towards specifications becomes unworkable when a system becomes popular in the **Real World**.) Since a hacker is likely to feel that a standards document is both unnecessary and technically deficient, the deprecation inherent in this term may be directed as much against the standard as against the person who ought to read it.

Node:RTI, Next:RTM, Previous:RTFS, Up:= R =

RTI /R-T-I/ interj.

The mnemonic for the `return from interrupt' instruction on many computers including the 6502 and 6800. The variant `RETI' is found among former Z80 hackers (almost nobody programs these things in assembler anymore). Equivalent to "Now, where was I?" or used to end a conversational digression. See **pop**; see also **POPJ**.

Node:RTM, Next:RTS, Previous:RTI, Up:= R =

RTM /R-T-M/

[Usenet: abbreviation for `Read The Manual'] 1. Politer variant of **RTFM**. 2. Robert Tappan Morris, perpetrator of the great Internet worm of 1988 (see **Great Worm**); villain to many, naive hacker gone wrong to a few. Morris claimed that the worm that brought the Internet to its knees was a benign experiment that got out of control as the result of a coding error. After the storm of negative publicity that followed this blunder, Morris's username on ITS was hacked from RTM to **RTFM**.

Node:RTS, Next:rude, Previous:RTM, Up:= R =

RTS /R-T-S/ imp.

Abbreviation for `Read The Screen'. Mainly used by hackers in the microcomputer world. Refers to what one would like to tell the **suit** one is forced to explain an extremely simple application to. Particularly appropriate when the suit failed to notice the `Press any key to continue' prompt, and wishes to know `why won't it do anything'. Also seen as `RTFS' in especially deserving cases.

Node:rude, Next:runes, Previous:RTS, Up:= R =

rude [WPI] adj.

1. (of a program) Badly written. 2. Functionally poor, e.g., a program that is very difficult to use because of gratuitously poor (random?) design decisions. Oppose **cuspy**. 3. Anything that manipulates a shared resource without regard for its other users in such a way as to cause a (non-fatal) problem. Examples: programs that change tty modes without resetting them on exit, or windowing programs that keep forcing themselves to the top of the window stack. Compare **all-elbows**.

Node:runes, Next:runic, Previous:rude, Up:= R =

runes pl.n.

1. Anything that requires **heavy wizardry** or **black art** to **parse**: core dumps, JCL commands, APL, or code in a language you haven't a clue how to read. Not quite as bad as **line noise**, but close. Compare **casting the runes**, **Great Runes**. 2. Special display characters (for example, the high-half graphics on an IBM PC). 3. [borderline techspeak] 16-bit characters from the Unicode multilingual character set.

Node:runic, Next:rusty iron, Previous:runes, Up:= R =

runic adj.

Syn. **obscure**. VMS fans sometimes refer to Unix as `Runix'; Unix fans return the compliment by expanding VMS to `Very Messy Syntax' or `Vachement Mauvais Système' (French idiom, "Hugely Bad System").

Node:rusty iron, Next:rusty memory, Previous:runic, Up:= R =

rusty iron n.

Syn. **tired iron**. It has been claimed that this is the inevitable fate of **water MIPS**.

Node:rusty memory, Next:rusty wire, Previous:rusty iron, Up:= R =

rusty memory n.

Mass-storage that uses iron-oxide-based magnetic media (esp. tape and the pre-Winchester removable disk packs used in **washing machine**s). Compare **donuts**.

Node:rusty wire, Next:S/N ratio, Previous:rusty memory, Up:= R =

rusty wire n.

[Amateur Packet Radio] Any very noisy network medium, in which the packets are subject to frequent corruption. Most prevalent in reference to wireless links subject to all the vagaries of RF noise and marginal propagation conditions. "Yes, but how good is your whizbang new protocol on really rusty wire?".

Node:= S =, Next:= T =, Previous:= R =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= S =

- S/N ratio:
- sacred:
- saga:
- sagan:
- SAIL:
- salescritter:
- salt:
- salt mines:
- salt substrate:
- same-day service:
- samizdat:
- samurai:
- sandbender:
- sandbox:
- sanity check:

- Saturday-night special:
- say:
- scag:
- scanno:
- scary devil monastery:
- schroedinbug:
- science-fiction fandom:
- scram switch:
- scratch:
- scratch monkey:
- scream and die:
- screaming tty:
- screen:
- screen name:
- screw:
- screwage:
- scribble:
- script kiddies:
- scrog:
- scrool:
- scrozzle:
- scruffies:
- SCSI:
- ScumOS:
- search-and-destroy mode:
- second-system effect:
- secondary damage:
- security through obscurity:
- SED:
- segfault:
- seggie:
- segment:
- segmentation fault:
- segv:
- self-reference:
- selvage:
- semi:
- semi-automated:
- semi-infinite:
- senior bit:
- September that never ended:
- server:
- SEX:
- sex changer:
- shambolic link:
- shar file:
- sharchive:
- Share and enjoy!:
- shareware:
- sharing violation:
- shebang:
- shelfware:

- shell:
- shell out:
- shift left (or right) logical:
- shim:
- shitogram:
- short card:
- shotgun debugging:
- shovelware:
- showstopper:
- shriek:
- Shub-Internet:
- sidecar:
- SIG:
- sig block:
- sig quote:
- sig virus:
- signal-to-noise ratio:
- silicon:
- silly walk:
- silo:
- Silver Book:
- since time T equals minus infinity:
- sitename:
- skrog:
- skulker:
- slab:
- slack:
- slap on the side:
- slash:
- slashdot effect:
- sleep:
- slim:
- slop:
- slopsucker:
- Slowlaris:
- slurp:
- smart:
- smart terminal:
- smash case:
- smash the stack:
- smiley:
- smoke:
- smoke and mirrors:
- smoke test:
- smoking clover:
- SMOP:
- smurf:
- SNAFU principle:
- snail:
- snail-mail:
- snap:
- snarf:

- snarf & barf:
- snarf down:
- snark:
- sneaker:
- sneakernet:
- sniff:
- snivitz:
- 'Snooze:
- SO:
- social engineering:
- social science number:
- sock puppet:
- sodium substrate:
- soft boot:
- softcopy:
- software bloat:
- software hoarding:
- software laser:
- software rot:
- softwarily:
- softy:
- some random X:
- sorcerer's apprentice mode:
- SOS:
- source of all good bits:
- space-cadet keyboard:
- spaceship operator:
- SPACEWAR:
- spaghetti code:
- spaghetti inheritance:
- spam:
- spamblock:
- spamhaus:
- spamvertize:
- spangle:
- spawn:
- special-case:
- speedometer:
- spell:
- spelling flame:
- spider food:
- spiffy:
- spike:
- spin:
- spl:
- splash screen:
- splat:
- spod:
- spoiler:
- spoiler space:
- sponge:
- spoof:

- spool:
- spool file:
- spungle:
- square tape:
- squirrelcide:
- stack:
- stack puke:
- stale pointer bug:
- star out:
- state:
- stealth manager:
- steam-powered:
- STFW:
- stiffy:
- stir-fried random:
- stomp on:
- Stone Age:
- stone knives and bearskins:
- stoppage:
- store:
- strided:
- stroke:
- strudel:
- stubroutine:
- studly:
- studlycaps:
- stunning:
- stupid-sort:
- Stupids:
- Sturgeon's Law:
- sucking mud:
- sufficiently small:
- suit:
- suitable win:
- suitably small:
- Sun:
- sun lounge:
- sun-stools:
- sunspots:
- super source quench:
- superloser:
- superprogrammer:
- superuser:
- support:
- surf:
- Suzie COBOL:
- swab:
- swap:
- swap space:
- swapped in:
- swapped out:
- swizzle:

- sync:
- syntactic salt:
- syntactic sugar:
- sys-frog:
- sysadmin:
- sysape:
- sysop:
- system:
- systems jock:
- system mangler:
- SysVile:

Node:S/N ratio, Next:sacred, Previous:rusty wire, Up:= S =

S/N ratio // n.

(also `s/n ratio', `s:n ratio'). Syn. **signal-to-noise ratio**. Often abbreviated `SNR'.

Node:sacred, Next:saga, Previous:S/N ratio, Up:= S =

sacred adj.

Reserved for the exclusive use of something (an extension of the standard meaning). Often means that anyone may look at the sacred object, but clobbering it will screw whatever it is sacred to. The comment "Register 7 is sacred to the interrupt handler" appearing in a program would be interpreted by a hacker to mean that if any *other* part of the program changes the contents of register 7, dire consequences are likely to ensue.

Node:saga, Next:sagan, Previous:sacred, Up:= S =

saga n.

[WPI] A cuspy but bogus raving story about N random broken people.

Here is a classic example of the saga form, as told by Guy L. Steele:

> Jon L. White (login name JONL) and I (GLS) were office mates at MIT for many years. One April, we both flew from Boston to California for a week on research business, to consult face-to-face with some people at Stanford, particularly our mutual friend Richard P. Gabriel (RPG; see **gabriel**).
>
> RPG picked us up at the San Francisco airport and drove us back to Palo Alto (going **logical** south on route 101, parallel to **El Camino Bignum**). Palo Alto is adjacent to Stanford University and about 40 miles south of San Francisco. We ate at The Good Earth, a `health food' restaurant, very popular, the sort whose milkshakes all contain honey and protein powder. JONL ordered such a shake -- the waitress claimed the flavor of the day was "lalaberry". I still have no idea what that might be, but it became a running joke. It was the color of raspberry, and JONL said it tasted rather bitter. I ate a better tostada there than I have ever had in a Mexican restaurant.

After this we went to the local Uncle Gaylord's Old Fashioned Ice Cream Parlor. They make ice cream fresh daily, in a variety of intriguing flavors. It's a chain, and they have a slogan: "If you don't live near an Uncle Gaylord's -- MOVE!" Also, Uncle Gaylord (a real person) wages a constant battle to force big-name ice cream makers to print their ingredients on the package (like air and plastic and other non-natural garbage). JONL and I had first discovered Uncle Gaylord's the previous August, when we had flown to a computer-science conference in Berkeley, California, the first time either of us had been on the West Coast. When not in the conference sessions, we had spent our time wandering the length of Telegraph Avenue, which (like Harvard Square in Cambridge) was lined with picturesque street vendors and interesting little shops. On that street we discovered Uncle Gaylord's Berkeley store. The ice cream there was very good. During that August visit JONL went absolutely bananas (so to speak) over one particular flavor, ginger honey.

Therefore, after eating at The Good Earth -- indeed, after every lunch and dinner and before bed during our April visit -- a trip to Uncle Gaylord's (the one in Palo Alto) was mandatory. We had arrived on a Wednesday, and by Thursday evening we had been there at least four times. Each time, JONL would get ginger honey ice cream, and proclaim to all bystanders that "Ginger was the spice that drove the Europeans mad! That's why they sought a route to the East! They used it to preserve their otherwise off-taste meat." After the third or fourth repetition RPG and I were getting a little tired of this spiel, and began to paraphrase him: "Wow! Ginger! The spice that makes rotten meat taste good!" "Say! Why don't we find some dog that's been run over and sat in the sun for a week and put some *ginger* on it for dinner?!" "Right! With a lalaberry shake!" And so on. This failed to faze JONL; he took it in good humor, as long as we kept returning to Uncle Gaylord's. He loves ginger honey ice cream.

Now RPG and his then-wife KBT (Kathy Tracy) were putting us up (putting up with us?) in their home for our visit, so to thank them JONL and I took them out to a nice French restaurant of their choosing. I unadventurously chose the filet mignon, and KBT had *je ne sais quoi du jour*, but RPG and JONL had *lapin* (rabbit). (Waitress: "*Oui*, we have fresh rabbit, fresh today." RPG: "Well, JONL, I guess we won't need any *ginger*!")

We finished the meal late, about 11 P.M., which is 2 A.M Boston time, so JONL and I were rather droopy. But it wasn't yet midnight. Off to Uncle Gaylord's!

Now the French restaurant was in Redwood City, north of Palo Alto. In leaving Redwood City, we somehow got onto route 101 going north instead of south. JONL and I wouldn't have known the difference had RPG not mentioned it. We still knew very little of the local geography. I did figure out, however, that we were headed in the direction of Berkeley, and half-jokingly suggested that we continue north and go to Uncle Gaylord's in Berkeley.

RPG said "Fine!" and we drove on for a while and talked. I was drowsy, and JONL actually dropped off to sleep for 5 minutes. When he awoke, RPG said, "Gee, JONL, you must have slept all the way over the bridge!", referring to the one spanning San Francisco Bay. Just then we came to a sign that said "University Avenue". I mumbled something about working our way over to Telegraph Avenue; RPG said "Right!" and maneuvered some more. Eventually we pulled up in front of an Uncle Gaylord's.

Now, I hadn't really been paying attention because I was so sleepy, and I didn't really understand what was happening until RPG let me in on it a few moments later, but I was just alert enough to notice that we had somehow come to the Palo Alto Uncle Gaylord's after all.

JONL noticed the resemblance to the Palo Alto store, but hadn't caught on. (The place is lit with red and yellow lights at night, and looks much different from the way it does in daylight.) He said, "This isn't the Uncle Gaylord's I went to in Berkeley! It looked like a barn! But this place looks *just like* the one back in Palo Alto!"

RPG deadpanned, "Well, this is the one *I* always come to when I'm in Berkeley. They've got two in San Francisco, too. Remember, they're a chain."

JONL accepted this bit of wisdom. And he was not totally ignorant -- he knew perfectly well that University Avenue was in Berkeley, not far from Telegraph Avenue. What he didn't know was that there is a completely different University Avenue in Palo Alto.

JONL went up to the counter and asked for ginger honey. The guy at the counter asked whether JONL would like to taste it first, evidently their standard procedure with that flavor, as not too many people like it.

JONL said, "I'm sure I like it. Just give me a cone." The guy behind the counter insisted that JONL try just a taste first. "Some people think it tastes like soap." JONL insisted, "Look, I *love* ginger. I eat Chinese food. I eat raw ginger roots. I already went through this hassle with the guy back in Palo Alto. I *know* I like that flavor!"

At the words "back in Palo Alto" the guy behind the counter got a very strange look on his face, but said nothing. KBT caught his eye and winked. Through my stupor I still hadn't quite grasped what was going on, and thought RPG was rolling on the floor laughing and clutching his stomach just because JONL had launched into his spiel ("makes rotten meat a dish for princes") for the forty-third time. At this point, RPG clued me in fully.

RPG, KBT, and I retreated to a table, trying to stifle our chuckles. JONL remained at the counter, talking about ice cream with the guy b.t.c., comparing Uncle Gaylord's to other ice cream shops and generally having a good old time.

At length the g.b.t.c. said, "How's the ginger honey?" JONL said, "Fine! I wonder what exactly is in it?" Now Uncle Gaylord publishes all his recipes and even teaches classes on how to make his ice cream at home. So the g.b.t.c. got out the recipe, and he and JONL pored over it for a while. But the g.b.t.c. could contain his curiosity no longer, and asked again, "You really like that stuff, huh?" JONL said, "Yeah, I've been eating it constantly back in Palo Alto for the past two days. In fact, I think this batch is about as good as the cones I got back in Palo Alto!"

G.b.t.c. looked him straight in the eye and said, "You're *in* Palo Alto!"

JONL turned slowly around, and saw the three of us collapse in a fit of giggles. He clapped a hand to his forehead and exclaimed, "I've been hacked!"

[My spies on the West Coast inform me that there is a close relative of the raspberry found out there called an `ollalieberry' --ESR]

[Ironic footnote: it appears that the **meme** about ginger vs. rotting meat may be an urban legend. It's not borne out by an examination of medieval recipes or period purchase records for spices, and appears full-blown in the works of Samuel Pegge, a gourmand and notorious flake case who originated numerous food myths. --ESR]

Node:sagan, Next:SAIL, Previous:saga, Up:= S =

sagan /say'gn/ n.

[from Carl Sagan's TV series "Cosmos"; think "billions of billions"] A large quantity of anything. "There's a sagan different ways to tweak EMACS." "The U.S. Government spends sagans on bombs and welfare -- hard to say which is more destructive."

Node:SAIL, Next:salescritter, Previous:sagan, Up:= S =

SAIL /sayl/, not /S-A-I-L/ n.

1. The Stanford Artificial Intelligence Lab. An important site in the early development of LISP; with the MIT AI Lab, BBN, CMU, XEROX PARC, and the Unix community, one of the major wellsprings of technical innovation and hacker-culture traditions (see the **WAITS** entry for details). The SAIL machines were shut down in late May 1990, scant weeks after the MIT AI Lab's ITS cluster was officially decommissioned. 2. The Stanford Artificial Intelligence Language used at SAIL (sense 1). It was an Algol-60 derivative with a coroutining facility and some new data types intended for building search trees and association lists.

Node:salescritter, Next:salt, Previous:SAIL, Up:= S =

salescritter /sayls'kri`tr/ n.

Pejorative hackerism for a computer salesperson. Hackers tell the following joke:

```
Q. What's the difference between a used-car dealer and a
   computer salesman?
A. The used-car dealer knows he's lying.  [Some versions add:
   ...and probably knows how to drive.]
```

This reflects the widespread hacker belief that salescritters are self-selected for stupidity (after all, if they had brains and the inclination to use them, they'd be in programming). The terms `salesthing' and `salesdroid' are also common. Compare **marketroid**, **suit**, **droid**.

Node:salt, Next:salt mines, Previous:salescritter, Up:= S =

salt n.

A tiny bit of near-random data inserted where too much regularity would be undesirable; a data **frob** (sense 1). For example, the Unix crypt(3) man page mentions that "the salt string is used to perturb the DES algorithm in one of 4096 different ways."

Node:salt mines, Next:salt substrate, Previous:salt, Up:= S =

salt mines n.

Dense quarters housing large numbers of programmers working long hours on grungy projects, with some hope of seeing the end of the tunnel in N years. Noted for their absence of sunshine. Compare **playpen**, **sandbox**.

Node:salt substrate, Next:same-day service, Previous:salt mines, Up:= S =

salt substrate n.

[MIT] Collective noun used to refer to potato chips, pretzels, saltines, or any other form of snack food designed primarily as a carrier for sodium chloride. Also `sodium substrate'. From the technical term

`chip substrate', used to refer to the silicon on the top of which the active parts of integrated circuits are deposited.

Node:same-day service, Next:samizdat, Previous:salt substrate, Up:= S =

same-day service n.

Ironic term used to describe long response time, particularly with respect to **MS-DOS** system calls (which ought to require only a tiny fraction of a second to execute). Such response time is a major incentive for programmers to write programs that are not **well-behaved**. See also **PC-ism**.

Node:samizdat, Next:samurai, Previous:same-day service, Up:= S =

samizdat /sahm-iz-daht/ n.

[Russian, literally "self publishing"] The process of disseminating documentation via underground channels. Originally referred to underground duplication and distribution of banned books in the Soviet Union; now refers by obvious extension to any less-than-official promulgation of textual material, esp. rare, obsolete, or never-formally-published computer documentation. Samizdat is obviously much easier when one has access to high-bandwidth networks and high-quality laser printers. Note that samizdat is properly used only with respect to documents which contain needed information (see also **hacker ethic**) but which are for some reason otherwise unavailable, but *not* in the context of documents which are available through normal channels, for which unauthorized duplication would be unethical copyright violation. See **Lions Book** for a historical example.

Node:samurai, Next:sandbender, Previous:samizdat, Up:= S =

samurai n.

A hacker who hires out for legal cracking jobs, snooping for factions in corporate political fights, lawyers pursuing privacy-rights and First Amendment cases, and other parties with legitimate reasons to need an electronic locksmith. In 1991, mainstream media reported the existence of a loose-knit culture of samurai that meets electronically on BBS systems, mostly bright teenagers with personal micros; they have modeled themselves explicitly on the historical samurai of Japan and on the "net cowboys" of William Gibson's **cyberpunk** novels. Those interviewed claim to adhere to a rigid ethic of loyalty to their employers and to disdain the vandalism and theft practiced by criminal crackers as beneath them and contrary to the hacker ethic; some quote Miyamoto Musashi's "Book of Five Rings", a classic of historical samurai doctrine, in support of these principles. See also **sneaker**, **Stupids**, **social engineering**, **cracker**, **hacker ethic**, and **dark-side hacker**.

Node:sandbender, Next:sandbox, Previous:samurai, Up:= S =

sandbender n.

[IBM] A person involved with silicon lithography and the physical design of chips. Compare **ironmonger**, **polygon pusher**.

Node:sandbox, Next:sanity check, Previous:sandbender, Up:= S =

sandbox n.

1. (also `sandbox, the') Common term for the R&D department at many software and computer companies (where hackers in commercial environments are likely to be found). Half-derisive, but reflects the truth that research is a form of creative play. Compare **playpen**. 2. Syn. **link farm**. 3. A controlled environment within which potentially dangerous programs are run. Used esp. in reference to Java implementations.

Node:sanity check, Next:Saturday-night special, Previous:sandbox, Up:= S =

sanity check n.

[very common] 1. The act of checking a piece of code (or anything else, e.g., a Usenet posting) for completely stupid mistakes. Implies that the check is to make sure the author was sane when it was written; e.g., if a piece of scientific software relied on a particular formula and was giving unexpected results, one might first look at the nesting of parentheses or the coding of the formula, as a `sanity check', before looking at the more complex I/O or data structure manipulation routines, much less the algorithm itself. Compare **reality check**. 2. A run-time test, either validating input or ensuring that the program hasn't screwed up internally (producing an inconsistent value or state).

Node:Saturday-night special, Next:say, Previous:sanity check, Up:= S =

Saturday-night special n.

[from police slang for a cheap handgun] A **quick-and-dirty** program or feature kluged together during off hours, under a deadline, and in response to pressure from a **salescritter**. Such hacks are dangerously unreliable, but all too often sneak into a production release after insufficient review.

Node:say, Next:scag, Previous:Saturday-night special, Up:= S =

say vt.

1. To type to a terminal. "To list a directory verbosely, you have to say `ls -l`." Tends to imply a **newline**-terminated command (a `sentence'). 2. A computer may also be said to `say' things to you, even if it doesn't have a speech synthesizer, by displaying them on a terminal in response to your commands. Hackers find it odd that this usage confuses **mundane**s.

Node:scag, Next:scanno, Previous:say, Up:= S =

scag vt.

To destroy the data on a disk, either by corrupting the filesystem or by causing media damage. "That last power hit scagged the system disk." Compare **scrog**, **roach**.

Node:scanno, Next:scary devil monastery, Previous:scag, Up:= S =

scanno /skan'oh/ n.

An error in a document caused by a scanner glitch, analogous to a typo or **thinko**.

Node:scary devil monastery, Next:schroedinbug, Previous:scanno, Up:= S =

scary devil monastery n.

Anagram frequently used to refer to the newsgroup *alt.sysadmin.recovery*, which is populated with characters that rather justify the reference.

Node:schroedinbug, Next:science-fiction fandom, Previous:scary devil monastery, Up:= S =

schroedinbug /shroh'din-buhg/ n.

[MIT: from the Schroedinger's Cat thought-experiment in quantum physics] A design or implementation bug in a program that doesn't manifest until someone reading source or using the program in an unusual way notices that it never should have worked, at which point the program promptly stops working for everybody until fixed. Though (like **bit rot**) this sounds impossible, it happens; some programs have harbored latent schroedinbugs for years. Compare **heisenbug**, **Bohr bug**, **mandelbug**.

Node:science-fiction fandom, Next:scram switch, Previous:schroedinbug, Up:= S =

science-fiction fandom n.

Another voluntary subculture having a very heavy overlap with hackerdom; most hackers read SF and/or fantasy fiction avidly, and many go to `cons' (SF conventions) or are involved in fandom-connected activities such as the Society for Creative Anachronism. Some hacker jargon originated in SF fandom; see **defenestration**, **great-wall**, **cyberpunk**, **h**, **ha ha only serious**, **IMHO**, **mundane**, **neep-neep**, **Real Soon Now**. Additionally, the jargon terms **cowboy**, **cyberspace**, **de-rezz**, **go flatline**, **ice**, **phage**, **virus**, **wetware**, **wirehead**, and **worm** originated in SF stories.

Node:scram switch, Next:scratch, Previous:science-fiction fandom, Up:= S =

scram switch n.

[from the nuclear power industry] An emergency-power-off switch (see **Big Red Switch**), esp. one positioned to be easily hit by evacuating personnel. In general, this is *not* something you **frob** lightly; these often initiate expensive events (such as Halon dumps) and are installed in a **dinosaur pen** for use in case of electrical fire or in case some luckless **field servoid** should put 120 volts across himself while **Easter egging**. (See also **molly-guard**, **TMRC**.)

A correspondent reports a legend that "Scram" is an acronym for "Start Cutting Right Away, Man" (another less plausible variant of this legend refers to "Safety Control Rod Axe Man"; these are almost certainly both **backronym**s). The story goes that in the earliest nuclear power experiments the engineers recognized the possibility that the reactor wouldn't behave exactly as predicted by their mathematical models. Accordingly, they made sure that they had mechanisms in place that would rapidly drop the control rods back into the reactor. One mechanism took the form of `scram technicians'. These individuals stood next to the ropes or cables that raised and lowered the control rods. Equipped with axes or cable-cutters, these technicians stood ready for the (literal) `scram' command. If necessary, they would cut the cables, and gravity would expeditiously return the control rods to the reactor, thereby averting yet another kind of **core dump**.

Modern reactor control rods are held in place with claw-like devices, held closed by current. SCRAM switches are circuit breakers that immediately open the circuit to the rod arms, resulting in the rapid insertion and subsequent bottoming of the control rods.

Node:scratch, Next:scratch monkey, Previous:scram switch, Up:= S =

scratch

1. [from `scratchpad'] adj. Describes a data structure or recording medium attached to a machine for testing or temporary-use purposes; one that can be **scribble**d on without loss. Usually in the combining forms `scratch memory', `scratch register', `scratch disk', `scratch tape', `scratch volume'. See also **scratch monkey**. 2. [primarily IBM] vt. To delete (as in a file).

Node:scratch monkey, Next:scream and die, Previous:scratch, Up:= S =

scratch monkey n.

As in "Before testing or reconfiguring, always mount a **scratch monkey**", a proverb used to advise caution when dealing with irreplaceable data or devices. Used to refer to any scratch volume hooked to a computer during any risky operation as a replacement for some precious resource or data that might otherwise get trashed.

This term preserves the memory of Mabel, the Swimming Wonder Monkey, star of a biological research program at the University of Toronto. Mabel was not (so the legend goes) your ordinary monkey; the university had spent years teaching her how to swim, breathing through a regulator, in order to study the effects of different gas mixtures on her physiology. Mabel suffered an untimely demise one day when a **DEC** **field circus** engineer troubleshooting a crash on the program's VAX inadvertently interfered with some custom hardware that was wired to Mabel.

It is reported that, after calming down an understandably irate customer sufficiently to ascertain the facts of the matter, a DEC troubleshooter called up the **field circus** manager responsible and asked him sweetly, "Can you swim?"

Not all the consequences to humans were so amusing; the sysop of the machine in question was nearly thrown in jail at the behest of certain clueless **droid**s at the local `humane' society. The moral is clear: When in doubt, always mount a scratch monkey.

[The actual incident occured in 1979 or 1980. There is a version of this story, complete with reported dialogue between one of the project people and DEC field service, that has been circulating on Internet since 1986. It is hilarious and mythic, but gets some facts wrong. For example, it reports the machine as a PDP-11 and alleges that Mabel's demise occurred when DEC **PM**ed the machine. Earlier versions of this entry were based on that story; this one has been corrected from an interview with the hapless sysop. --ESR]

Node:scream and die, Next:screaming tty, Previous:scratch monkey, Up:= S =

scream and die v.

Syn. **cough and die**, but connotes that an error message was printed or displayed before the program crashed.

Node:screaming tty, Next:screen, Previous:scream and die, Up:= S =

screaming tty n.

[Unix] A terminal line which spews an infinite number of random characters at the operating system. This can happen if the terminal is either disconnected or connected to a powered-off terminal but still enabled for login; misconfiguration, misimplementation, or simple bad luck can start such a terminal screaming. A screaming tty or two can seriously degrade the performance of a vanilla Unix system; the arriving "characters" are treated as userid/password pairs and tested as such. The Unix password encryption algorithm is designed to be computationally intensive in order to foil brute-force crack attacks, so although none of the logins succeeds; the overhead of rejecting them all can be substantial.

Node:screen, Next:screen name, Previous:screaming tty, Up:= S =

screen n.

[Atari ST **demoscene**] One **demoeffect** or one screenful of them. Probably comes from old Sierra-style adventures or shoot-em-ups where one travels from one place to another one screenful at a time.

Node:screen name, Next:screw, Previous:screen, Up:= S =

screen name n.

A **handle** sense 1. This term has been common among users of IRC, MUDs, and commercial on-line services since the mid-1990s. Hackers recognize the term but don't generally use it.

Node:screw, Next:screwage, Previous:screen name, Up:= S =

screw n.

[MIT] A **lose**, usually in software. Especially used for user-visible misbehavior caused by a bug or misfeature. This use has become quite widespread outside MIT.

Node:screwage, Next:scribble, Previous:screw, Up:= S =

screwage /skroo'*j/ n.

Like **lossage** but connotes that the failure is due to a designed-in misfeature rather than a simple inadequacy or a mere bug.

Node:scribble, Next:script kiddies, Previous:screwage, Up:= S =

scribble n.

To modify a data structure in a random and unintentionally destructive way. "Bletch! Somebody's disk-compactor program went berserk and scribbled on the i-node table." "It was working fine until one of the allocation routines scribbled on low core." Synonymous with **trash**; compare **mung**, which conveys a bit more intention, and **mangle**, which is more violent and final.

Node:script kiddies, Next:scrog, Previous:scribble, Up:= S =

script kiddies pl.n.

The lowest form of **cracker**; script kiddies do mischief with scripts and programs written by others, often without understanding the **exploit**.

Node:scrog, Next:scrool, Previous:script kiddies, Up:= S =

scrog /skrog/ vt.

[Bell Labs] To damage, trash, or corrupt a data structure. "The list header got scrogged." Also reported as `skrog', and ascribed to the comic strip "The Wizard of Id". Compare **scag**; possibly the two are related. Equivalent to **scribble** or **mangle**.

Node:scrool, Next:scrozzle, Previous:scrog, Up:= S =

scrool /skrool/ n.

[from the pioneering Roundtable chat system in Houston ca. 1984; prob. originated as a typo for `scroll'] The log of old messages, available for later perusal or to help one get back in synch with the conversation. It was originally called the `scrool monster', because an early version of the roundtable software had a bug where it would dump all 8K of scrool on a user's terminal.

Node:scrozzle, Next:scruffies, Previous:scrool, Up:= S =

scrozzle /skroz'l/ vt.

Used when a self-modifying code segment runs incorrectly and corrupts the running program or vital data. "The damn compiler scrozzled itself again!"

Node:scruffies, Next:SCSI, Previous:scrozzle, Up:= S =

scruffies n.

See **neats vs. scruffies**.

Node:SCSI, Next:ScumOS, Previous:scruffies, Up:= S =

SCSI n.

[Small Computer System Interface] A bus-independent standard for system-level interfacing between a computer and intelligent devices. Typically annotated in literature with `sexy' (/sek'see/), `sissy' (/sis'ee/), and `scuzzy' (/skuh'zee/) as pronunciation guides -- the last being the overwhelmingly predominant form, much to the dismay of the designers and their marketing people. One can usually assume that a person who pronounces it /S-C-S-I/ is clueless.

Node:ScumOS, Next:search-and-destroy mode, Previous:SCSI, Up:= S =

ScumOS /skuhm'os/ or /skuhm'O-S/ n.

Unflattering hackerism for SunOS, the BSD Unix variant supported on Sun Microsystems's Unix workstations (see also **sun-stools**), and compare **AIDX**, **Macintrash**, **Nominal Semidestructor**, **HP-SUX**. Despite what this term might suggest, Sun was founded by hackers and still enjoys excellent relations with hackerdom; usage is more often in exasperation than outright loathing.

Node:search-and-destroy mode, Next:second-system effect, Previous:ScumOS, Up:= S =

search-and-destroy mode n.

Hackerism for a noninteractive search-and-replace facility in an editor, so called because an incautiously chosen match pattern can cause **infinite** damage.

Node:second-system effect, Next:secondary damage, Previous:search-and-destroy mode, Up:= S =

second-system effect n.

(sometimes, more euphoniously, `second-system syndrome') When one is designing the successor to a relatively small, elegant, and successful system, there is a tendency to become grandiose in one's success and design an **elephantine** feature-laden monstrosity. The term was first used by Fred Brooks in his classic "The Mythical Man-Month: Essays on Software Engineering" (Addison-Wesley, 1975; ISBN 0-201-00650-2). It described the jump from a set of nice, simple operating systems on the IBM 70xx series to OS/360 on the 360 series. A similar effect can also happen in an evolving system; see **Brooks's Law**, **creeping elegance**, **creeping featurism**. See also **Multics**, **OS/2**, **X**, **software bloat**.

This version of the jargon lexicon has been described (with altogether too much truth for comfort) as an example of second-system effect run amok on jargon-1....

Node:secondary damage, Next:security through obscurity, Previous:second-system effect, Up:= S =

secondary damage n.

When a fatal error occurs (esp. a **segfault**) the immediate cause may be that a pointer has been trashed due to a previous **fandango on core**. However, this fandango may have been due to an *earlier* fandango, so no amount of analysis will reveal (directly) how the damage occurred. "The data structure was clobbered, but it was secondary damage."

By extension, the corruption resulting from N cascaded fandangoes on core is `Nth-level damage'. There is at least one case on record in which 17 hours of **grovel**ling with `adb` actually dug up the underlying bug behind an instance of seventh-level damage! The hacker who accomplished this near-superhuman feat was presented with an award by his fellows.

Node:security through obscurity, Next:SED, Previous:secondary damage, Up:= S =

security through obscurity

(alt. `security by obscurity') A term applied by hackers to most OS vendors' favorite way of coping with security holes -- namely, ignoring them, documenting neither any known holes nor the underlying security algorithms, trusting that nobody will find out about them and that people who do find out about them won't exploit them. This "strategy" never works for long and occasionally sets the world up for debacles like the **RTM** worm of 1988 (see **Great Worm**), but once the brief moments of panic created by such events subside most vendors are all too willing to turn over and go back to sleep. After all, actually fixing the bugs would siphon off the resources needed to implement the next user-interface frill on marketing's wish list -- and besides, if they started fixing security bugs customers might begin to *expect* it and imagine that their warranties of merchantability gave them some sort of *right* to a system with fewer holes in it than a shotgunned Swiss cheese, and *then* where would we be?

Historical note: There are conflicting stories about the origin of this term. It has been claimed that it was first used in the Usenet newsgroup in *comp.sys.apollo* during a campaign to get HP/Apollo to fix security problems in its Unix-**clone** Aegis/DomainOS (they didn't change a thing). **ITS** fans, on the other hand, say it was coined years earlier in opposition to the incredibly paranoid **Multics** people down the hall, for whom security was everything. In the ITS culture it referred to (1) the fact that by the time a tourist figured out how to make trouble he'd generally gotten over the urge to make it, because he felt part of the community; and (2) (self-mockingly) the poor coverage of the documentation and obscurity of many commands. One instance of *deliberate* security through obscurity is recorded; the command to allow patching the running ITS system (escape escape control-R) echoed as $$^D. If you actually typed alt alt ^D, that set a flag that would prevent patching the system even if you later got it right.

Node:SED, Next:segfault, Previous:security through obscurity, Up:= S =

SED /S-E-D/ n.

[TMRC, from `Light-Emitting Diode'] Smoke-emitting diode. A **friode** that lost the war. See also **LER**.

Node:segfault, Next:seggie, Previous:SED, Up:= S =

segfault n.,vi.

Syn. **segment**, **segmentation fault**.

Node:seggie, Next:segment, Previous:segfault, Up:= S =

seggie /seg'ee/ n.

[Unix] Shorthand for **segmentation fault** reported from Britain.

Node:segment, Next:segmentation fault, Previous:seggie, Up:= S =

segment /seg'ment/ vi.

To experience a **segmentation fault**. Confusingly, this is often pronounced more like the noun `segment' than like mainstream v. segment; this is because it is actually a noun shorthand that has been verbed.

Node:segmentation fault, Next:segv, Previous:segment, Up:= S =

segmentation fault n.

[Unix] 1. [techspeak] An error in which a running program attempts to access memory not allocated to it and **core dump**s with a segmentation violation error. This is often caused by improper usage of pointers in the source code, dereferencing a null pointer, or (in C) inadvertently using a non-pointer variable as a pointer. The classic example is:

```
int i;
scanf ("%d", i);  /* should have used &i */
```

2. To lose a train of thought or a line of reasoning. Also uttered as an exclamation at the point of befuddlement.

Node:segv, Next:self-reference, Previous:segmentation fault, Up:= S =

segv /seg'vee/ n.,vi.

Yet another synonym for **segmentation fault** (actually, in this case, `segmentation violation').

Node:self-reference, Next:selvage, Previous:segv, Up:= S =

self-reference n.

See **self-reference**.

Node:selvage, Next:semi, Previous:self-reference, Up:= S =

selvage /sel'v*j/ n.

[from sewing and weaving] See **chad** (sense 1).

Node:semi, Next:semi-automated, Previous:selvage, Up:= S =

semi /se'mee/ or /se'mi:/

1. n. Abbreviation for `semicolon', when speaking. "Commands to **grind** are prefixed by semi-semi-star" means that the prefix is `;;*`, not 1/4 of a star. 2. A prefix used with words such as `immediately' as a qualifier. "When is the system coming up?" "Semi-immediately." (That is, maybe not for an hour.) "We did consider that possibility semi-seriously." See also **infinite**.

Node:semi-automated, Next:semi-infinite, Previous:semi, Up:= S =

semi-automated adj.

[US Geological Survey] A procedure that has yet to be completely automated; it still requires a smidge of clueful human interaction. Semi-automated programs usually come with written-out operator instructions

that are worth their weight in gold - without them, very nasty things can happen. At USGS semi-automated programs are often referred to as "semi-automated weapons".

Node:semi-infinite, Next:senior bit, Previous:semi-automated, Up:= S =

semi-infinite n.

See **infinite**.

Node:senior bit, Next:September that never ended, Previous:semi-infinite, Up:= S =

senior bit n.

[IBM; rare] Syn. **meta bit**.

Node:September that never ended, Next:server, Previous:senior bit, Up:= S =

September that never ended

All time since September 1993. One of the seasonal rhythms of the Usenet used to be the annual September influx of clueless newbies who, lacking any sense of **netiquette**, made a general nuisance of themselves. This coincided with people starting college, getting their first internet accounts, and plunging in without bothering to learn what was acceptable. These relatively small drafts of newbies could be assimilated within a few months. But in September 1993, AOL users became able to post to Usenet, nearly overwhelming the old-timers' capacity to acculturate them; to those who nostalgically recall the period before hand, this triggered an inexorable decline in the quality of discussions on newsgroups. See also **AOL!**.

Node:server, Next:SEX, Previous:September that never ended, Up:= S =

server n.

A kind of **daemon** that performs a service for the requester and which often runs on a computer other than the one on which the server runs. A particularly common term on the Internet, which is rife with `web servers', `name servers', `domain servers', `news servers', `finger servers', and the like.

Node:SEX, Next:sex changer, Previous:server, Up:= S =

SEX /seks/

[Sun Users' Group & elsewhere] n. 1. Software EXchange. A technique invented by the blue-green algae hundreds of millions of years ago to speed up their evolution, which had been terribly slow up until then. Today, SEX parties are popular among hackers and others (of course, these are no longer limited to exchanges of genetic software). In general, SEX parties are a **Good Thing**, but unprotected SEX can propagate a **virus**. See also **pubic directory**. 2. The rather Freudian mnemonic often used for Sign EXtend, a machine instruction found in the PDP-11 and many other architectures. The RCA 1802 chip used in the early Elf and SuperElf personal computers had a `SEt X register' SEX instruction, but this seems to have had little folkloric impact. The Data General instruction set also had `SEX`.

DEC's engineers nearly got a PDP-11 assembler that used the `SEX` mnemonic out the door at one time, but (for once) marketing wasn't asleep and forced a change. That wasn't the last time this happened, either. The author of "The Intel 8086 Primer", who was one of the original designers of the 8086, noted that there was originally a `SEX` instruction on that processor, too. He says that Intel management got cold feet and decreed that it be changed, and thus the instruction was renamed `CBW` and `CWD` (depending on what was being extended). Amusingly, the Intel 8048 (the microcontroller used in IBM PC keyboards) is also missing straight `SEX` but has logical-or and logical-and instructions `ORL` and `ANL`.

The Motorola 6809, used in the Radio Shack Color Computer and in U.K.'s `Dragon 32' personal computer, actually had an official `SEX` instruction; the 6502 in the Apple II with which it competed did not. British hackers thought this made perfect mythic sense; after all, it was commonly observed, you could (on some theoretical level) have sex with a dragon, but you can't have sex with an apple.

Node:sex changer, Next:shambolic link, Previous:SEX, Up:= S =

sex changer n.

Syn. **gender mender**.

Node:shambolic link, Next:shar file, Previous:sex changer, Up:= S =

shambolic link /sham-bol'ik link/ n.

A Unix symbolic link, particularly when it confuses you, points to nothing at all, or results in your ending up in some completely unexpected part of the filesystem....

Node:shar file, Next:sharchive, Previous:shambolic link, Up:= S =

shar file /shar' fi:l/ n.

Syn. **sharchive**.

Node:sharchive, Next:Share and enjoy!, Previous:shar file, Up:= S =

sharchive /shar'ki:v/ n.

[Unix and Usenet; from /bin/sh archive] A **flatten**ed representation of a set of one or more files, with the unique property that it can be unflattened (the original files restored) by feeding it through a standard Unix shell; thus, a sharchive can be distributed to anyone running Unix, and no special unpacking software is required. Sharchives are also intriguing in that they are typically created by shell scripts; the script that produces sharchives is thus a script which produces self-unpacking scripts, which may themselves contain scripts. (The downsides of sharchives are that they are an ideal venue for **Trojan horse** attacks and that, for recipients not running Unix, no simple un-sharchiving program is possible; sharchives can and do make use of arbitrarily-powerful shell features.) Sharchives are also commonly referred to as `shar files' after the name of the most common program for generating them.

Node:Share and enjoy!, Next:shareware, Previous:sharchive, Up:= S =

Share and enjoy! imp.

1. Commonly found at the end of software release announcements and **README file**s, this phrase indicates allegiance to the hacker ethic of free information sharing (see **hacker ethic**, sense 1). 2. The motto of the complaints division of Sirius Cybernetics Corporation (the ultimate gaggle of incompetent **suit**s) in Douglas Adams's "Hitch Hiker's Guide to the Galaxy". The irony of using this as a cultural recognition signal appeals to hackers.

Node:shareware, Next:sharing violation, Previous:Share and enjoy!, Up:= S =

shareware /sheir'weir/ n.

A kind of **freeware** (sense 1) for which the author requests some payment, usually in the accompanying documentation files or in an announcement made by the software itself. Such payment may or may not buy additional support or functionality. See also **careware**, **charityware**, **crippleware**, **FRS**, **guiltware**, **postcardware**, and **-ware**; compare **payware**.

Node:sharing violation, Next:shebang, Previous:shareware, Up:= S =

sharing violation

[From a file error common to several **OS**s] A response to receiving information, typically of an excessively personal nature, that you were probably happier not knowing. "You know those little noises that Pat makes in bed..?" "Whoa! Sharing violation!" In contrast to the original file error, which indicated that you were *not* being given data that you *did* want.

Node:shebang, Next:shelfware, Previous:sharing violation, Up:= S =

shebang /sh*-bang/ n.

The character sequence "#!" that frequently begins executable shell scripts under Unix. Probably derived from "shell bang" under the influence of American slang "the whole shebang" (everything, the works).

Node:shelfware, Next:shell, Previous:shebang, Up:= S =

shelfware /shelf'weir/ n.

Software purchased on a whim (by an individual user) or in accordance with policy (by a corporation or government agency), but not actually required for any particular use. Therefore, it often ends up on some shelf.

Node:shell, Next:shell out, Previous:shelfware, Up:= S =

shell [orig. **Multics** n.

techspeak, widely propagated via Unix] 1. [techspeak] The command interpreter used to pass commands to an operating system; so called because it is the part of the operating system that interfaces with the outside world. 2. More generally, any interface program that mediates access to a special resource or

server for convenience, efficiency, or security reasons; for this meaning, the usage is usually `a shell around' whatever. This sort of program is also called a `wrapper'. 3. A skeleton program, created by hand or by another program (like, say, a parser generator), which provides the necessary **incantation**s to set up some task and the control flow to drive it (the term **driver** is sometimes used synonymously). The user is meant to fill in whatever code is needed to get real work done. This usage is common in the AI and Microsoft Windows worlds, and confuses Unix hackers.

Historical note: Apparently, the original Multics shell (sense 1) was so called because it was a shell (sense 3); it ran user programs not by starting up separate processes, but by dynamically linking the programs into its own code, calling them as subroutines, and then dynamically de-linking them on return. The VMS command interpreter still does something very like this.

Node:shell out, Next:shift left (or right) logical, Previous:shell, Up:= S =

shell out vi.

[Unix] To **spawn** an interactive subshell from within a program (e.g., a mailer or editor). "Bang foo runs foo in a subshell, while bang alone shells out."

Node:shift left (or right) logical, Next:shim, Previous:shell out, Up:= S =

shift left (or right) logical

[from any of various machines' instruction sets] 1. vi. To move oneself to the left (right). To move out of the way. 2. imper. "Get out of that (my) seat! You can shift to that empty one to the left (right)." Often used without the `logical', or as `left shift' instead of `shift left'. Sometimes heard as LSH /lish/, from the **PDP-10** instruction set. See **Programmer's Cheer**.

Node:shim, Next:shitogram, Previous:shift left (or right) logical, Up:= S =

shim n.

A small piece of data inserted in order to achieve a desired memory alignment or other addressing property. For example, the PDP-11 Unix linker, in split I&D (instructions and data) mode, inserts a two-byte shim at location 0 in data space so that no data object will have an address of 0 (and be confused with the C null pointer). See also **loose bytes**.

Node:shitogram, Next:short card, Previous:shim, Up:= S =

shitogram /shit'oh-gram/ n.

A *really* nasty piece of email. Compare **nastygram**, **flame**.

Node:short card, Next:shotgun debugging, Previous:shitogram, Up:= S =

short card n.

A half-length IBM XT expansion card or adapter that will fit in one of the two short slots located towards

the right rear of a standard chassis (tucked behind the floppy disk drives). See also **tall card**.

Node:shotgun debugging, Next:shovelware, Previous:short card, Up:= S =

shotgun debugging n.

The software equivalent of **Easter egging**; the making of relatively undirected changes to software in the hope that a bug will be perturbed out of existence. This almost never works, and usually introduces more bugs.

Node:shovelware, Next:showstopper, Previous:shotgun debugging, Up:= S =

shovelware /shuh'v*l-weir`/ n.

1. Extra software dumped onto a CD-ROM or tape to fill up the remaining space on the medium after the software distribution it's intended to carry, but not integrated with the distribution. 2. A slipshod compilation of software dumped onto a CD-ROM without much care for organization or even usability.

Node:showstopper, Next:shriek, Previous:shovelware, Up:= S =

showstopper n.

A hardware or (especially) software bug that makes an implementation effectively unusable; one that absolutely has to be fixed before development can go on. Opposite in connotation from its original theatrical use, which refers to something stunningly *good*.

Node:shriek, Next:Shub-Internet, Previous:showstopper, Up:= S =

shriek n.

See **excl**. Occasional CMU usage, also in common use among APL fans and mathematicians, especially category theorists.

Node:Shub-Internet, Next:sidecar, Previous:shriek, Up:= S =

Shub-Internet /shuhb' in't*r-net/ n.

[MUD: from H. P. Lovecraft's evil fictional deity Shub-Niggurath, the Black Goat with a Thousand Young] The harsh personification of the Internet: Beast of a Thousand Processes, Eater of Characters, Avatar of Line Noise, and Imp of Call Waiting; the hideous multi-tendriled entity formed of all the manifold connections of the net. A sect of MUDders worships Shub-Internet, sacrificing objects and praying for good connections. To no avail -- its purpose is malign and evil, and is the cause of all network slowdown. Often heard as in "Freela casts a tac nuke at Shub-Internet for slowing her down." (A forged response often follows along the lines of: "Shub-Internet gulps down the tac nuke and burps happily.") Also cursed by users of the Web, **FTP** and **TELNET** when the system slows down. The dread name of Shub-Internet is seldom spoken aloud, as it is said that repeating it three times will cause the being to wake, deep within its lair beneath the Pentagon. Compare **Random Number God**.

[January 1996: It develops that one of the computer administrators in the basement of the Pentagon read this entry and fell over laughing. As a result, you too can now poke Shub-Internet by **ping**ing *shub-internet.ims.disa.mil*. See also **kremvax**. - ESR]

[April 1999: shub-internet.ims.disa.mil is no more, alas. But Shub-Internet lives o^$#$*^ - ESR]

Node:sidecar, Next:SIG, Previous:Shub-Internet, Up:= S =

sidecar n.

1. Syn. **slap on the side**. Esp. used of add-ons for the late and unlamented IBM PCjr. 2. The IBM PC compatibility box that could be bolted onto the side of an Amiga. Designed and produced by Commodore, it broke all of the company's own design rules. If it worked with any other peripherals, it was by **magic**. 3. More generally, any of various devices designed to be connected to the expansion slot on the left side of the Amiga 500 (and later, 600 & 1200), which included a hard drive controller, a hard drive, and additional memory.

Node:SIG, Next:sig block, Previous:sidecar, Up:= S =

SIG /sig/ n.

(also common as a prefix in combining forms) A Special Interest Group, in one of several technical areas, sponsored by the Association for Computing Machinery; well-known ones include SIGPLAN (the Special Interest Group on Programming Languages), SIGARCH (the Special Interest Group for Computer Architecture) and SIGGRAPH (the Special Interest Group for Computer Graphics). Hackers, not surprisingly, like to overextend this naming convention to less formal associations like SIGBEER (at ACM conferences) and SIGFOOD (at University of Illinois).

Node:sig block, Next:sig quote, Previous:SIG, Up:= S =

sig block /sig blok/ n.

[Unix; often written `.sig' there] Short for `signature', used specifically to refer to the electronic signature block that most Unix mail- and news-posting software will **automagically** append to outgoing mail and news. The composition of one's sig can be quite an art form, including an ASCII logo or one's choice of witty sayings (see **sig quote**, **fool file**); but many consider large sigs a waste of **bandwidth**, and it has been observed that the size of one's sig block is usually inversely proportional to one's longevity and level of prestige on the net. See also **doubled sig**.

Node:sig quote, Next:sig virus, Previous:sig block, Up:= S =

sig quote /sig kwoht/ n.

[Usenet] A maxim, quote, proverb, joke, or slogan embedded in one's **sig block** and intended to convey something of one's philosophical stance, pet peeves, or sense of humor. "Calm down, it's only ones and zeroes."

Node:sig virus, Next:signal-to-noise ratio, Previous:sig quote, Up:= S =

sig virus n.

A parasitic **meme** embedded in a **sig block**. There was a **meme plague** or fad for these on Usenet in late 1991. Most were equivalents of "I am a .sig virus. Please reproduce me in your .sig block.". Of course, the .sig virus's memetic hook is the giggle value of going along with the gag; this, however, was a self-limiting phenomenon as more and more people picked up on the idea. There were creative variants on it; some people stuck `sig virus antibody' texts in their sigs, and there was at least one instance of a sig virus eater.

Node:signal-to-noise ratio, Next:silicon, Previous:sig virus, Up:= S =

signal-to-noise ratio [from analog electronics] n.

Used by hackers in a generalization of its technical meaning. `Signal' refers to useful information conveyed by some communications medium, and `noise' to anything else on that medium. Hence a low ratio implies that it is not worth paying attention to the medium in question. Figures for such metaphorical ratios are never given. The term is most often applied to **Usenet** newsgroups during **flame war**s. Compare **bandwidth**. See also **coefficient of X**, **lost in the noise**.

Node:silicon, Next:silly walk, Previous:signal-to-noise ratio, Up:= S =

silicon n.

Hardware, esp. ICs or microprocessor-based computer systems (compare **iron**). Contrasted with software. See also **sandbender**.

Node:silly walk, Next:silo, Previous:silicon, Up:= S =

silly walk vi.

[from Monty Python's Flying Circus] 1. A ridiculous procedure required to accomplish a task. Like **grovel**, but more **random** and humorous. "I had to silly-walk through half the /usr directories to find the maps file." 2. Syn. **fandango on core**.

Node:silo, Next:Silver Book, Previous:silly walk, Up:= S =

silo n.

The FIFO input-character buffer in an RS-232 line card. So called from **DEC** terminology used on DH and DZ line cards for the VAX and PDP-11, presumably because it was a storage space for fungible stuff that went in at the top and came out at the bottom.

Node:Silver Book, Next:since time T equals minus infinity, Previous:silo, Up:= S =

Silver Book n.

Jensen and Wirth's infamous "Pascal User Manual and Report", so called because of the silver cover of the widely distributed Springer-Verlag second edition of 1978 (ISBN 0-387-90144-2). See **book titles**,

Pascal.

Node:since time T equals minus infinity, Next:sitename, Previous:Silver Book, Up:= S =

since time T equals minus infinity adv.

A long time ago; for as long as anyone can remember; at the time that some particular frob was first designed. Usually the word `time' is omitted. See also **time T**; contrast **epoch**.

Node:sitename, Next:skrog, Previous:since time T equals minus infinity, Up:= S =

sitename /si:t'naym/ n.

[Unix/Internet] The unique electronic name of a computer system, used to identify it in UUCP mail, Usenet, or other forms of electronic information interchange. The folklore interest of sitenames stems from the creativity and humor they often display. Interpreting a sitename is not unlike interpreting a vanity license plate; one has to mentally unpack it, allowing for mono-case and length restrictions and the lack of whitespace. Hacker tradition deprecates dull, institutional-sounding names in favor of punchy, humorous, and clever coinages (except that it is considered appropriate for the official public gateway machine of an organization to bear the organization's name or acronym). Mythological references, cartoon characters, animal names, and allusions to SF or fantasy literature are probably the most popular sources for sitenames (in roughly descending order). The obligatory comment when discussing these is Harris's Lament: "All the good ones are taken!" See also **network address**.

Node:skrog, Next:skulker, Previous:sitename, Up:= S =

skrog v.

Syn. **scrog**.

Node:skulker, Next:slab, Previous:skrog, Up:= S =

skulker n.

Syn. **prowler**.

Node:slab, Next:slack, Previous:skulker, Up:= S =

slab [Apple]

1. n. A continuous horizontal line of pixels, all with the same color. 2. vi. To paint a slab on an output device. Apple's QuickDraw, like most other professional-level graphics systems, renders polygons and lines not with Bresenham's algorithm, but by calculating `slab points' for each scan line on the screen in succession, and then slabbing in the actual image pixels.

Node:slack, Next:slap on the side, Previous:slab, Up:= S =

slack n.

1. Space allocated to a disk file but not actually used to store useful information. The techspeak equivalent is `internal fragmentation'. Antonym: **hole**. 2. In the theology of the **Church of the SubGenius**, a mystical substance or quality that is the prerequisite of all human happiness.

Since Unix files are stored compactly, except for the unavoidable wastage in the last block or fragment, it might be said that "Unix has no slack". See **ha ha only serious**.

Node:slap on the side, Next:slash, Previous:slack, Up:= S =

slap on the side n.

(also called a **sidecar**, or abbreviated `SOTS'.) A type of external expansion hardware marketed by computer manufacturers (e.g., Commodore for the Amiga 500/1000 series and IBM for the hideous failure called `PCjr'). Various SOTS boxes provided necessities such as memory, hard drive controllers, and conventional expansion slots.

Node:slash, Next:slashdot effect, Previous:slap on the side, Up:= S =

slash n.

Common name for the slant (`/', ASCII 0101111) character. See **ASCII** for other synonyms.

Node:slashdot effect, Next:sleep, Previous:slash, Up:= S =

slashdot effect n.

1. Also spelled "/. effect"; what is said to have happened when a website being virtually unreachable because too many people are hitting it after the site was mentioned in an interesting article on the popular Slashdot news service. The term is quite widely used by /. readers, including variants like "That site has been slashdotted again!" 2. In a perhaps inevitable generation, the term is being used to describe any similar effect from being listed on a popular site.

Node:sleep, Next:slim, Previous:slashdot effect, Up:= S =

sleep vi.

1. [techspeak] To relinquish a claim (of a process on a multitasking system) for service; to indicate to the scheduler that a process may be deactivated until some given event occurs or a specified time delay elapses. 2. In jargon, used very similarly to v. **block**; also in `sleep on', syn. with `block on'. Often used to indicate that the speaker has relinquished a demand for resources until some (possibly unspecified) external event: "They can't get the fix I've been asking for into the next release, so I'm going to sleep on it until the release, then start hassling them again."

Node:slim, Next:slop, Previous:sleep, Up:= S =

slim n.

A small, derivative change (e.g., to code).

Node:slop, Next:slopsucker, Previous:slim, Up:= S =

slop n.

1. A one-sided **fudge factor**, that is, an allowance for error but in only one of two directions. For example, if you need a piece of wire 10 feet long and have to guess when you cut it, you make very sure to cut it too long, by a large amount if necessary, rather than too short by even a little bit, because you can always cut off the slop but you can't paste it back on again. When discrete quantities are involved, slop is often introduced to avoid the possibility of being on the losing side of a **fencepost error**. 2. The percentage of `extra' code generated by a compiler over the size of equivalent assembler code produced by **hand-hacking**; i.e., the space (or maybe time) you lose because you didn't do it yourself. This number is often used as a measure of the goodness of a compiler; slop below 5% is very good, and 10% is usually acceptable. With modern compiler technology, esp. on RISC machines, the compiler's slop may actually be *negative*; that is, humans may be unable to generate code as good. This is one of the reasons assembler programming is no longer common.

Node:slopsucker, Next:Slowlaris, Previous:slop, Up:= S =

slopsucker /slop'suhk-r/ n.

A lowest-priority task that waits around until everything else has `had its fill' of machine resources. Only when the machine would otherwise be idle is the task allowed to `suck up the slop'. Also called a `hungry puppy' or `bottom feeder'. One common variety of slopsucker hunts for large prime numbers. Compare **background**.

Node:Slowlaris, Next:slurp, Previous:slopsucker, Up:= S =

Slowlaris /slo'-lahr-is/ n.

[Usenet; poss. from the variety of sloth called a "slow loris". The variant `Slowlartus' is also common, related to **LART**] Common hackish term for Solaris, Sun's System VR4 version of UNIX that came out of the standardization wars of the early 1990s. So named because especially on older hardware, responsiveness was much less crisp than under the preceding SunOS. Early releases of Solaris (that is, Solaris 2, as some **marketroid**s at Sun retroactively rechristened SunOS as Solaris 1) were quite buggy, and Sun was forced by customer demand to support SunOS for quite some time. Newer versions are acknowledged to be among the best commercial UNIX variants in 1998, but still lose single-processor benchmarks to Sparc **Linux**. Compare **AIDX**, **HP-SUX**, **Nominal Semidestructor**, **Telerat**, **sun-stools**.

Node:slurp, Next:smart, Previous:Slowlaris, Up:= S =

slurp vt.

To read a large data file entirely into **core** before working on it. This may be contrasted with the strategy of reading a small piece at a time, processing it, and then reading the next piece. "This program slurps in a 1K-by-1K matrix and does an FFT." See also **sponge**.

Node:smart, Next:smart terminal, Previous:slurp, Up:= S =

smart adj.

Said of a program that does the **Right Thing** in a wide variety of complicated circumstances. There is a difference between calling a program smart and calling it intelligent; in particular, there do not exist any intelligent programs (yet -- see **AI-complete**). Compare **robust** (smart programs can be **brittle**).

Node:smart terminal, Next:smash case, Previous:smart, Up:= S =

smart terminal n.

1. A terminal that has enough computing capability to render graphics or to offload some kind of front-end processing from the computer it talks to. The development of workstations and personal computers has made this term and the product it describes semi-obsolescent, but one may still hear variants of the phrase `act like a smart terminal' used to describe the behavior of workstations or PCs with respect to programs that execute almost entirely out of a remote **server**'s storage, using local devices as displays. 2. obs. Any terminal with an addressable cursor; the opposite of a **glass tty**. Today, a terminal with merely an addressable cursor, but with none of the more-powerful features mentioned in sense 1, is called a **dumb terminal**.

There is a classic quote from Rob Pike (inventor of the **blit** terminal): "A smart terminal is not a smart*ass* terminal, but rather a terminal you can educate." This illustrates a common design problem: The attempt to make peripherals (or anything else) intelligent sometimes results in finicky, rigid `special features' that become just so much dead weight if you try to use the device in any way the designer didn't anticipate. Flexibility and programmability, on the other hand, are *really* smart. Compare **hook**.

Node:smash case, Next:smash the stack, Previous:smart terminal, Up:= S =

smash case vi.

To lose or obliterate the uppercase/lowercase distinction in text input. "MS-DOS will automatically smash case in the names of all the files you create." Compare **fold case**.

Node:smash the stack, Next:smiley, Previous:smash case, Up:= S =

smash the stack n.

[C programming] To corrupt the execution stack by writing past the end of a local array or other data structure. Code that smashes the stack can cause a return from the routine to jump to a random address, resulting in some of the most insidious data-dependent bugs known to mankind. Variants include `trash' the stack, **scribble** the stack, **mangle** the stack; the term ****mung** the stack is not used, as this is never done intentionally. See **spam**; see also **aliasing bug**, **fandango on core**, **memory leak**, **memory smash**, **precedence lossage**, **overrun screw**.

Node:smiley, Next:smoke, Previous:smash the stack, Up:= S =

smiley n.

See **emoticon**.

Node:smoke, Next:smoke and mirrors, Previous:smiley, Up:= S =

smoke vi.

1. To **crash** or blow up, usually spectacularly. "The new version smoked, just like the last one." Used for both hardware (where it often describes an actual physical event), and software (where it's merely colorful). 2. [from automotive slang] To be conspicuously fast. "That processor really smokes." Compare **magic smoke**.

Node:smoke and mirrors, Next:smoke test, Previous:smoke, Up:= S =

smoke and mirrors n.

Marketing deceptions. The term is mainstream in this general sense. Among hackers it's strongly associated with bogus demos and crocked **benchmark**s (see also **MIPS**, **machoflops**). "They claim their new box cranks 50 MIPS for under $5000, but didn't specify the instruction mix -- sounds like smoke and mirrors to me." The phrase, popularized by newspaper columnist Jimmy Breslin c.1975, has been said to derive from carnie slang for magic acts and `freak show' displays that depend on `trompe l'oeil' effects, but also calls to mind the fierce Aztec god Tezcatlipoca (lit. "Smoking Mirror") for whom the hearts of huge numbers of human sacrificial victims were regularly cut out. Upon hearing about a rigged demo or yet another round of fantasy-based marketing promises, hackers often feel analogously disheartened. See also **stealth manager**.

Node:smoke test, Next:smoking clover, Previous:smoke and mirrors, Up:= S =

smoke test n.

1. A rudimentary form of testing applied to electronic equipment following repair or reconfiguration, in which power is applied and the tester checks for sparks, smoke, or other dramatic signs of fundamental failure. See **magic smoke**. 2. By extension, the first run of a piece of software after construction or a critical change. See and compare **reality check**.

There is an interesting semi-parallel to this term among typographers and printers: When new typefaces are being punch-cut by hand, a `smoke test' (hold the letter in candle smoke, then press it onto paper) is used to check out new dies.

Node:smoking clover, Next:SMOP, Previous:smoke test, Up:= S =

smoking clover n.

[ITS] A **display hack** originally due to Bill Gosper. Many convergent lines are drawn on a color monitor in such a way that every pixel struck has its color incremented. The lines all have one endpoint in the middle of the screen; the other endpoints are spaced one pixel apart around the perimeter of a large square. The color map is then repeatedly rotated. This results in a striking, rainbow-hued, shimmering four-leaf clover. Gosper joked about keeping it hidden from the FDA (the U.S.'s Food and Drug Administration) lest its hallucinogenic properties cause it to be banned.

Node:SMOP, Next:smurf, Previous:smoking clover, Up:= S =

SMOP /S-M-O-P/ n.

[Simple (or Small) Matter of Programming] 1. A piece of code, not yet written, whose anticipated length is significantly greater than its complexity. Used to refer to a program that could obviously be written, but is not worth the trouble. Also used ironically to imply that a difficult problem can be easily solved because a program can be written to do it; the irony is that it is very clear that writing such a program will be a great deal of work. "It's easy to enhance a FORTRAN compiler to compile COBOL as well; it's just an SMOP." 2. Often used ironically by the intended victim when a suggestion for a program is made which seems easy to the suggester, but is obviously (to the victim) a lot of work.

Node:smurf, Next:SNAFU principle, Previous:SMOP, Up:= S =

smurf /smerf/ n.

[from the *soc.motss* newsgroup on Usenet, after some obnoxiously gooey cartoon characters] A newsgroup regular with a habitual style that is irreverent, silly, and *cute*. Like many other hackish terms for people, this one may be praise or insult depending on who uses it. In general, being referred to as a smurf is probably not going to make your day unless you've previously adopted the label yourself in a spirit of irony. Compare **old fart**.

Node:SNAFU principle, Next:snail, Previous:smurf, Up:= S =

SNAFU principle /sna'foo prin'si-pl/ n.

[from a WWII Army acronym for `Situation Normal, All Fucked Up'] "True communication is possible only between equals, because inferiors are more consistently rewarded for telling their superiors pleasant lies than for telling the truth." -- a central tenet of **Discordianism**, often invoked by hackers to explain why authoritarian hierarchies screw up so reliably and systematically. The effect of the SNAFU principle is a progressive disconnection of decision-makers from reality. This lightly adapted version of a fable dating back to the early 1960s illustrates the phenomenon perfectly:

> In the beginning was the plan,
> and then the specification;
> And the plan was without form,
> and the specification was void.
>
> And darkness
> was on the faces of the implementors thereof;
> And they spake unto their leader,
> saying:
> "It is a crock of shit,
> and smells as of a sewer."
>
> And the leader took pity on them,
> and spoke to the project leader:
> "It is a crock of excrement,
> and none may abide the odor thereof."
>
> And the project leader
> spake unto his section head, saying:
> "It is a container of excrement,
> and it is very strong, such that none may abide it."

The section head then hurried to his department manager,
and informed him thus:
"It is a vessel of fertilizer,
and none may abide its strength."

The department manager carried these words
to his general manager,
and spoke unto him
saying:
"It containeth that which aideth the growth of plants,
and it is very strong."

And so it was that the general manager rejoiced
and delivered the good news unto the Vice President.
"It promoteth growth,
and it is very powerful."

The Vice President rushed to the President's side,
and joyously exclaimed:
"This powerful new software product
will promote the growth of the company!"

And the President looked upon the product,
and saw that it was very good.

After the subsequent and inevitable disaster, the **suit**s protect themselves by saying "I was misinformed!", and the implementors are demoted or fired. Compare **Conway's Law**.

Node:snail, Next:snail-mail, Previous:SNAFU principle, Up:= S =

snail vt.

To **snail-mail** something. "Snail me a copy of those graphics, will you?"

Node:snail-mail, Next:snap, Previous:snail, Up:= S =

snail-mail n.

Paper mail, as opposed to electronic. Sometimes written as the single word `SnailMail'. One's postal address is, correspondingly, a `snail address'. Derives from earlier coinage `USnail' (from `U.S. Mail'), for which there have even been parody posters and stamps made. Also (less commonly) called `P-mail', from `paper mail' or `physical mail'. Oppose **email**.

Node:snap, Next:snarf, Previous:snail-mail, Up:= S =

snap v.

To replace a pointer to a pointer with a direct pointer; to replace an old address with the forwarding address found there. If you telephone the main number for an institution and ask for a particular person by name, the operator may tell you that person's extension before connecting you, in the hopes that you will `snap your pointer' and dial direct next time. The underlying metaphor may be that of a rubber band

stretched through a number of intermediate points; if you remove all the thumbtacks in the middle, it snaps into a straight line from first to last. See **chase pointers**.

Often, the behavior of a **trampoline** is to perform an error check once and then snap the pointer that invoked it so as henceforth to bypass the trampoline (and its one-shot error check). In this context one also speaks of `snapping links'. For example, in a LISP implementation, a function interface trampoline might check to make sure that the caller is passing the correct number of arguments; if it is, and if the caller and the callee are both compiled, then snapping the link allows that particular path to use a direct procedure-call instruction with no further overhead.

Node:snarf, Next:snarf & barf, Previous:snap, Up:= S =

snarf /snarf/ vt.

1. To grab, esp. to grab a large document or file for the purpose of using it with or without the author's permission. See also **BLT**. 2. [in the Unix community] To fetch a file or set of files across a network. See also **blast**. This term was mainstream in the late 1960s, meaning `to eat piggishly'. It may still have this connotation in context. "He's in the snarfing phase of hacking -- **FTP**ing megs of stuff a day." 3. To acquire, with little concern for legal forms or *politesse* (but not quite by stealing). "They were giving away samples, so I snarfed a bunch of them." 4. Syn. for **slurp**. "This program starts by snarfing the entire database into core, then...." 5. [GEnie] To spray food or **programming fluid**s due to laughing at the wrong moment. "I was drinking coffee, and when I read your post I snarfed all over my desk." "If I keep reading this topic, I think I'll have to snarf-proof my computer with a keyboard **condom**." [This sense appears to be widespread among mundane teenagers --ESR]

Node:snarf & barf, Next:snarf down, Previous:snarf, Up:= S =

snarf & barf /snarf'n-barf`/ n.

Under a **WIMP environment**, the act of grabbing a region of text and then stuffing the contents of that region into another region (or the same one) to avoid retyping a command line. In the late 1960s, this was a mainstream expression for an `eat now, regret it later' cheap-restaurant expedition.

Node:snarf down, Next:snark, Previous:snarf & barf, Up:= S =

snarf down v.

To **snarf**, with the connotation of absorbing, processing, or understanding. "I'll snarf down the latest version of the **nethack** user's guide -- it's been a while since I played last and I don't know what's changed recently."

Node:snark, Next:sneaker, Previous:snarf down, Up:= S =

snark n.

[Lewis Carroll, via the Michigan Terminal System] 1. A system failure. When a user's process bombed, the operator would get the message "Help, Help, Snark in MTS!" 2. More generally, any kind of unexplained or threatening event on a computer (especially if it might be a boojum). Often used to refer to an event or a log file entry that might indicate an attempted security violation. See **snivitz**. 3. UUCP name of *snark.thyrsus.com*, home site of the Jargon File versions from 2.*.* on (i.e., this lexicon).

Node:sneaker, Next:sneakernet, Previous:snark, Up:= S =

sneaker n.

An individual hired to break into places in order to test their security; analogous to **tiger team**. Compare **samurai**.

Node:sneakernet, Next:sniff, Previous:sneaker, Up:= S =

sneakernet /snee'ker-net/ n.

Term used (generally with ironic intent) for transfer of electronic information by physically carrying tape, disks, or some other media from one machine to another. "Never underestimate the bandwidth of a station wagon filled with magtape, or a 747 filled with CD-ROMs." Also called `Tennis-Net', `Armpit-Net', `Floppy-Net' or `Shoenet'; in the 1990s, `Nike network' after a well-known sneaker brand.

Node:sniff, Next:snivitz, Previous:sneakernet, Up:= S =

sniff v.,n.

1. To watch IP packets traversing a local network. Most often in the phrase `packet sniffer', a program for doing same. 2.Synonym for **poll**.

Node:snivitz, Next:'Snooze, Previous:sniff, Up:= S =

snivitz /sniv'itz/ n.

A hiccup in hardware or software; a small, transient problem of unknown origin (less serious than a **snark**). Compare **glitch**.

Node:'Snooze, Next:SO, Previous:snivitz, Up:= S =

'Snooze /snooz/ [FidoNet] n.

Fidonews, the weekly official on-line newsletter of FidoNet. As the editorial policy of Fidonews is "anything that arrives, we print", there are often large articles completely unrelated to FidoNet, which in turn tend to elicit **flamage** in subsequent issues.

Node:SO, Next:social engineering, Previous:'Snooze, Up:= S =

SO /S-O/ n.

1. (also `S.O.') Abbrev. for Significant Other, almost invariably written abbreviated and pronounced /S-O/ by hackers. Used to refer to one's primary relationship, esp. a live-in to whom one is not married. See **MOTAS**, **MOTOS**, **MOTSS**. 2. [techspeak] The Shift Out control character in ASCII (Control-N, 0001110).

Node:social engineering, Next:social science number, Previous:SO, Up:= S =

social engineering n.

Term used among **cracker**s and **samurai** for cracking techniques that rely on weaknesses in **wetware** rather than software; the aim is to trick people into revealing passwords or other information that compromises a target system's security. Classic scams include phoning up a mark who has the required information and posing as a field service tech or a fellow employee with an urgent access problem. See also the **tiger team** story in the **patch** entry.

Node:social science number, Next:sock puppet, Previous:social engineering, Up:= S =

social science number n. //

[IBM] A statistic that is **content-free**, or nearly so. A measure derived via methods of questionable validity from data of a dubious and vague nature. Predictively, having a social science number in hand is seldom much better than nothing, and can be considerably worse. As a rule, **management** loves them. See also **numbers**, **math-out**, **pretty pictures**.

Node:sock puppet, Next:sodium substrate, Previous:social science number, Up:= S =

sock puppet n.

[Usenet: from the act of placing a sock over your hand and talking to it and pretending it's talking back] In Usenet parlance, a **pseudo** through which the puppeteer posts follow-ups to their own original message to give the appearance that a number of people support the views held in the original message.

Node:sodium substrate, Next:soft boot, Previous:sock puppet, Up:= S =

sodium substrate n.

Syn **salt substrate**.

Node:soft boot, Next:softcopy, Previous:sodium substrate, Up:= S =

soft boot n.

See **boot**.

Node:softcopy, Next:software bloat, Previous:soft boot, Up:= S =

softcopy /soft'kop-ee/ n.

[by analogy with `hardcopy'] A machine-readable form of corresponding hardcopy. See **bits**, **machinable**.

Node:software bloat, Next:software hoarding, Previous:softcopy, Up:= S =

software bloat n.

The results of **second-system effect** or **creeping featuritis**. Commonly cited examples include `ls(1)`, **X**, **BSD**, **Missed'em-five**, and **OS/2**.

Node:software hoarding, Next:software laser, Previous:software bloat, Up:= S =

software hoarding n.

Pejorative term employed by members and adherents of the **GNU** project to describe the act of holding software proprietary, keeping it under trade secret or license terms which prohibit free redistribution and modification. Used primarily in Free Software Foundation propaganda. For a summary of related issues, see **GNU**.

Node:software laser, Next:software rot, Previous:software hoarding, Up:= S =

software laser n.

An optical laser works by bouncing photons back and forth between two mirrors, one totally reflective and one partially reflective. If the lasing material (usually a crystal) has the right properties, photons scattering off the atoms in the crystal will excite cascades of more photons, all in lockstep. Eventually the beam will escape through the partially-reflective mirror. One kind of **sorcerer's apprentice mode** involving **bounce message**s can produce closely analogous results, with a **cascade** of messages escaping to flood nearby systems. By mid-1993 there had been at least two publicized incidents of this kind.

Node:software rot, Next:softwarily, Previous:software laser, Up:= S =

software rot n.

Term used to describe the tendency of software that has not been used in a while to **lose**; such failure may be semi-humorously ascribed to **bit rot**. More commonly, `software rot' strikes when a program's assumptions become out of date. If the design was insufficiently **robust**, this may cause it to fail in mysterious ways.

For example, owing to endemic shortsightedness in the design of COBOL programs, most will succumb to software rot when their 2-digit year counters **wrap around** at the beginning of the year 2000. Actually, related lossages often afflict centenarians who have to deal with computer software designed by unimaginative clods. One such incident became the focus of a minor public flap in 1990, when a gentleman born in 1889 applied for a driver's license renewal in Raleigh, North Carolina. The new system refused to issue the card, probably because with 2-digit years the ages 101 and 1 cannot be distinguished.

Historical note: Software rot in an even funnier sense than the mythical one was a real problem on early research computers (e.g., the R1; see **grind crank**). If a program that depended on a peculiar instruction hadn't been run in quite a while, the user might discover that the opcodes no longer did the same things they once did. ("Hey, so-and-so needs an instruction to do such-and-such. We can **snarf** this opcode, right? No one uses it.")

Another classic example of this sprang from the time an MIT hacker found a simple way to double the speed of the unconditional jump instruction on a PDP-6, so he patched the hardware. Unfortunately, this

broke some fragile timing software in a music-playing program, throwing its output out of tune. This was fixed by adding a defensive initialization routine to compare the speed of a timing loop with the real-time clock; in other words, it figured out how fast the PDP-6 was that day, and corrected appropriately.

Compare **bit rot**.

Node:softwarily, Next:softy, Previous:software rot, Up:= S =

softwarily /soft-weir'i-lee/ adv.

In a way pertaining to software. "The system is softwarily unreliable." The adjective **`softwary' is *not* used. See **hardwarily**.

Node:softy, Next:some random X, Previous:softwarily, Up:= S =

softy n.

[IBM] Hardware hackers' term for a software expert who is largely ignorant of the mysteries of hardware.

Node:some random X, Next:sorcerer's apprentice mode, Previous:softy, Up:= S =

some random X adj.

Used to indicate a member of class X, with the implication that Xs are interchangeable. "I think some random cracker tripped over the guest timeout last night." See also **J. Random**.

Node:sorcerer's apprentice mode, Next:SOS, Previous:some random X, Up:= S =

sorcerer's apprentice mode n.

[from Goethe's "Der Zauberlehrling" via Paul Dukas's "L'apprenti sorcier" the film "Fantasia"] A bug in a protocol where, under some circumstances, the receipt of a message causes multiple messages to be sent, each of which, when received, triggers the same bug. Used esp. of such behavior caused by **bounce message** loops in **email** software. Compare **broadcast storm**, **network meltdown**, **software laser**, **ARMM**.

Node:SOS, Next:source of all good bits, Previous:sorcerer's apprentice mode, Up:= S =

SOS /S-O-S/

n.,obs. An infamously **losing** text editor. Once, back in the 1960s, when a text editor was needed for the PDP-6, a hacker crufted together a **quick-and-dirty** `stopgap editor' to be used until a better one was written. Unfortunately, the old one was never really discarded when new ones came along. SOS is a descendant (`Son of Stopgap') of that editor, and many PDP-10 users gained the dubious pleasure of its acquaintance. Since then other programs similar in style to SOS have been written, notably the early font editor BILOS /bye'lohs/, the Brother-In-Law Of Stopgap (the alternate expansion `Bastard Issue, Loins of Stopgap' has been proposed).

Node:source of all good bits, Next:space-cadet keyboard, Previous:SOS, Up:= S =

source of all good bits n.

A person from whom (or a place from which) useful information may be obtained. If you need to know about a program, a **guru** might be the source of all good bits. The title is often applied to a particularly competent secretary.

Node:space-cadet keyboard, Next:spaceship operator, Previous:source of all good bits, Up:= S =

space-cadet keyboard n.

A now-legendary device used on MIT LISP machines, which inspired several still-current jargon terms and influenced the design of **EMACS**. It was equipped with no fewer than *seven* shift keys: four keys for **bucky bits** (`control', `meta', `hyper', and `super') and three like regular shift keys, called `shift', `top', and `front'. Many keys had three symbols on them: a letter and a symbol on the top, and a Greek letter on the front. For example, the `L' key had an `L' and a two-way arrow on the top, and the Greek letter lambda on the front. By pressing this key with the right hand while playing an appropriate `chord' with the left hand on the shift keys, you could get the following results:

L

lowercase l

shift-L

uppercase L

front-L

lowercase lambda

front-shift-L

uppercase lambda

top-L

two-way arrow (front and shift are ignored)

And of course each of these might also be typed with any combination of the control, meta, hyper, and super keys. On this keyboard, you could type over 8000 different characters! This allowed the user to type very complicated mathematical text, and also to have thousands of single-character commands at his disposal. Many hackers were actually willing to memorize the command meanings of that many characters if it reduced typing time (this attitude obviously shaped the interface of EMACS). Other hackers, however, thought having that many bucky bits was overkill, and objected that such a keyboard can require three or four hands to operate. See **bucky bits**, **cokebottle**, **double bucky**, **meta bit**, **quadruple bucky**.

Note: early versions of this entry incorrectly identified the space-cadet keyboard with the `Knight keyboard'. Though both were designed by Tom Knight, the latter term was properly applied only to a keyboard used for ITS on the PDP-10 and modeled on the Stanford keyboard (as described under **bucky bits**). The true space-cadet keyboard evolved from the first Knight keyboard.

Node:spaceship operator, Next:SPACEWAR, Previous:space-cadet keyboard, Up:= S =

spaceship operator n.

The glyph <=>, so-called apparently because in the low-resolution constant-width font used on many terminals it vaguely resembles a flying saucer. **Perl** uses this to denote the signum-of-difference operation.

Node:SPACEWAR, Next:spaghetti code, Previous:spaceship operator, Up:= S =

SPACEWAR n.

A space-combat simulation game, inspired by E. E. "Doc" Smith's "Lensman" books, in which two spaceships duel around a central sun, shooting torpedoes at each other and jumping through hyperspace. This game was first implemented on the PDP-1 at MIT in 1962. In 1968-69, a descendant of the game motivated Ken Thompson to build, in his spare time on a scavenged PDP-7, the operating system that became **Unix**. Less than nine years after that, SPACEWAR was commercialized as one of the first video games; descendants are still **feep**ing in video arcades everywhere.

Node:spaghetti code, Next:spaghetti inheritance, Previous:SPACEWAR, Up:= S =

spaghetti code n.

Code with a complex and tangled control structure, esp. one using many GOTOs, exceptions, or other `unstructured' branching constructs. Pejorative. The synonym `kangaroo code' has been reported, doubtless because such code has so many jumps in it.

Node:spaghetti inheritance, Next:spam, Previous:spaghetti code, Up:= S =

spaghetti inheritance n.

[encountered among users of object-oriented languages that use inheritance, such as Smalltalk] A convoluted class-subclass graph, often resulting from carelessly deriving subclasses from other classes just for the sake of reusing their code. Coined in a (successful) attempt to discourage such practice, through guilt-by-association with **spaghetti code**.

Node:spam, Next:spamblock, Previous:spaghetti inheritance, Up:= S =

spam vt.,vi.,n.

[from "Monty Python's Flying Circus"] 1. To crash a program by overrunning a fixed-size buffer with excessively large input data. See also **buffer overflow**, **overrun screw**, **smash the stack**. 2. To cause a newsgroup to be flooded with irrelevant or inappropriate messages. You can spam a newsgroup with as little as one well- (or ill-) planned message (e.g. asking "What do you think of abortion?" on *soc.women*). This is often done with **cross-post**ing (e.g. any message which is crossposted to *alt.rush-limbaugh* and *alt.politics.homosexuality* will almost inevitably spam both groups). This overlaps with **troll** behavior; the latter more specific term has become more common. 3. To send many identical or nearly-identical messages separately to a large number of Usenet newsgroups. This is more specifically called `ECP',

Excessive Cross-Posting. This is one sure way to infuriate nearly everyone on the Net. See also **velveeta** and **jello**. 4. To bombard a newsgroup with multiple copies of a message. This is more specifically called `EMP', Excessive Multi-Posting. 5. To mass-mail unrequested identical or nearly-identical email messages, particularly those containing advertising. Especially used when the mail addresses have been culled from network traffic or databases without the consent of the recipients. Synonyms include **UCE**, **UBE**. 6. Any large, annoying, quantity of output. For instance, someone on IRC who walks away from their screen and comes back to find 200 lines of text might say "Oh no, spam".

The later definitions have become much more prevalent as the Internet has opened up to non-techies, and to most people senses 3 4 and 5 are now primary. All three behaviors are considered abuse of the net, and are almost universally grounds for termination of the originator's email account or network connection. In these senses the term `spam' has gone mainstream, though without its original sense or folkloric freight - there is apparently a widespread myth among **luser**s that "spamming" is what happens when you dump cans of Spam into a revolving fan.

Node:spamblock, Next:spamhaus, Previous:spam, Up:= S =

spamblock /spam'blok/ n.

[poss. by analogy to sunblock] Text inserted in an email address to render it invalid and thus useless to spammers. For example, the address `jrandom@hacker.org' might be transformed to `jrandom@NOSPAM.hacker.org'. Adding spamblock to an address is often referred to as `munging' it (see **munge**)-. This evasion tactic depends on the fact that most spammers collect names with some sort of **address harvester** on volumes too high to de-mung by hand, but individual humans reading an email message can readily spot and remove a spamblock in the from address.

Note: This is not actually a very effective tactic, and may already be passing out of use in early 1999 after about two years of life. In both mail and news, it's essentially impossible to keep a smart address harvester from mining out the addresses in the message header and trace lines. Therefore the only people who can be protected are third parties mentioned by email address in the message - not a common enough case to interest spammers.

Node:spamhaus, Next:spamvertize, Previous:spamblock, Up:= S =

spamhaus spam'hows n.

Pejorative term for an internet service provider that permits or even encourages **spam** mailings from its systems. The plural is `spamhausen'. There is a web page devoted to tracking spamhausen.

The most notorious of the spamhausen was Sanford Wallace's Cyber Promotions Inc., shut down by a lawsuit on 16 October 1997. The anniversary of the shutdown is celebrated on Usenet as Spam Freedom Day, but lesser imitators of the Spamford still infest various murky corners of the net. Since prosecution of spammers became routine under the junk-fax laws and statues specifically targeting spam, spamhausen have declined in relative importance; today, hit-and-run attacks by spammers using **relay rape** and **throwaway account**s on reputable ISPs seem to account for most of the flow.

Node:spamvertize, Next:spangle, Previous:spamhaus, Up:= S =

spamvertize v.

To advertise using **spam**. Pejorative.

Node:spangle, Next:spawn, Previous:spamvertize, Up:= S =

spangle n.

[UK] The singular of **bells and whistles**. See also **spungle**.

Node:spawn, Next:special-case, Previous:spangle, Up:= S =

spawn n.,vi.

1. [techspeak] In UNIX parlance, to create a child process from within a process. Technically this is a `fork'; the term `spawn' is a bit more general and is used for threads (lightweight processes) as well as traditional heavyweight processes. 2. In gaming, meant to indicate where (`spawn-point') and when a player comes to life (or `re-spawns') after being killed. Opposite of **frag**.

Node:special-case, Next:speedometer, Previous:spawn, Up:= S =

special-case vt.

To write unique code to handle input to or situations arising in a program that are somehow distinguished from normal processing. This would be used for processing of mode switches or interrupt characters in an interactive interface (as opposed, say, to text entry or normal commands), or for processing of **hidden flag**s in the input of a batch program or **filter**.

Node:speedometer, Next:spell, Previous:special-case, Up:= S =

speedometer n.

A pattern of lights displayed on a linear set of LEDs (today) or nixie tubes (yesterday, on ancient mainframes). The pattern is shifted left every N times the operating system goes through its **main loop**. A swiftly moving pattern indicates that the system is mostly idle; the speedometer slows down as the system becomes overloaded. The speedometer on Sun Microsystems hardware bounces back and forth like the eyes on one of the Cylons from the wretched "Battlestar Galactica" TV series.

Historical note: One computer, the GE 600 (later Honeywell 6000) actually had an *analog* speedometer on the front panel, calibrated in instructions executed per second.

Node:spell, Next:spelling flame, Previous:speedometer, Up:= S =

spell n.

Syn. **incantation**.

Node:spelling flame, Next:spider food, Previous:spell, Up:= S =

spelling flame n. //

[Usenet] A posting ostentatiously correcting a previous article's spelling as a way of casting scorn on the point the article was trying to make, instead of actually responding to that point (compare **dictionary flame**). Of course, people who are more than usually slovenly spellers are prone to think *any* correction is a spelling flame. It's an amusing comment on human nature that spelling flames themselves often contain spelling errors.

Node:spider food, Next:spiffy, Previous:spelling flame, Up:= S =

spider food n.

Keywords embedded (usually invisibly) into a web page to attract search engines (spiders). The intended result of including spider food in one's web page is to insure that the page appears high on the list of matching entries to a search engine query. There are right and wrong ways to do this; the right way is a discreet `meta keywords' tag, the wrong way is to embed many repeats of a keyword in comments (and many search engines now detect and ignore the latter).

Node:spiffy, Next:spike, Previous:spider food, Up:= S =

spiffy /spi'fee/ adj.

1. Said of programs having a pretty, clever, or exceptionally well-designed interface. "Have you seen the spiffy **X** version of **empire** yet?" 2. Said sarcastically of a program that is perceived to have little more than a flashy interface going for it. Which meaning should be drawn depends delicately on tone of voice and context. This word was common mainstream slang during the 1940s, in a sense close to 1.

Node:spike, Next:spin, Previous:spiffy, Up:= S =

spike v.

To defeat a selection mechanism by introducing a (sometimes temporary) device that forces a specific result. The word is used in several industries; telephone engineers refer to spiking a relay by inserting a pin to hold the relay in either the closed or open state, and railroaders refer to spiking a track switch so that it cannot be moved. In programming environments it normally refers to a temporary change, usually for testing purposes (as opposed to a permanent change, which would be called **hardwired**).

Node:spin, Next:spl, Previous:spike, Up:= S =

spin vi.

Equivalent to **buzz**. More common among C and Unix programmers.

Node:spl, Next:splash screen, Previous:spin, Up:= S =

spl /S-P-L/

[abbrev, from Set Priority Level] The way traditional Unix kernels implement mutual exclusion by running code at high interrupt levels. Used in jargon to describe the act of tuning in or tuning out ordinary communication. Classically, spl levels run from 1 to 7; "Fred's at spl 6 today" would mean that he is very

hard to interrupt. "Wait till I finish this; I'll spl down then." See also **interrupts locked out**.

Node:splash screen, Next:splat, Previous:spl, Up:= S =

splash screen n.

[Mac users] Syn. **banner**, sense 3.

Node:splat, Next:spod, Previous:splash screen, Up:= S =

splat n.

1. Name used in many places (DEC, IBM, and others) for the asterisk (*) character (ASCII 0101010). This may derive from the `squashed-bug' appearance of the asterisk on many early line printers. 2. [MIT] Name used by some people for the # character (ASCII 0100011). 3. The **feature key** on a Mac (same as **alt**, sense 2). 4. obs. Name used by some people for the Stanford/ITS extended ASCII circle-x character. This character is also called `blobby' and `frob', among other names; it is sometimes used by mathematicians as a notation for `tensor product'. 5. obs. Name for the semi-mythical Stanford extended ASCII circle-plus character. See also **ASCII**.

Node:spod, Next:spoiler, Previous:splat, Up:= S =

spod n.

[UK] 1. A lower form of life found on **talker system**s and **MUD**s. The spod has few friends in **RL** and uses talkers instead, finding communication easier and preferable over the net. He has all the negative traits of the **computer geek** without having any interest in computers per se. Lacking any knowledge of or interest in how networks work, and considering his access a God-given right, he is a major irritant to sysadmins, clogging up lines in order to reach new MUDs, following passed-on instructions on how to sneak his way onto Internet ("Wow! It's in America!") and complaining when he is not allowed to use busy routes. A true spod will start any conversation with "Are you male or female?" (and follow it up with "Got any good numbers/IDs/passwords?") and will not talk to someone physically present in the same terminal room until they log onto the same machine that he is using and enter talk mode. Compare **newbie**, **tourist**, **weenie**, **twink**, **terminal junkie**, **warez d00dz**. 2. A **backronym** for "Sole Purpose, Obtain a Degree"; according to some self-described spods, this term is used by indifferent students to condemn their harder-working fellows. Compare the defiant adoption of the term `geek' in the mid-1990s by people who would previously have been stigmatized by it (see **computer geek**). 3. [obs.] An ordinary person; a **random**. This is the meaning with which the term was coined, but the inventor informs us he has himself accepted sense 1.

Node:spoiler, Next:spoiler space, Previous:spod, Up:= S =

spoiler n.

[Usenet] 1. A remark which reveals important plot elements from books or movies, thus denying the reader (of the article) the proper suspense when reading the book or watching the movie. 2. Any remark which telegraphs the solution of a problem or puzzle, thus denying the reader the pleasure of working out the correct answer (see also **interesting**). Either sense readily forms compounds like `total spoiler', `quasi-spoiler' and even `pseudo-spoiler'.

By convention, articles which are spoilers in either sense should contain the word `spoiler' in the Subject: line, or guarantee via various tricks that the answer appears only after several screens-full of warning, or conceal the sensitive information via **rot13**, **spoiler space** or some combination of these techniques.

Node:spoiler space, Next:sponge, Previous:spoiler, Up:= S =

spoiler space

[also `spoiler spoo'] A screenful of blank lines (and, often, form-feeds) deliberately inserted in a message following a **spoiler** warning, so the actual spoiler can't be seen without hitting a key.

Node:sponge, Next:spoof, Previous:spoiler space, Up:= S =

sponge n.

[Unix] A special case of a **filter** that reads its entire input before writing any output; the canonical example is a sort utility. Unlike most filters, a sponge can conveniently overwrite the input file with the output data stream. If a file system has versioning (as ITS did and VMS does now) the sponge/filter distinction loses its usefulness, because directing filter output would just write a new version. See also **slurp**.

Node:spoof, Next:spool, Previous:sponge, Up:= S =

spoof vi.

To capture, alter, and retransmit a communication stream in a way that misleads the recipient. As used by hackers, refers especially to altering TCP/IP packet source addresses or other packet-header data in order to masquerade as a trusted machine. This term has become very widespread and is borderline techspeak.

Node:spool, Next:spool file, Previous:spoof, Up:= S =

spool vi.

[from early IBM `Simultaneous Peripheral Operation On-Line', but is widely thought to be a **backronym**] To send files to some device or program (a `spooler') that queues them up and does something useful with them later. Without qualification, the spooler is the `print spooler' controlling output of jobs to a printer; but the term has been used in connection with other peripherals (especially plotters and graphics devices) and occasionally even for input devices. See also **demon**.

Node:spool file, Next:spungle, Previous:spool, Up:= S =

spool file n.

Any file to which data is **spool**ed to await the next stage of processing. Especially used in circumstances where spooling the data copes with a mismatch between speeds in two devices or pieces of software. For example, when you send mail under Unix, it's typically copied to a spool file to await a transport **demon**'s attentions. This is borderline techspeak.

Node:spungle, Next:square tape, Previous:spool file, Up:= S =

spungle n.

[Durham, UK; portmanteau, **spangle** + bungle] A **spangle** of no actual usefulness. Example: Roger the Bent Paperclip in Microsoft Word '98. A spungle's only virtue is that it looks pretty, unless you find creeping featurism ugly.

Node:square tape, Next:squirrelcide, Previous:spungle, Up:= S =

square tape n.

Mainframe magnetic tape cartridges for use with IBM 3480 or compatible tape drives; or QIC tapes used on workstations and micros. The term comes from the square (actually rectangular) shape of the cartridges; contrast **round tape**.

Node:squirrelcide, Next:stack, Previous:square tape, Up:= S =

squirrelcide n.

[common on Usenet's *comp.risks* newsgroup.] (alt. `squirrelicide') What all too frequently happens when a squirrel decides to exercise its species's unfortunate penchant for shorting out power lines with their little furry bodies. Result: one dead squirrel, one down computer installation. In this situation, the computer system is said to have been squirrelcided.

Node:stack, Next:stack puke, Previous:squirrelcide, Up:= S =

stack n.

The set of things a person has to do in the future. One speaks of the next project to be attacked as having risen to the top of the stack. "I'm afraid I've got real work to do, so this'll have to be pushed way down on my stack." "I haven't done it yet because every time I pop my stack something new gets pushed." If you are interrupted several times in the middle of a conversation, "My stack overflowed" means "I forget what we were talking about." The implication is that more items were pushed onto the stack than could be remembered, so the least recent items were lost. The usual physical example of a stack is to be found in a cafeteria: a pile of plates or trays sitting on a spring in a well, so that when you put one on the top they all sink down, and when you take one off the top the rest spring up a bit. See also **push** and **pop**.

At MIT, **PDL** used to be a more common synonym for **stack** in all these contexts, and this may still be true. Everywhere else **stack** seems to be the preferred term. **Knuth** ("The Art of Computer Programming", second edition, vol. 1, p. 236) says:

> Many people who realized the importance of stacks and queues independently have given other names to these structures: stacks have been called push-down lists, reversion storages, cellars, nesting stores, piles, last-in-first-out ("LIFO") lists, and even yo-yo lists!

Node:stack puke, Next:stale pointer bug, Previous:stack, Up:= S =

stack puke n.

Some processor architectures are said to `puke their guts onto the stack' to save their internal state during exception processing. The Motorola 68020, for example, regurgitates up to 92 bytes on a bus fault. On a pipelined machine, this can take a while.

Node:stale pointer bug, Next:star out, Previous:stack puke, Up:= S =

stale pointer bug n.

Synonym for **aliasing bug** used esp. among microcomputer hackers.

Node:star out, Next:state, Previous:stale pointer bug, Up:= S =

star out v.

[University of York, England] To replace a user's encrypted password in /etc/passwd with a single asterisk. Under Unix this is not a legal encryption of any password; hence the user is not permitted to log in. In general, accounts like adm, news, and daemon are permanently "starred out"; occasionally a real user might have the this inflicted upon him/her as a punishment, e.g. "Graham was starred out for playing Omega in working hours". Also occasionally known as The Order Of The Gold Star in this context. "Don't do that, or you'll be awarded the Order of the Gold Star..." Compare **disusered**.

Node:state, Next:stealth manager, Previous:star out, Up:= S =

state n.

1. Condition, situation. "What's the state of your latest hack?" "It's winning away." "The system tried to read and write the disk simultaneously and got into a totally **wedged** state." The standard question "What's your state?" means "What are you doing?" or "What are you about to do?" Typical answers are "about to gronk out", or "hungry". Another standard question is "What's the state of the world?", meaning "What's new?" or "What's going on?". The more terse and humorous way of asking these questions would be "State-p?". Another way of phrasing the first question under sense 1 would be "state-p latest hack?". 2. Information being maintained in non-permanent memory (electronic or human).

Node:stealth manager, Next:steam-powered, Previous:state, Up:= S =

stealth manager n.

[Corporate DP] A manager that appears out of nowhere, promises undeliverable software to unknown end users, and vanishes before the programming staff realizes what has happened. See **smoke and mirrors**.

Node:steam-powered, Next:STFW, Previous:stealth manager, Up:= S =

steam-powered adj.

Old-fashioned or underpowered; archaic. This term does not have a strong negative loading and may even be used semi-affectionately for something that clanks and wheezes a lot but hangs in there doing the job.

Node:STFW, Next:stiffy, Previous:steam-powered, Up:= S =

STFW imp. /S-T-F-W/

[Usenet] Commmon abbreviation for "Search The Fucking Web", a suggestion that what you're asking for is a query better handled by a search engine than a human being. Usage is common and exactly parallel to both senses of **RTFM**.

Node:stiffy, Next:stir-fried random, Previous:STFW, Up:= S =

stiffy n.

3.5-inch **microfloppies**, so called because their jackets are more rigid than those of the 5.25-inch and the (now totally obsolete) 8-inch floppy. Elsewhere this might be called a `firmy'. For some odd reason, several sources have taken the trouble to inform us that this term is widespread in South Africa.

Node:stir-fried random, Next:stomp on, Previous:stiffy, Up:= S =

stir-fried random n.

(alt. `stir-fried mumble') Term used for the best dish of many of those hackers who can cook. Consists of random fresh veggies and meat wokked with random spices. Tasty and economical. See **random**, **great-wall**, **ravs**, **laser chicken**, **oriental food**; see also **mumble**.

Node:stomp on, Next:Stone Age, Previous:stir-fried random, Up:= S =

stomp on vt.

To inadvertently overwrite something important, usually automatically. "All the work I did this weekend got stomped on last night by the nightly server script." Compare **scribble**, **mangle**, **trash**, **scrog**, **roach**.

Node:Stone Age, Next:stone knives and bearskins, Previous:stomp on, Up:= S =

Stone Age n.,adj.

1. In computer folklore, an ill-defined period from ENIAC (ca. 1943) to the mid-1950s; the great age of electromechanical **dinosaur**s. Sometimes used for the entire period up to 1960-61 (see **Iron Age**); however, it is funnier and more descriptive to characterize the latter period in terms of a `Bronze Age' era of transistor-logic, pre-ferrite-**core** machines with drum or CRT mass storage (as opposed to just mercury delay lines and/or relays). See also **Iron Age**. 2. More generally, a pejorative for any crufty, ancient piece of hardware or software technology. Note that this is used even by people who were there for the **Stone Age** (sense 1).

Node:stone knives and bearskins, Next:stoppage, Previous:Stone Age, Up:= S =

stone knives and bearskins n.

[from the Star Trek Classic episode "The City on the Edge of Forever"] A term traditionally used to describe (and deprecate) computing environments that are grotesquely primitive in light of what is known about good ways to design things. As in "Don't get too used to the facilities here. Once you leave SAIL it's stone knives and bearskins as far as the eye can see". Compare **steam-powered**.

Node:stoppage, Next:store, Previous:stone knives and bearskins, Up:= S =

stoppage /sto'p*j/ n.

Extreme **lossage** that renders something (usually something vital) completely unusable. "The recent system stoppage was caused by a **fried** transformer."

Node:store, Next:strided, Previous:stoppage, Up:= S =

store n.

[prob. from techspeak `main store'] In some varieties of Commonwealth hackish, the preferred synonym for **core**. Thus, `bringing a program into store' means not that one is returning shrink-wrapped software but that a program is being **swap**ped in.

Node:strided, Next:stroke, Previous:store, Up:= S =

strided /stri:'d*d/ adj.

[scientific computing] Said of a sequence of memory reads and writes to addresses, each of which is separated from the last by a constant interval called the `stride length'. These can be a worst-case access pattern for the standard memory-caching schemes when the stride length is a multiple of the cache line size. Strided references are often generated by loops through an array, and (if your data is large enough that access-time is significant) it can be worthwhile to tune for better locality by inverting double loops or by partially unrolling the outer loop of a loop nest. This usage is borderline techspeak; the related term `memory stride' is definitely techspeak.

Node:stroke, Next:strudel, Previous:strided, Up:= S =

stroke n.

Common name for the slant (`/', ASCII 0101111) character. See **ASCII** for other synonyms.

Node:strudel, Next:stubroutine, Previous:stroke, Up:= S =

strudel n.

Common (spoken) name for the at-sign (`@', ASCII 1000000) character. See **ASCII** for other synonyms.

Node:stubroutine, Next:studly, Previous:strudel, Up:= S =

stubroutine /stuhb'roo-teen/ n.

[contraction of `stub subroutine'] Tiny, often vacuous placeholder for a subroutine that is to be written or fleshed out later.

Node:studly, Next:studlycaps, Previous:stubroutine, Up:= S =

studly adj.

Impressive; powerful. Said of code and designs which exhibit both complexity and a virtuoso flair. Has connotations similar to **hairy** but is more positive in tone. Often in the emphatic `most studly' or as noun-form `studliness'. "Smail 3.0's configuration parser is most studly."

Node:studlycaps, Next:stunning, Previous:studly, Up:= S =

studlycaps /stuhd'lee-kaps/ n.

A hackish form of silliness similar to **BiCapitalization** for trademarks, but applied randomly and to arbitrary text rather than to trademarks. ThE oRigiN and SigNificaNce of thIs pRacTicE iS oBscuRe.

Node:stunning, Next:stupid-sort, Previous:studlycaps, Up:= S =

stunning adj.

Mind-bogglingly stupid. Usually used in sarcasm. "You want to code *what* in ADA? That's a ... stunning idea!"

Node:stupid-sort, Next:Stupids, Previous:stunning, Up:= S =

stupid-sort n.

Syn. **bogo-sort**.

Node:Stupids, Next:Sturgeon's Law, Previous:stupid-sort, Up:= S =

Stupids n.

Term used by **samurai** for the **suit**s who employ them; succinctly expresses an attitude at least as common, though usually better disguised, among other subcultures of hackers. There may be intended reference here to an SF story originally published in 1952 but much anthologized since, Mark Clifton's "Star, Bright". In it, a super-genius child classifies humans into a very few `Brights' like herself, a huge majority of `Stupids', and a minority of `Tweens', the merely ordinary geniuses.

Node:Sturgeon's Law, Next:sucking mud, Previous:Stupids, Up:= S =

Sturgeon's Law prov.

"Ninety percent of everything is crap". Derived from a quote by science fiction author Theodore Sturgeon, who once said, "Sure, 90% of science fiction is crud. That's because 90% of everything is crud." Oddly, when Sturgeon's Law is cited, the final word is almost invariably changed to `crap'. Compare **Hanlon's Razor**, **Ninety-Ninety Rule**. Though this maxim originated in SF fandom, most hackers recognize it and are all too aware of its truth.

Node:sucking mud, Next:sufficiently small, Previous:Sturgeon's Law, Up:= S =

sucking mud adj.

[Applied Data Research] (also `pumping mud') Crashed or **wedged**. Usually said of a machine that provides some service to a network, such as a file server. This Dallas regionalism derives from the East Texas oilfield lament, "Shut 'er down, Ma, she's a-suckin' mud". Often used as a query. "We are going to reconfigure the network, are you ready to suck mud?"

Node:sufficiently small, Next:suit, Previous:sucking mud, Up:= S =

sufficiently small adj.

Syn. **suitably small**.

Node:suit, Next:suitable win, Previous:sufficiently small, Up:= S =

suit n.

1. Ugly and uncomfortable `business clothing' often worn by non-hackers. Invariably worn with a `tie', a strangulation device that partially cuts off the blood supply to the brain. It is thought that this explains much about the behavior of suit-wearers. Compare **droid**. 2. A person who habitually wears suits, as distinct from a techie or hacker. See **pointy-haired**, **burble**, **management**, **Stupids**, **SNAFU principle**, **PHB**, and **brain-damaged**.

Node:suitable win, Next:suitably small, Previous:suit, Up:= S =

suitable win n.

See **win**.

Node:suitably small, Next:Sun, Previous:suitable win, Up:= S =

suitably small adj.

[perverted from mathematical jargon]

An expression used ironically to characterize unquantifiable behavior that differs from expected or required behavior. For example, suppose a newly created program came up with a correct full-screen display, and one publicly exclaimed: "It works!" Then, if the program dumped core on the first mouse click, one might add: "Well, for suitably small values of `works'." Compare the characterization of pi under **random numbers**.

Node:Sun, Next:sun lounge, Previous:suitably small, Up:= S =

Sun n.

Sun Microsystems. Hackers remember that the name was originally an acronym, Stanford University Network. Sun started out around 1980 with some hardware hackers (mainly) from Stanford talking to some software hackers (mainly) from UC Berkeley; Sun's original technology concept married a clever board design based on the Motorola 68000 to **BSD** Unix. Sun went on to lead the worstation industry through the 1980s, and for years afterwards remained an engineering-driven company and a good place for hackers to work. Though Sun drifted away from its techie origins after 1990 and has since made some strategic moves that disappointed and annoyed many hackers (especially by maintaining proprietary control of Java and rejecting Linux), it's still considered within the family in much the same way **DEC** was in the 1970s and early 1980s.

Node:sun lounge, Next:sun-stools, Previous:Sun, Up:= S =

sun lounge n.

[UK] The room where all the Sun workstations live. The humor in this term comes from the fact that it's also in mainstream use to describe a solarium, and all those Sun workstations clustered together give off an amazing amount of heat.

Node:sun-stools, Next:sunspots, Previous:sun lounge, Up:= S =

sun-stools n.

Unflattering hackerism for SunTools, a pre-X windowing environment notorious in its day for size, slowness, and misfeatures. **X**, however, is larger and (some claim) slower; see **second-system effect**.

Node:sunspots, Next:super source quench, Previous:sun-stools, Up:= S =

sunspots n.

1. Notional cause of an odd error. "Why did the program suddenly turn the screen blue?" "Sunspots, I guess." 2. Also the cause of **bit rot** -- from the myth that sunspots will increase **cosmic rays**, which can flip single bits in memory. See also **phase of the moon**.

Node:super source quench, Next:superloser, Previous:sunspots, Up:= S =

super source quench n.

A special packet designed to shut up an Internet host. The Internet Protocol (IP) has a control message called Source Quench that asks a host to transmit more slowly on a particular connection to avoid congestion. It also has a Redirect control message intended to instruct a host to send certain packets to a different local router. A "super source quench" is actually a redirect control packet, forged to look like it came from a local router, that instructs a host to send all packets to its own local loopback address. This will effectively tie many Internet hosts up in knots. Compare **Godzillagram**, **breath-of-life packet**.

Node:superloser, Next:superprogrammer, Previous:super source quench, Up:= S =

superloser n.

[Unix] A superuser with no clue - someone with root privileges on a Unix system and no idea what he/she is doing, the moral equivalent of a three-year-old with an unsafetied Uzi. Anyone who thinks this is an uncommon situation reckons without the territorial urges of **management**.

Node:superprogrammer, Next:superuser, Previous:superloser, Up:= S =

superprogrammer n.

A prolific programmer; one who can code exceedingly well and quickly. Not all hackers are superprogrammers, but many are. (Productivity can vary from one programmer to another by three orders of magnitude. For example, one programmer might be able to write an average of 3 lines of working code in one day, while another, with the proper tools, might be able to write 3,000. This range is astonishing; it is matched in very few other areas of human endeavor.) The term `superprogrammer' is more commonly used within such places as IBM than in the hacker community. It tends to stress naive measures of productivity and to underweight creativity, ingenuity, and getting the job *done* -- and to sidestep the question of whether the 3,000 lines of code do more or less useful work than three lines that do the **Right Thing**. Hackers tend to prefer the terms **hacker** and **wizard**.

Node:superuser, Next:support, Previous:superprogrammer, Up:= S =

superuser n.

[Unix] Syn. **root**, **avatar**. This usage has spread to non-Unix environments; the superuser is any account with all **wheel** bits on. A more specific term than **wheel**.

Node:support, Next:surf, Previous:superuser, Up:= S =

support n.

After-sale handholding; something many software vendors promise but few deliver. To hackers, most support people are useless -- because by the time a hacker calls support he or she will usually know the software and the relevant manuals better than the support people (sadly, this is *not* a joke or exaggeration). A hacker's idea of `support' is a tête-à-tête with the software's designer.

Node:surf, Next:Suzie COBOL, Previous:support, Up:= S =

surf v.

[from the `surf' idiom for rapidly flipping TV channels] To traverse the Internet in search of interesting stuff, used esp. if one is doing so with a World Wide Web browser. It is also common to speak of `surfing in' to a particular resource.

Hackers adopted this term early, but many have stopped using it since it went completely mainstream around 1995. The passive, couch-potato connotations that go with TV channel surfing were never

pleasant, and hearing non-hackers wax enthusiastic about "surfing the net" tends to make hackers feel a bit as though their home is being overrun by ignorami.

Node:Suzie COBOL, Next:swab, Previous:surf, Up:= S =

Suzie COBOL /soo'zee koh'bol/

1. [IBM: prob. from Frank Zappa's `Suzy Creamcheese'] n. A coder straight out of training school who knows everything except the value of comments in plain English. Also (fashionable among personkind wishing to avoid accusations of sexism) `Sammy Cobol' or (in some non-IBM circles) `Cobol Charlie'. 2. [proposed] Meta-name for any **code grinder**, analogous to **J. Random Hacker**.

Node:swab, Next:swap, Previous:Suzie COBOL, Up:= S =

swab /swob/

[From the mnemonic for the PDP-11 `SWAp Byte' instruction, as immortalized in the `dd(1)` option `conv=swab` (see **dd**)] 1. vt. To solve the **NUXI problem** by swapping bytes in a file. 2. n. The program in V7 Unix used to perform this action, or anything functionally equivalent to it. See also **big-endian**, **little-endian**, **middle-endian**, **bytesexual**.

Node:swap, Next:swap space, Previous:swab, Up:= S =

swap vt.

1. [techspeak] To move information from a fast-access memory to a slow-access memory (`swap out'), or vice versa (`swap in'). Often refers specifically to the use of disks as `virtual memory'. As pieces of data or program are needed, they are swapped into **core** for processing; when they are no longer needed they may be swapped out again. 2. The jargon use of these terms analogizes people's short-term memories with core. Cramming for an exam might be spoken of as swapping in. If you temporarily forget someone's name, but then remember it, your excuse is that it was swapped out. To `keep something swapped in' means to keep it fresh in your memory: "I reread the TECO manual every few months to keep it swapped in." If someone interrupts you just as you got a good idea, you might say "Wait a moment while I swap this out", implying that a piece of paper is your extra-somatic memory and that if you don't swap the idea out by writing it down it will get overwritten and lost as you talk. Compare **page in**, **page out**.

Node:swap space, Next:swapped in, Previous:swap, Up:= S =

swap space n.

Storage space, especially temporary storage space used during a move or reconfiguration. "I'm just using that corner of the machine room for swap space."

Node:swapped in, Next:swapped out, Previous:swap space, Up:= S =

swapped in n.

See **swap**. See also **page in**.

Node:swapped out, Next:swizzle, Previous:swapped in, Up:= S =

swapped out n.

See **swap**. See also **page out**.

Node:swizzle, Next:sync, Previous:swapped out, Up:= S =

swizzle v.

To convert external names, array indices, or references within a data structure into address pointers when the data structure is brought into main memory from external storage (also called `pointer swizzling'); this may be done for speed in chasing references or to simplify code (e.g., by turning lots of name lookups into pointer dereferences). The converse operation is sometimes termed `unswizzling'. See also **snap**.

Node:sync, Next:syntactic salt, Previous:swizzle, Up:= S =

sync /sink/ n., vi.

(var. `synch') 1. To synchronize, to bring into synchronization. 2. [techspeak] To force all pending I/O to the disk; see **flush**, sense 2. 3. More generally, to force a number of competing processes or agents to a state that would be `safe' if the system were to crash; thus, to checkpoint (in the database-theory sense).

Node:syntactic salt, Next:syntactic sugar, Previous:sync, Up:= S =

syntactic salt n.

The opposite of **syntactic sugar**, a feature designed to make it harder to write bad code. Specifically, syntactic salt is a hoop the programmer must jump through just to prove that he knows what's going on, rather than to express a program action. Some programmers consider required type declarations to be syntactic salt. A requirement to write `end if`, `end while`, `end do`, etc. to terminate the last block controlled by a control construct (as opposed to just `end`) would definitely be syntactic salt. Syntactic salt is like the real thing in that it tends to raise hackers' blood pressures in an unhealthy way. Compare **candygrammar**.

Node:syntactic sugar, Next:sys-frog, Previous:syntactic salt, Up:= S =

syntactic sugar n.

[coined by Peter Landin] Features added to a language or other formalism to make it `sweeter' for humans, features which do not affect the expressiveness of the formalism (compare **chrome**). Used esp. when there is an obvious and trivial translation of the `sugar' feature into other constructs already present in the notation. C's `a[i]` notation is syntactic sugar for `*(a + i)`. "Syntactic sugar causes cancer of the semicolon." -- Alan Perlis.

The variants `syntactic saccharin' and `syntactic syrup' are also recorded. These denote something even more gratuitous, in that syntactic sugar serves a purpose (making something more acceptable to humans), but syntactic saccharin or syrup serve no purpose at all. Compare **candygrammar**, **syntactic salt**.

Node:sys-frog, Next:sysadmin, Previous:syntactic sugar, Up:= S =

sys-frog /sis'frog/ n.

[the PLATO system] Playful variant of `sysprog', which is in turn short for `systems programmer'.

Node:sysadmin, Next:sysape, Previous:sys-frog, Up:= S =

sysadmin /sis'ad-min/ n.

Common contraction of `system admin'; see **admin**.

Node:sysape, Next:sysop, Previous:sysadmin, Up:= S =

sysape /sys'ayp/ n.

A rather derogatory term for a computer operator; a play on **sysop** common at sites that use the banana hierarchy of problem complexity (see **one-banana problem**).

Node:sysop, Next:system, Previous:sysape, Up:= S =

sysop /sis'op/ n.

[esp. in the BBS world] The operator (and usually the owner) of a bulletin-board system. A common neophyte mistake on **FidoNet** is to address a message to `sysop' in an international **echo**, thus sending it to hundreds of sysops around the world.

Node:system, Next:systems jock, Previous:sysop, Up:= S =

system n.

1. The supervisor program or OS on a computer. 2. The entire computer system, including input/output devices, the supervisor program or OS, and possibly other software. 3. Any large-scale program. 4. Any method or algorithm. 5. `System hacker': one who hacks the system (in senses 1 and 2 only; for sense 3 one mentions the particular program: e.g., `LISP hacker')

Node:systems jock, Next:system mangler, Previous:system, Up:= S =

systems jock n.

See **jock**, sense 2.

Node:system mangler, Next:SysVile, Previous:systems jock, Up:= S =

system mangler n.

Humorous synonym for `system manager', poss. from the fact that one major IBM OS had a **root** account called SYSMANGR. Refers specifically to a systems programmer in charge of administration, software maintenance, and updates at some site. Unlike **admin**, this term emphasizes the technical end of the skills involved.

Node:SysVile, Next:T, Previous:system mangler, Up:= S =

SysVile /sis-vi:l'/ n.

See **Missed'em-five**.

Node:= T =, Next:= U =, Previous:= S =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= T =

- T:
- tail recursion:
- talk mode:
- talker system:
- tall card:
- tanked:
- TANSTAAFL:
- tape monkey:
- tar and feather:
- tarball:
- tardegy:
- taste:
- tayste:
- TCB:
- TCP/IP:
- TechRef:
- TECO:
- tee:
- teergrube:
- teledildonics:
- Telerat:
- TELNET:
- ten-finger interface:
- tense:
- tentacle:
- tenured graduate student:
- tera-:
- teraflop club:
- terminak:
- terminal brain death:
- terminal illness:
- terminal junkie:
- terpri:
- test:

- TeX:
- text:
- thanks in advance:
- That's not a bug that's a feature!:
- the literature:
- the network:
- the X that can be Y is not the true X:
- theology:
- theory:
- thinko:
- This can't happen:
- This time for sure!:
- thrash:
- thread:
- three-finger salute:
- throwaway account:
- thud:
- thumb:
- thundering herd problem:
- thunk:
- tick:
- tick-list features:
- tickle a bug:
- tiger team:
- time bomb:
- time sink:
- time T:
- times-or-divided-by:
- TINC:
- Tinkerbell program:
- TINLC:
- tip of the ice-cube:
- tired iron:
- tits on a keyboard:
- TLA:
- (TM):
- TMRC:
- TMRCie:
- TMTOWTDI:
- to a first approximation:
- to a zeroth approximation:
- toad:
- toast:
- toaster:
- toeprint:
- toggle:
- tool:
- toolsmith:
- toor:
- topic drift:
- topic group:
- TOPS-10:

- TOPS-20:
- tourist:
- tourist information:
- touristic:
- toy:
- toy language:
- toy problem:
- toy program:
- trampoline:
- trap:
- trap door:
- trash:
- trawl:
- tree-killer:
- treeware:
- trit:
- trivial:
- troff:
- troglodyte:
- troglodyte mode:
- Trojan horse:
- troll:
- Troll-O-Meter:
- tron:
- true-hacker:
- tty:
- tube:
- tube time:
- tunafish:
- tune:
- turbo nerd:
- Turing tar-pit:
- turist:
- Tux:
- tweak:
- tweeter:
- TWENEX:
- twiddle:
- twiddle:
- twilight zone:
- twink:
- twirling baton:
- two pi:
- two-to-the-N:
- twonkie:

Node:T, Next:tail recursion, Previous:SysVile, Up:= T =

T /T/

1. [from LISP terminology for `true'] Yes. Used in reply to a question (particularly one asked using **The**

-P convention). In LISP, the constant T means `true', among other things. Some Lisp hackers use `T' and `NIL' instead of `Yes' and `No' almost reflexively. This sometimes causes misunderstandings. When a waiter or flight attendant asks whether a hacker wants coffee, he may absently respond `T', meaning that he wants coffee; but of course he will be brought a cup of tea instead. Fortunately, most hackers (particularly those who frequent Chinese restaurants) like tea at least as well as coffee -- so it is not that big a problem. 2. See **time T** (also **since time T equals minus infinity**). 3. [techspeak] In transaction-processing circles, an abbreviation for the noun `transaction'. 4. [Purdue] Alternate spelling of **tee**. 5. A dialect of **LISP** developed at Yale. (There is an intended allusion to NIL, "New Implementation of Lisp", another dialect of Lisp developed for the **VAX**)

Node:tail recursion, Next:talk mode, Previous:T, Up:= T =

tail recursion n.

If you aren't sick of it already, see **tail recursion**.

Node:talk mode, Next:talker system, Previous:tail recursion, Up:= T =

talk mode n.

A feature supported by Unix, ITS, and some other OSes that allows two or more logged-in users to set up a real-time on-line conversation. It combines the immediacy of talking with all the precision (and verbosity) that written language entails. It is difficult to communicate inflection, though conventions have arisen for some of these (see the section on writing style in the Prependices for details).

Talk mode has a special set of jargon words, used to save typing, which are not used orally. Some of these are identical to (and probably derived from) Morse-code jargon used by ham-radio amateurs since the 1920s.

`AFAIK`
: as far as I know

`BCNU`
: be seeing you

`BTW`
: by the way

`BYE?`
: are you ready to unlink? (this is the standard way to end a talk-mode conversation; the other person types `BYE` to confirm, or else continues the conversation)

`CUL`
: see you later

`ENQ?`
: are you busy? (expects `ACK` or `NAK` in return)

`FOO?`
: are you there? (often used on unexpected links, meaning also "Sorry if I butted in ..." (linker) or "What's up?" (linkee))

`FWIW`
: for what it's worth

`FYI`
: for your information

`FYA`
: for your amusement

`GA`

go ahead (used when two people have tried to type simultaneously; this cedes the right to type to the other)

GRMBL
: grumble (expresses disquiet or disagreement)

HELLOP
: hello? (an instance of the `-P' convention)

IIRC
: if I recall correctly

JAM
: just a minute (equivalent to SEC....)

MIN
: same as JAM

NIL
: no (see **NIL**)

NP
: no problem

O
: over to you

OO
: over and out

/
: another form of "over to you" (from x/y as "x over y")

\
: lambda (used in discussing LISPy things)

OBTW
: oh, by the way

OTOH
: on the other hand

R U THERE?
: are you there?

SEC
: wait a second (sometimes written SEC...)

SYN
: Are you busy? (expects ACK, SYN|ACK, or RST in return; this is modeled on the TCP/IP handshake sequence)

T
: yes (see the main entry for **T**)

TNX
: thanks

TNX 1.0E6
: thanks a million (humorous)

TNXE6
: another form of "thanks a million"

WRT
: with regard to, or with respect to.

WTF
: the universal interrogative particle; WTF knows what it means?

WTH
: what the hell?

<double newline>
: When the typing party has finished, he/she types two newlines to signal that he/she is done; this leaves a blank line between `speeches' in the conversation, making it easier to reread the preceding text.

<name>:

When three or more terminals are linked, it is conventional for each typist to **prepend** his/her login name or handle and a colon (or a hyphen) to each line to indicate who is typing (some conferencing facilities do this automatically). The login name is often shortened to a unique prefix (possibly a single letter) during a very long conversation.

`/\/\/\`
: A giggle or chuckle. On a MUD, this usually means `earthquake fault'.

Most of the above sub-jargon is used at both Stanford and MIT. Several of these expressions are also common in **email**, esp. FYI, FYA, BTW, BCNU, WTF, and CUL. A few other abbreviations have been reported from commercial networks, such as GEnie and CompuServe, where on-line `live' chat including more than two people is common and usually involves a more `social' context, notably the following:

`<g>`
: grin

`<gd&r>`
: grinning, ducking, and running

`BBL`
: be back later

`BRB`
: be right back

`HHOJ`
: ha ha only joking

`HHOK`
: ha ha only kidding

`HHOS`
: **ha ha only serious**

`IMHO`
: in my humble opinion (see **IMHO**)

`LOL`
: laughing out loud

`NHOH`
: Never Heard of Him/Her (often used in **initgame**)

`ROTF`
: rolling on the floor

`ROTFL`
: rolling on the floor laughing

`AFK`
: away from keyboard

`b4`
: before

`CU l8tr`
: see you later

`MORF`
: male or female?

`TTFN`
: ta-ta for now

`TTYL`
: talk to you later

`OIC`
: oh, I see

`rehi`
: hello again

Most of these are not used at universities or in the Unix world, though ROTF and TTFN have gained some currency there and IMHO is common; conversely, most of the people who know these are

unfamiliar with FOO?, BCNU, HELLOP, **NIL**, and **T**.

The **MUD** community uses a mixture of Usenet/Internet emoticons, a few of the more natural of the old-style talk-mode abbrevs, and some of the `social' list above; specifically, MUD respondents report use of BBL, BRB, LOL, b4, BTW, WTF, TTFN, and WTH. The use of `rehi' is also common; in fact, mudders are fond of re- compounds and will frequently `rehug' or `rebonk' (see **bonk/oif**) people. The word `re' by itself is taken as `regreet'. In general, though, MUDders express a preference for typing things out in full rather than using abbreviations; this may be due to the relative youth of the MUD cultures, which tend to include many touch typists and to assume high-speed links. The following uses specific to MUDs are reported:

`CU l8er`
: see you later (mutant of `CU l8tr`)

`FOAD`
: fuck off and die (use of this is generally OTT)

`OTT`
: over the top (excessive, uncalled for)

`ppl`
: abbrev for "people"

`THX`
: thanks (mutant of `TNX`; clearly this comes in batches of 1138 (the Lucasian K)).

`UOK?`
: are you OK?

Some **B1FF**isms (notably the variant spelling `d00d`) appear to be passing into wider use among some subgroups of MUDders.

One final note on talk mode style: neophytes, when in talk mode, often seem to think they must produce letter-perfect prose because they are typing rather than speaking. This is not the best approach. It can be very frustrating to wait while your partner pauses to think of a word, or repeatedly makes the same spelling error and backs up to fix it. It is usually best just to leave typographical errors behind and plunge forward, unless severe confusion may result; in that case it is often fastest just to type "xxx" and start over from before the mistake.

See also **hakspek**, **emoticon**.

Node:talker system, Next:tall card, Previous:talk mode, Up:= T =

talker system n.

British hackerism for software that enables real-time chat or **talk mode**.

Node:tall card, Next:tanked, Previous:talker system, Up:= T =

tall card n.

A PC/AT-size expansion card (these can be larger than IBM PC or XT cards because the AT case is bigger). See also **short card**. When IBM introduced the PS/2 model 30 (its last gasp at supporting the ISA) they made the case lower and many industry-standard tall cards wouldn't fit; this was felt to be a reincarnation of the **connector conspiracy**, done with less style.

Node:tanked, Next:TANSTAAFL, Previous:tall card, Up:= T =

tanked adj.

Same as **down**, used primarily by Unix hackers. See also **hosed**. Popularized as a synonym for `drunk' by Steve Dallas in the late lamented "Bloom County" comic strip.

Node:TANSTAAFL, Next:tape monkey, Previous:tanked, Up:= T =

TANSTAAFL /tan'stah-fl/

[acronym, from Robert Heinlein's classic "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress".] "There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch", often invoked when someone is balking at the prospect of using an unpleasantly **heavyweight** technique, or at the poor quality of some piece of software, or at the **signal-to-noise ratio** of unmoderated Usenet newsgroups. "What? Don't tell me I have to implement a database back end to get my address book program to work!" "Well, TANSTAAFL you know." This phrase owes some of its popularity to the high concentration of science-fiction fans and political libertarians in hackerdom (see **Appendix B** for discussion).

Node:tape monkey, Next:tar and feather, Previous:TANSTAAFL, Up:= T =

tape monkey n.

A junior system administrator, one who might plausibly be assigned to do physical swapping of tapes and subsequent storage. When a backup needs to be restored, one might holler "Tape monkey!" (Compare **one-banana problem**) Also used to dismiss jobs not worthy of a highly trained sysadmin's ineffable talents: "Cable up her PC? You must be joking - I'm no tape monkey."

Node:tar and feather, Next:tarball, Previous:tape monkey, Up:= T =

tar and feather vi.

[from Unix `tar(1)`] To create a transportable archive from a group of files by first sticking them together with `tar(1)` (the Tape ARchiver) and then compressing the result (see **compress**). The latter action is dubbed `feathering' partly for euphony and (if only for contrived effect) by analogy to what you do with an airplane propeller to decrease wind resistance, or with an oar to reduce water resistance; smaller files, after all, slip through comm links more easily. Compare the more common **tarball**.

Node:tarball, Next:tardegy, Previous:tar and feather, Up:= T =

tarball n.

[very common; prob. based on the "tar baby" in the Uncle Remus folk tales] An archive, created with the Unix tar(1) utility, containing myriad related files. "Here, I'll just ftp you a tarball of the whole project." Tarballs have been the standard way to ship around source-code distributions since the mid-1980s; in retrospect it seems odd that this term did not enter common usage until the late 1990s.

Node:tardegy, Next:taste, Previous:tarball, Up:= T =

tardegy

n. [deliberate mangling of `tragedy'] An incident in which someone who clearly deserves to be selected out of the gene pool on grounds of extreme stupidity meets with a messy end. Coined on the Darwin list, which is dedicated to chronicling such incidents; but almost all hackers would instantly recognize the intention of the term and laugh.

Node:taste, Next:tayste, Previous:tardegy, Up:= T =

taste [primarily MIT] n.

1. The quality in a program that tends to be inversely proportional to the number of features, hacks, and kluges programmed into it. Also `tasty', `tasteful', `tastefulness'. "This feature comes in N tasty flavors." Although `tasty' and `flavorful' are essentially synonyms, `taste' and **flavor** are not. Taste refers to sound judgment on the part of the creator; a program or feature can *exhibit* taste but cannot *have* taste. On the other hand, a feature can have **flavor**. Also, **flavor** has the additional meaning of `kind' or `variety' not shared by `taste'. The marked sense of **flavor** is more popular than `taste', though both are widely used. See also **elegant**. 2. Alt. sp. of **tayste**.

Node:tayste, Next:TCB, Previous:taste, Up:= T =

tayste /tayst/

n. Two bits; also as **taste**. Syn. **crumb**, **quarter**. See **nybble**.

Node:TCB, Next:TCP/IP, Previous:tayste, Up:= T =

TCB /T-C-B/ n.

[IBM] 1. Trouble Came Back. An intermittent or difficult-to-reproduce problem that has failed to respond to neglect or **shotgun debugging**. Compare **heisenbug**. Not to be confused with: 2. Trusted Computing Base, an `official' jargon term from the **Orange Book**.

Node:TCP/IP, Next:TechRef, Previous:TCB, Up:= T =

TCP/IP /T'C-P I'P/ n.

1. [Transmission Control Protocol/Internet Protocol] The wide-area-networking protocol that makes the Internet work, and the only one most hackers can speak the name of without laughing or retching. Unlike such allegedly `standard' competitors such as X.25, DECnet, and the ISO 7-layer stack, TCP/IP evolved primarily by actually being *used*, rather than being handed down from on high by a vendor or a heavily-politicized standards committee. Consequently, it (a) works, (b) actually promotes cheap cross-platform connectivity, and (c) annoys the hell out of corporate and governmental empire-builders everywhere. Hackers value all three of these properties. See **creationism**. 2. [Amateur Packet Radio] Formerly expanded as "The Crap Phil Is Pushing". The reference is to Phil Karn, KA9Q, and the context was an ongoing technical/political war between the majority of sites still running AX.25 and the TCP/IP relays. TCP/IP won.

Node:TechRef, Next:TECO, Previous:TCP/IP, Up:= T =

TechRef /tek'ref/ n.

[MS-DOS] The original "IBM PC Technical Reference Manual", including the BIOS listing and complete schematics for the PC. The only PC documentation in the original-issue package that was considered serious by real hackers.

Node:TECO, Next:tee, Previous:TechRef, Up:= T =

TECO /tee'koh/ n.,v. obs.

1. [originally an acronym for `[paper] Tape Editor and COrrector'; later, `Text Editor and COrrector'] n. A text editor developed at MIT and modified by just about everybody. With all the dialects included, TECO may have been the most prolific editor in use before **EMACS**, to which it was directly ancestral. Noted for its powerful programming-language-like features and its unspeakably hairy syntax. It is literally the case that every string of characters is a valid TECO program (though probably not a useful one); one common game used to be mentally working out what the TECO commands corresponding to human names did. 2. vt. Originally, to edit using the TECO editor in one of its infinite variations (see below). 3. vt.,obs. To edit even when TECO is *not* the editor being used! This usage is rare and now primarily historical.

As an example of TECO's obscurity, here is a TECO program that takes a list of names such as:

```
Loser, J. Random
Quux, The Great
Dick, Moby
```

sorts them alphabetically according to surname, and then puts the surname last, removing the comma, to produce the following:

```
Moby Dick
J. Random Loser
The Great Quux
```

The program is

```
[1 J^P$L$$
J <.-Z; .,(S,$ -D .)FX1 @F^B $K :L I $ G1 L>$$
```

(where ^B means `Control-B' (ASCII 0000010) and $ is actually an **alt** or escape (ASCII 0011011) character).

In fact, this very program was used to produce the second, sorted list from the first list. The first hack at it had a **bug**: GLS (the author) had accidentally omitted the `@` in front of `F^B`, which as anyone can see is clearly the **Wrong Thing**. It worked fine the second time. There is no space to describe all the features of TECO, but it may be of interest that `^P` means `sort' and `J<.-Z; ... L>` is an idiomatic series of commands for `do once for every line'.

In mid-1991, TECO is pretty much one with the dust of history, having been replaced in the affections of hackerdom by **EMACS**. Descendants of an early (and somewhat lobotomized) version adopted by DEC can still be found lurking on VMS and a couple of crufty PDP-11 operating systems, however, and ports of the more advanced MIT versions remain the focus of some antiquarian interest. See also **retrocomputing**, **write-only language**.

Node:tee, Next:teergrube, Previous:TECO, Up:= T =

tee n.,vt.

[Purdue] A carbon copy of an electronic transmission. "Oh, you're sending him the **bits** to that? Slap on a tee for me." From the Unix command `tee(1)`, itself named after a pipe fitting (see **plumbing**). Can also mean `save one for me', as in "Tee a slice for me!" Also spelled `T'.

Node:teergrube, Next:teledildonics, Previous:tee, Up:= T =

teergrube /teer'groob/ n.

[German for `tar pit'] A trap set to punish spammers who use an **address harvester**; a mail server deliberately set up to be really, really slow. To activate it, scatter addresses that look like users on the teergrube's host in places where the address harvester will be trolling (one popular way is to embed the fake address in a Usenet sig block next to a human-readable warning not to send mail to it). The address harvester will dutifully collect the address. When the spammer tries to mailbomb it, his mailer will get stuck.

Node:teledildonics, Next:Telerat, Previous:teergrube, Up:= T =

teledildonics /tel`*-dil-do'-niks/ n.

Sex in a computer simulated virtual reality, esp. computer-mediated sexual interaction between the **VR** presences of two humans. This practice is not yet possible except in the rather limited form of erotic conversation on **MUD**s and the like. The term, however, is widely recognized in the VR community as a **ha ha only serious** projection of things to come. "When we can sustain a multi-sensory surround good enough for teledildonics, *then* we'll know we're getting somewhere." See also **hot chat**.

Node:Telerat, Next:TELNET, Previous:teledildonics, Up:= T =

Telerat /tel'*-rat/ n. obs.

Unflattering hackerism for `Teleray', a now-extinct line of extremely losing terminals. Compare **AIDX**, **Macintrash** **Nominal Semidestructor**, **ScumOS**, **sun-stools**, **HP-SUX**, **Slowlaris**.

Node:TELNET, Next:ten-finger interface, Previous:Telerat, Up:= T =

TELNET /tel'net/ vt.

(also commonly lowercased as `telnet') To communicate with another Internet host using the TELNET (**RFC** 854) protocol (usually using a program of the same name). TOPS-10 people used the word IMPCOM, since that was the program name for them. Sometimes abbreviated to TN /T-N/. "I usually TN over to SAIL just to read the AP News."

Node:ten-finger interface, Next:tense, Previous:TELNET, Up:= T =

ten-finger interface n.

The interface between two networks that cannot be directly connected for security reasons; refers to the practice of placing two terminals side by side and having an operator read from one and type into the other.

Node:tense, Next:tentacle, Previous:ten-finger interface, Up:= T =

tense adj.

Of programs, very clever and efficient. A tense piece of code often got that way because it was highly **bum**med, but sometimes it was just based on a great idea. A comment in a clever routine by Mike Kazar, once a grad-student hacker at CMU: "This routine is so tense it will bring tears to your eyes." A tense programmer is one who produces tense code.

Node:tentacle, Next:tenured graduate student, Previous:tense, Up:= T =

tentacle n.

A covert **pseudo**, sense 1. An artificial identity created in cyberspace for nefarious and deceptive purposes. The implication is that a single person may have multiple tentacles. This term was originally floated in some paranoid ravings on the cypherpunks list (see **cypherpunk**), and adopted in a spirit of irony by other, saner members. It has since shown up, used seriously, in the documentation for some remailer software, and is now (1994) widely recognized on the net.

Node:tenured graduate student, Next:tera-, Previous:tentacle, Up:= T =

tenured graduate student n.

One who has been in graduate school for 10 years (the usual maximum is 5 or 6): a `ten-yeared' student (get it?). Actually, this term may be used of any grad student beginning in his seventh year. Students don't really get tenure, of course, the way professors do, but a tenth-year graduate student has probably been around the university longer than any untenured professor.

Node:tera-, Next:teraflop club, Previous:tenured graduate student, Up:= T =

tera- /te'r*/ pref.

[SI] See **quantifiers**.

Node:teraflop club, Next:terminak, Previous:tera-, Up:= T =

teraflop club /te'r*-flop kluhb/ n.

[FLOP = Floating Point Operation] A mythical association of people who consume outrageous amounts of computer time in order to produce a few simple pictures of glass balls with intricate ray-tracing techniques. Caltech professor James Kajiya is said to have been the founder. Compare **Knights of the Lambda Calculus**.

Node:terminak, Next:terminal brain death, Previous:teraflop club, Up:= T =

terminak /ter'mi-nak`/ n.

[Caltech, ca. 1979] Any malfunctioning computer terminal. A common failure mode of Lear-Siegler ADM 3a terminals caused the `L' key to produce the `K' code instead; complaints about this tended to look like "Terminak #3 has a bad keyboard. Pkease fix." Compare **dread high-bit disease**, **frogging**; see also **AIDX**, **Nominal Semidestructor**, **ScumOS**, **sun-stools**, **Telerat**, **HP-SUX**, **Slowlaris**.

Node:terminal brain death, Next:terminal illness, Previous:terminak, Up:= T =

terminal brain death n.

The extreme form of **terminal illness** (sense 1). What someone who has obviously been hacking continuously for far too long is said to be suffering from.

Node:terminal illness, Next:terminal junkie, Previous:terminal brain death, Up:= T =

terminal illness n.

1. Syn. **raster burn**. 2. The `burn-in' condition your CRT tends to get if you don't have a screen saver.

Node:terminal junkie, Next:terpri, Previous:terminal illness, Up:= T =

terminal junkie n.

[UK] A **wannabee** or early **larval stage** hacker who spends most of his or her time wandering the directory tree and writing **noddy** programs just to get a fix of computer time. Variants include `terminal jockey', `console junkie', and **console jockey**. The term `console jockey' seems to imply more expertise than the other three (possibly because of the exalted status of the **console** relative to an ordinary terminal). See also **twink**, **read-only user**. Appropriately, this term was used in the works of William S. Burroughs to describe a heroin addict with an unlimited supply.

Node:terpri, Next:test, Previous:terminal junkie, Up:= T =

terpri /ter'pree/ vi.

[from LISP 1.5 (and later, MacLISP)] To output a **newline**. Now rare as jargon, though still used as techspeak in Common LISP. It is a contraction of `TERminate PRInt line', named for the fact that, on some early OSes and hardware, no characters would be printed until a complete line was formed, so this operation terminated the line and emitted the output.

Node:test, Next:TeX, Previous:terpri, Up:= T =

test n.

1. Real users bashing on a prototype long enough to get thoroughly acquainted with it, with careful monitoring and followup of the results. 2. Some bored random user trying a couple of the simpler features

with a developer looking over his or her shoulder, ready to pounce on mistakes. Judging by the quality of most software, the second definition is far more prevalent. See also **demo**.

Node:TeX, Next:text, Previous:test, Up:= T =

TeX /tekh/ n.

An extremely powerful **macro**-based text formatter written by Donald E. **Knuth**, very popular in the computer-science community (it is good enough to have displaced Unix **troff**, the other favored formatter, even at many Unix installations). TeX fans insist on the correct (guttural) pronunciation, and the correct spelling (all caps, squished together, with the E depressed below the baseline; the mixed-case `TeX' is considered an acceptable kluge on ASCII-only devices). Fans like to proliferate names from the word `TeX' -- such as TeXnician (TeX user), TeXhacker (TeX programmer), TeXmaster (competent TeX programmer), TeXhax, and TeXnique. See also **CrApTeX**.

Knuth began TeX because he had become annoyed at the declining quality of the typesetting in volumes I-III of his monumental "Art of Computer Programming" (see **Knuth**, also **bible**). In a manifestation of the typical hackish urge to solve the problem at hand once and for all, he began to design his own typesetting language. He thought he would finish it on his sabbatical in 1978; he was wrong by only about 8 years. The language was finally frozen around 1985, but volume IV of "The Art of Computer Programming" is not expected to appear until 2002. The impact and influence of TeX's design has been such that nobody minds this very much. Many grand hackish projects have started as a bit of **toolsmith**ing on the way to something else; Knuth's diversion was simply on a grander scale than most.

TeX has also been a noteworthy example of free, shared, but high-quality software. Knuth offers a monetary awards to anyone who found and reported bugs dating from before the 1989 code freeze; as the years wore on and the few remaining bugs were fixed (and new ones even harder to find), the bribe went up. Though well-written, TeX is so large (and so full of cutting edge technique) that it is said to have unearthed at least one bug in every Pascal system it has been compiled with.

Node:text, Next:thanks in advance, Previous:TeX, Up:= T =

text n.

1. [techspeak] Executable code, esp. a `pure code' portion shared between multiple instances of a program running in a multitasking OS. Compare **English**. 2. Textual material in the mainstream sense; data in ordinary **ASCII** or **EBCDIC** representation (see **flat-ASCII**). "Those are text files; you can review them using the editor." These two contradictory senses confuse hackers, too.

Node:thanks in advance, Next:That's not a bug that's a feature!, Previous:text, Up:= T =

thanks in advance

[Usenet] Conventional net.politeness ending a posted request for information or assistance. Sometimes written `advTHANKSance' or `aTdHvAaNnKcSe' or abbreviated `TIA'. See **net.-**, **netiquette**.

Node:That's not a bug that's a feature!, Next:the literature, Previous:thanks in advance, Up:= T =

That's not a bug, that's a feature!

The **canonical** first parry in a debate about a purported bug. The complainant, if unconvinced, is likely to retort that the bug is then at best a **misfeature**. See also **feature**.

Node:the literature, Next:the network, Previous:That's not a bug that's a feature!, Up:= T =

the literature n.

Computer-science journals and other publications, vaguely gestured at to answer a question that the speaker believes is **trivial**. Thus, one might answer an annoying question by saying "It's in the literature." Oppose **Knuth**, which has no connotation of triviality.

Node:the network, Next:the X that can be Y is not the true X, Previous:the literature, Up:= T =

the network n.

1. Historicaslly, the union of all the major noncommercial, academic, and hacker-oriented networks, such as Internet, the pre-1990 ARPANET, NSFnet, **BITNET**, and the virtual UUCP and **Usenet** `networks', plus the corporate in-house networks and commercial time-sharing services (such as CompuServe, GEnie and AOL) that gateway to them. A site is generally considered `on the network' if it can be reached through some combination of Internet-style (@-sign) and UUCP (bang-path) addresses. See **Internet**, **bang path**, **Internet address**, **network address**. 2. Following the mass-culture discovery of the Internet in 1994 and subsequent proliferation of cheap TCP/IP connections, "the network" is increasingly synonymous with the Internet itself (as it was before the second wave of wide-area computer networking began around 1980). 3. A fictional conspiracy of libertarian hacker-subversives and anti-authoritarian monkeywrenchers described in Robert Anton Wilson's novel "Schrödinger's Cat", to which many hackers have subsequently decided they belong (this is an example of **ha ha only serious**).

In sense 1, `the network' is often abbreviated to `the net'. "Are you on the net?" is a frequent question when hackers first meet face to face, and "See you on the net!" is a frequent goodbye.

Node:the X that can be Y is not the true X, Next:theology, Previous:the network, Up:= T =

the X that can be Y is not the true X

Yet another instance of hackerdom's peculiar attraction to mystical references -- a common humorous way of making exclusive statements about a class of things. The template is from the "Tao te Ching": "The Tao which can be spoken of is not the true Tao." The implication is often that the X is a mystery accessible only to the enlightened. See the **trampoline** entry for an example, and compare **has the X nature**.

Node:theology, Next:theory, Previous:the X that can be Y is not the true X, Up:= T =

theology n.

1. Ironically or humorously used to refer to **religious issues**. 2. Technical fine points of an abstruse nature, esp. those where the resolution is of theoretical interest but is relatively **marginal** with respect to actual use of a design or system. Used esp. around software issues with a heavy AI or language-design component, such as the smart-data vs. smart-programs dispute in AI.

Node:theory, Next:thinko, Previous:theology, Up:= T =

theory n.

The consensus, idea, plan, story, or set of rules that is currently being used to inform a behavior. This usage is a generalization and (deliberate) abuse of the technical meaning. "What's the theory on fixing this TECO loss?" "What's the theory on dinner tonight?" ("Chinatown, I guess.") "What's the current theory on letting lusers on during the day?" "The theory behind this change is to fix the following well-known screw...."

Node:thinko, Next:This can't happen, Previous:theory, Up:= T =

thinko /thing'koh/ n.

[by analogy with `typo'] A momentary, correctable glitch in mental processing, especially one involving recall of information learned by rote; a bubble in the stream of consciousness. Syn. **braino**; see also **brain fart**. Compare **mouso**.

Node:This can't happen, Next:This time for sure!, Previous:thinko, Up:= T =

This can't happen

Less clipped variant of **can't happen**.

Node:This time for sure!, Next:thrash, Previous:This can't happen, Up:= T =

This time, for sure! excl.

Ritual affirmation frequently uttered during protracted debugging sessions involving numerous small obstacles (e.g., attempts to bring up a UUCP connection). For the proper effect, this must be uttered in a fruity imitation of Bullwinkle J. Moose. Also heard: "Hey, Rocky! Watch me pull a rabbit out of my hat!" The **canonical** response is, of course, "But that trick *never* works!" See **hacker humor**.

Node:thrash, Next:thread, Previous:This time for sure!, Up:= T =

thrash vi.

To move wildly or violently, without accomplishing anything useful. Paging or swapping systems that are overloaded waste most of their time moving data into and out of core (rather than performing useful computation) and are therefore said to thrash. Someone who keeps changing his mind (esp. about what to work on next) is said to be thrashing. A person frantically trying to execute too many tasks at once (and not spending enough time on any single task) may also be described as thrashing. Compare **multitask**.

Node:thread, Next:three-finger salute, Previous:thrash, Up:= T =

thread n.

[Usenet, GEnie, CompuServe] Common abbreviation of `topic thread', a more or less continuous chain of

postings on a single topic. To `follow a thread' is to read a series of Usenet postings sharing a common subject or (more correctly) which are connected by Reference headers. The better newsreaders can present news in thread order automatically. Not to be confused with the techspeak sense of `thread', e.g. a lightweight process.

Interestingly, this is far from a neologism. The OED says: "That which connects the successive points in anything, esp. a narrative, train of thought, or the like; the sequence of events or ideas continuing throughout the whole course of anything;" Citations are given going back to 1642!

Node:three-finger salute, Next:throwaway account, Previous:thread, Up:= T =

three-finger salute n.

Syn. **Vulcan nerve pinch**.

Node:throwaway account, Next:thud, Previous:three-finger salute, Up:= T =

throwaway account n.

1. An inexpensive Internet account purchased on a legitimate **ISP** for the the sole purpose of spewing **spam**. 2. An inexpensive Internet account obtained for the sole purpose of doing something which requires a valid email address but being able to ignore spam since the user will not look at the account again.

Node:thud, Next:thumb, Previous:throwaway account, Up:= T =

thud n.

1. Yet another **metasyntactic variable** (see **foo**). It is reported that at CMU from the mid-1970s the canonical series of these was `foo', `bar', `thud', `blat'. 2. Rare term for the hash character, `#' (ASCII 0100011). See **ASCII** for other synonyms.

Node:thumb, Next:thundering herd problem, Previous:thud, Up:= T =

thumb n.

The slider on a window-system scrollbar. So called because moving it allows you to browse through the contents of a text window in a way analogous to thumbing through a book.

Node:thundering herd problem, Next:thunk, Previous:thumb, Up:= T =

thundering herd problem

Scheduler thrashing. This can happen under Unix when you have a number of processes that are waiting on a single event. When that event (a connection to the web server, say) happens, every process which could possibly handle the event is awakened. In the end, only one of those processes will actually be able to do the work, but, in the meantime, all the others wake up and contend for CPU time before being put back to sleep. Thus the system thrashes briefly while a herd of processes thunders through. If this starts to

happen many times per second, the performance impact can be significant.

Node:thunk, Next:tick, Previous:thundering herd problem, Up:= T =

thunk /thuhnk/ n.

1. [obs.]"A piece of coding which provides an address", according to P. Z. Ingerman, who invented thunks in 1961 as a way of binding actual parameters to their formal definitions in Algol-60 procedure calls. If a procedure is called with an expression in the place of a formal parameter, the compiler generates a thunk which computes the expression and leaves the address of the result in some standard location. 2. Later generalized into: an expression, frozen together with its environment, for later evaluation if and when needed (similar to what in techspeak is called a `closure'). The process of unfreezing these thunks is called `forcing'. 3. A **stubroutine**, in an overlay programming environment, that loads and jumps to the correct overlay. Compare **trampoline**. 4. People and activities scheduled in a thunklike manner. "It occurred to me the other day that I am rather accurately modeled by a thunk -- I frequently need to be forced to completion." -- paraphrased from a **plan file**.

Historical note: There are a couple of onomatopoeic myths circulating about the origin of this term. The most common is that it is the sound made by data hitting the stack; another holds that the sound is that of the data hitting an accumulator. Yet another suggests that it is the sound of the expression being unfrozen at argument-evaluation time. In fact, according to the inventors, it was coined after they realized (in the wee hours after hours of discussion) that the type of an argument in Algol-60 could be figured out in advance with a little compile-time thought, simplifying the evaluation machinery. In other words, it had `already been thought of'; thus it was christened a `thunk', which is "the past tense of `think' at two in the morning".

Node:tick, Next:tick-list features, Previous:thunk, Up:= T =

tick n.

1. A **jiffy** (sense 1). 2. In simulations, the discrete unit of time that passes between iterations of the simulation mechanism. In AI applications, this amount of time is often left unspecified, since the only constraint of interest is the ordering of events. This sort of AI simulation is often pejoratively referred to as `tick-tick-tick' simulation, especially when the issue of simultaneity of events with long, independent chains of causes is **handwave**d. 3. In the FORTH language, a single quote character.

Node:tick-list features, Next:tickle a bug, Previous:tick, Up:= T =

tick-list features n.

[Acorn Computers] Features in software or hardware that customers insist on but never use (calculators in desktop TSRs and that sort of thing). The American equivalent would be `checklist features', but this jargon sense of the phrase has not been reported.

Node:tickle a bug, Next:tiger team, Previous:tick-list features, Up:= T =

tickle a bug vt.

To cause a normally hidden bug to manifest itself through some known series of inputs or operations. "You can tickle the bug in the Paradise VGA card's highlight handling by trying to set bright yellow

reverse video."

Node:tiger team, Next:time bomb, Previous:tickle a bug, Up:= T =

tiger team n.

[U.S. military jargon] 1. Originally, a team (of **sneaker**s) whose purpose is to penetrate security, and thus test security measures. These people are paid professionals who do hacker-type tricks, e.g., leave cardboard signs saying "bomb" in critical defense installations, hand-lettered notes saying "Your codebooks have been stolen" (they usually haven't been) inside safes, etc. After a successful penetration, some high-ranking security type shows up the next morning for a `security review' and finds the sign, note, etc., and all hell breaks loose. Serious successes of tiger teams sometimes lead to early retirement for base commanders and security officers (see the **patch** entry for an example). 2. Recently, and more generally, any official inspection team or special **firefighting** group called in to look at a problem.

A subset of tiger teams are professional **cracker**s, testing the security of military computer installations by attempting remote attacks via networks or supposedly `secure' comm channels. Some of their escapades, if declassified, would probably rank among the greatest hacks of all times. The term has been adopted in commercial computer-security circles in this more specific sense.

Node:time bomb, Next:time sink, Previous:tiger team, Up:= T =

time bomb n.

A subspecies of **logic bomb** that is triggered by reaching some preset time, either once or periodically. There are numerous legends about time bombs set up by programmers in their employers' machines, to go off if the programmer is fired or laid off and is not present to perform the appropriate suppressing action periodically.

Interestingly, the only such incident for which we have been pointed to documentary evidence took place in the Soviet Union in 1986! A disgruntled programmer at the Volga Automobile Plant (where the Fiat clones called Ladas were manufactured) planted a time bomb which, a week after he'd left on vacation, stopped the entire main assembly line for a day. The case attracted lots of attention in the Soviet Union because it was the first cracking case to make it to court there. The perpetrator got a suspended sentence of 3 years in jail and was barred from future work as a programmer.

Node:time sink, Next:time T, Previous:time bomb, Up:= T =

time sink n.

[poss. by analogy with `heat sink' or `current sink'] A project that consumes unbounded amounts of time.

Node:time T, Next:times-or-divided-by, Previous:time sink, Up:= T =

time T /ti:m T/ n.

1. An unspecified but usually well-understood time, often used in conjunction with a later time T+1. "We'll meet on campus at time T or at Louie's at time T+1" means, in the context of going out for dinner: "We can meet on campus and go to Louie's, or we can meet at Louie's itself a bit later." (Louie's was a Chinese restaurant in Palo Alto that was a favorite with hackers.) Had the number 30 been used instead of

the number 1, it would have implied that the travel time from campus to Louie's is 30 minutes; whatever time T is (and that hasn't been decided on yet), you can meet half an hour later at Louie's than you could on campus and end up eating at the same time. See also **since time T equals minus infinity**.

Node:times-or-divided-by, Next:TINC, Previous:time T, Up:= T =

times-or-divided-by quant.

[by analogy with `plus-or-minus'] Term occasionally used when describing the uncertainty associated with a scheduling estimate, for either humorous or brutally honest effect. For a software project, the scheduling uncertainty factor is usually at least 2.

Node:TINC, Next:Tinkerbell program, Previous:times-or-divided-by, Up:= T =

TINC //

[Usenet] Abbreviation: "There Is No Cabal". See **backbone cabal** and **NANA**, but note that this abbreviation did not enter use until long after the dispersal of the backbone cabal.

Node:Tinkerbell program, Next:TINLC, Previous:TINC, Up:= T =

Tinkerbell program n.

[Great Britain] A monitoring program used to scan incoming network calls and generate alerts when calls are received from particular sites, or when logins are attempted using certain IDs. Named after `Project Tinkerbell', an experimental phone-tapping program developed by British Telecom in the early 1980s.

Node:TINLC, Next:tip of the ice-cube, Previous:Tinkerbell program, Up:= T =

TINLC //

Abbreviation: "There Is No Lumber Cartel". See **Lumber Cartel**. TINLC is a takeoff on **TINC**.

Node:tip of the ice-cube, Next:tired iron, Previous:TINLC, Up:= T =

tip of the ice-cube n. //

[IBM] The visible part of something small and insignificant. Used as an ironic comment in situations where `tip of the iceberg' might be appropriate if the subject were at all important.

Node:tired iron, Next:tits on a keyboard, Previous:tip of the ice-cube, Up:= T =

tired iron n.

[IBM] Hardware that is perfectly functional but far enough behind the state of the art to have been superseded by new products, presumably with sufficient improvement in bang-per-buck that the old stuff

is starting to look a bit like a **dinosaur**.

Node:tits on a keyboard, Next:TLA, Previous:tired iron, Up:= T =

tits on a keyboard n.

Small bumps on certain keycaps to keep touch-typists registered. Usually on the `5` of a numeric keypad, and on the `F` and `J` of a **QWERTY** keyboard; but older Macs, perverse as usual, had them on the `D` and `K` keys (this changed in 1999).

Node:TLA, Next:(TM), Previous:tits on a keyboard, Up:= T =

TLA /T-L-A/ n.

[Three-Letter Acronym] 1. Self-describing abbreviation for a species with which computing terminology is infested. 2. Any confusing acronym. Examples include MCA, FTP, SNA, CPU, MMU, SCCS, DMU, FPU, NNTP, TLA. People who like this looser usage argue that not all TLAs have three letters, just as not all four-letter words have four letters. One also hears of `ETLA' (Extended Three-Letter Acronym, pronounced /ee tee el ay/) being used to describe four-letter acronyms. The term `SFLA' (Stupid Four-Letter Acronym) has also been reported. See also **YABA**.

The self-effacing phrase "TDM TLA" (Too Damn Many...) is often used to bemoan the plethora of TLAs in use. In 1989, a random of the journalistic persuasion asked hacker Paul Boutin "What do you think will be the biggest problem in computing in the 90s?" Paul's straight-faced response: "There are only 17,000 three-letter acronyms." (To be exact, there are 26^3 = 17,576.) There is probably some karmic justice in the fact that Paul Boutin subsequently became a journalist.

Node:(TM), Next:TMRC, Previous:TLA, Up:= T =

(TM) //

[Usenet] ASCII rendition of the trademark-superscript symbol appended to phrases that the author feels should be recorded for posterity, perhaps in future editions of this lexicon. Sometimes used ironically as a form of protest against the recent spate of software and algorithm patents and `look and feel' lawsuits. See also **UN*X**.

Node:TMRC, Next:TMRCie, Previous:(TM), Up:= T =

TMRC /tmerk'/ n.

The Tech Model Railroad Club at MIT, one of the wellsprings of hacker culture. The 1959 "Dictionary of the TMRC Language" compiled by Peter Samson included several terms that became basics of the hackish vocabulary (see esp. **foo**, **mung**, and **frob**).

By 1962, TMRC's legendary layout was already a marvel of complexity and has grown in the years since. All the features described here were still present when the old layout was decomissioned in 1998 just before the demolition of MIT Building 20, and will almost certainly be retained when the old layout is rebuilt (expected in 2003). The control system alone featured about 1200 relays. There were **scram switch**es located at numerous places around the room that could be thwacked if something undesirable

was about to occur, such as a train going full-bore at an obstruction. Another feature of the system was a digital clock on the dispatch board, which was itself something of a wonder in those bygone days before cheap LEDs and seven-segment displays. When someone hit a scram switch the clock stopped and the display was replaced with the word `FOO'; at TMRC the scram switches are therefore called `foo switches'.

Steven Levy, in his book "Hackers" (see the **Bibliography** in Appendix C), gives a stimulating account of those early years. TMRC's Signals and Power Committee included many of the early PDP-1 hackers and the people who later became the core of the MIT AI Lab staff. Thirty years later that connection is still very much alive, and this lexicon accordingly includes a number of entries from a recent revision of the TMRC dictionary.

TMRC has a web page at http://web.mit.edu/tmrc/www/.

Node:TMRCie, Next:TMTOWTDI, Previous:TMRC, Up:= T =

TMRCie /tmerk'ee/, n.

[MIT] A denizen of **TMRC**.

Node:TMTOWTDI, Next:to a first approximation, Previous:TMRCie, Up:= T =

TMTOWTDI

There's More Than One Way To Do It. This abbreviation of the official motto of **Perl** is frequently used on newsgroups and mailing lists related to that language.

Node:to a first approximation, Next:to a zeroth approximation, Previous:TMTOWTDI, Up:= T =

to a first approximation adj.

1. [techspeak] When one is doing certain numerical computations, an approximate solution may be computed by any of several heuristic methods, then refined to a final value. By using the starting point of a first approximation of the answer, one can write an algorithm that converges more quickly to the correct result. 2. In jargon, a preface to any comment that indicates that the comment is only approximately true. The remark "To a first approximation, I feel good" might indicate that deeper questioning would reveal that not all is perfect (e.g., a nagging cough still remains after an illness).

Node:to a zeroth approximation, Next:toad, Previous:to a first approximation, Up:= T =

to a zeroth approximation

[from `to a first approximation'] A *really* sloppy approximation; a wild guess. Compare **social science number**.

Node:toad, Next:toast, Previous:to a zeroth approximation, Up:= T =

toad vt. [MUD]

1. Notionally, to change a **MUD** player into a toad. 2. To permanently and totally exile a player from the MUD. A very serious action, which can only be done by a MUD **wizard**; often involves a lot of debate among the other characters first. See also **frog**, **FOD**.

Node:toast, Next:toaster, Previous:toad, Up:= T =

toast 1. n.

Any completely inoperable system or component, esp. one that has just crashed and burned: "Uh, oh ... I think the serial board is toast." 2. vt. To cause a system to crash accidentally, especially in a manner that requires manual rebooting. "Rick just toasted the **firewall machine** again." Compare **fried**.

Node:toaster, Next:toeprint, Previous:toast, Up:= T =

toaster n.

1. The archetypal really stupid application for an embedded microprocessor controller; often used in comments that imply that a scheme is inappropriate technology (but see **elevator controller**). "**DWIM** for an assembler? That'd be as silly as running Unix on your toaster!" 2. A very, very dumb computer. "You could run this program on any dumb toaster." See **bitty box**, **Get a real computer!**, **toy**, **beige toaster**. 3. A Macintosh, esp. the Classic Mac. Some hold that this is implied by sense 2. 4. A peripheral device. "I bought my box without toasters, but since then I've added two boards and a second disk drive." 5. A specialized computer used as an appliance. See **web toaster**, **video toaster**.

Node:toeprint, Next:toggle, Previous:toaster, Up:= T =

toeprint n.

A **footprint** of especially small size.

Node:toggle, Next:tool, Previous:toeprint, Up:= T =

toggle vt.

To change a **bit** from whatever state it is in to the other state; to change from 1 to 0 or from 0 to 1. This comes from `toggle switches', such as standard light switches, though the word `toggle' actually refers to the mechanism that keeps the switch in the position to which it is flipped rather than to the fact that the switch has two positions. There are four things you can do to a bit: set it (force it to be 1), clear (or zero) it, leave it alone, or toggle it. (Mathematically, one would say that there are four distinct boolean-valued functions of one boolean argument, but saying that is much less fun than talking about toggling bits.)

Node:tool, Next:toolsmith, Previous:toggle, Up:= T =

tool 1. n.

A program used primarily to create, manipulate, modify, or analyze other programs, such as a compiler or an editor or a cross-referencing program. Oppose **app**, **operating system**. 2. [Unix] An application program with a simple, `transparent' (typically text-stream) interface designed specifically to be used in

programmed combination with other tools (see **filter**, **plumbing**). 3. [MIT: general to students there] vi. To work; to study (connotes tedium). The TMRC Dictionary defined this as "to set one's brain to the grindstone". See **hack**. 4. n. [MIT] A student who studies too much and hacks too little. (MIT's student humor magazine rejoices in the name "Tool and Die".)

Node:toolsmith, Next:toor, Previous:tool, Up:= T =

toolsmith n.

The software equivalent of a tool-and-die specialist; one who specializes in making the **tool**s with which other programmers create applications. Many hackers consider this more fun than applications per se; to understand why, see **uninteresting**. Jon Bentley, in the "Bumper-Sticker Computer Science" chapter of his book "More Programming Pearls", quotes Dick Sites from **DEC** as saying "I'd rather write programs to write programs than write programs".

Node:toor, Next:topic drift, Previous:toolsmith, Up:= T =

toor n.

The Bourne-Again Super-user. An alternate account with UID of 0, created on Unix machines where the root user has an inconvenient choice of shell. Compare **avatar**.

Node:topic drift, Next:topic group, Previous:toor, Up:= T =

topic drift n.

Term used on GEnie, Usenet and other electronic fora to describe the tendency of a **thread** to drift away from the original subject of discussion (and thus, from the Subject header of the originating message), or the results of that tendency. The header in each post can be changed to keep current with the posts, but usually isn't due to forgetfulness or laziness. A single post may often result in several posts each responding to a different point in the original. Some subthreads will actually be in response to some off-the-cuff side comment, possibly degenerating into a **flame war**, or just as often evolving into a separate discussion. Hence, discussions aren't really so much threads as they are trees. Except that they don't really have leaves, or multiple branching roots; usually some lines of discussion will just sort of die off after everyone gets tired of them. This could take anywhere from hours to weeks, or even longer.

The term `topic drift' is often used in gentle reminders that the discussion has strayed off any useful track. "I think we started with a question about Niven's last book, but we've ended up discussing the sexual habits of the common marmoset. Now *that's* topic drift!"

Node:topic group, Next:TOPS-10, Previous:topic drift, Up:= T =

topic group n.

Syn. **forum**.

Node:TOPS-10, Next:TOPS-20, Previous:topic group, Up:= T =

TOPS-10 /tops-ten/ n.

DEC's proprietary OS for the fabled **PDP-10** machines, long a favorite of hackers but now effectively extinct. A fountain of hacker folklore; see Appendix A. See also **ITS**, **TOPS-20**, **TWENEX**, **VMS**, **operating system**. TOPS-10 was sometimes called BOTS-10 (from `bottoms-ten') as a comment on the inappropriateness of describing it as the top of anything.

Node:TOPS-20, Next:tourist, Previous:TOPS-10, Up:= T =

TOPS-20 /tops-twen'tee/ n.

See **TWENEX**.

Node:tourist, Next:tourist information, Previous:TOPS-20, Up:= T =

tourist n.

1. [ITS] A guest on the system, especially one who generally logs in over a network from a remote location for **comm mode**, email, games, and other trivial purposes. One step below **luser**. ITS hackers often used to spell this **turist**, perhaps by some sort of tenuous analogy with **luser** (this usage may also have expressed the ITS culture's penchant for six-letterisms, and-or been some sort of tribute to Alan Turing). Compare **twink**, **lurker**, **read-only user**. 2. [IRC] An **IRC** user who goes from channel to channel without saying anything; see **channel hopping**.

Node:tourist information, Next:touristic, Previous:tourist, Up:= T =

tourist information n.

Information in an on-line display that is not immediately useful, but contributes to a viewer's gestalt of what's going on with the software or hardware behind it. Whether a given piece of info falls in this category depends partly on what the user is looking for at any given time. The `bytes free' information at the bottom of an MS-DOS `dir` display is tourist information; so (most of the time) is the TIME information in a Unix `ps(1)` display.

Node:touristic, Next:toy, Previous:tourist information, Up:= T =

touristic adj.

Having the quality of a **tourist**. Often used as a pejorative, as in `losing touristic scum'. Often spelled `turistic' or `turistik', so that phrase might be more properly rendered `lusing turistic scum'.

Node:toy, Next:toy language, Previous:touristic, Up:= T =

toy n.

A computer system; always used with qualifiers. 1. `nice toy': One that supports the speaker's hacking style adequately. 2. `just a toy': A machine that yields insufficient **computron**s for the speaker's preferred uses. This is not condemnatory, as is **bitty box**; toys can at least be fun. It is also strongly conditioned by

one's expectations; Cray XMP users sometimes consider the Cray-1 a `toy', and certainly all RISC boxes and mainframes are toys by their standards. See also **Get a real computer!**.

Node:toy language, Next:toy problem, Previous:toy, Up:= T =

toy language n.

A language useful for instructional purposes or as a proof-of-concept for some aspect of computer-science theory, but inadequate for general-purpose programming. **Bad Thing**s can result when a toy language is promoted as a general purpose solution for programming (see **bondage-and-discipline language**); the classic example is **Pascal**. Several moderately well-known formalisms for conceptual tasks such as programming Turing machines also qualify as toy languages in a less negative sense. See also **MFTL**.

Node:toy problem, Next:toy program, Previous:toy language, Up:= T =

toy problem n.

[AI] A deliberately oversimplified case of a challenging problem used to investigate, prototype, or test algorithms for a real problem. Sometimes used pejoratively. See also **gedanken**, **toy program**.

Node:toy program, Next:trampoline, Previous:toy problem, Up:= T =

toy program n.

1. One that can be readily comprehended; hence, a trivial program (compare **noddy**). 2. One for which the effort of initial coding dominates the costs through its life cycle. See also **noddy**.

Node:trampoline, Next:trap, Previous:toy program, Up:= T =

trampoline n.

An incredibly **hairy** technique, found in some **HLL** and program-overlay implementations (e.g., on the Macintosh), that involves on-the-fly generation of small executable (and, likely as not, self-modifying) code objects to do indirection between code sections. These pieces of **live data** are called `trampolines'. Trampolines are notoriously difficult to understand in action; in fact, it is said by those who use this term that the trampoline that doesn't bend your brain is not the true trampoline. See also **snap**.

Node:trap, Next:trap door, Previous:trampoline, Up:= T =

trap

1. n. A program interrupt, usually an interrupt caused by some exceptional situation in the user program. In most cases, the OS performs some action, then returns control to the program. 2. vi. To cause a trap. "These instructions trap to the monitor." Also used transitively to indicate the cause of the trap. "The monitor traps all input/output instructions."

This term is associated with assembler programming (`interrupt' or `exception' is more common among

HLL programmers) and appears to be fading into history among programmers as the role of assembler continues to shrink. However, it is still important to computer architects and systems hackers (see **system**, sense 1), who use it to distinguish deterministically repeatable exceptions from timing-dependent ones (such as I/O interrupts).

Node:trap door, Next:trash, Previous:trap, Up:= T =

trap door n.

(alt. `trapdoor') 1. Syn. **back door** -- a **Bad Thing**. 2. [techspeak] A `trap-door function' is one which is easy to compute but very difficult to compute the inverse of. Such functions are **Good Thing**s with important applications in cryptography, specifically in the construction of public-key cryptosystems.

Node:trash, Next:trawl, Previous:trap door, Up:= T =

trash vt.

To destroy the contents of (said of a data structure). The most common of the family of near-synonyms including **mung**, **mangle**, and **scribble**.

Node:trawl, Next:tree-killer, Previous:trash, Up:= T =

trawl v.

To sift through large volumes of data (e.g., Usenet postings, FTP archives, or the Jargon File) looking for something of interest.

Node:tree-killer, Next:treeware, Previous:trawl, Up:= T =

tree-killer n.

[Sun] 1. A printer. 2. A person who wastes paper. This epithet should be interpreted in a broad sense; `wasting paper' includes the production of **spiffy** but **content-free** documents. Thus, most **suit**s are tree-killers. The negative loading of this term may reflect the epithet `tree-killer' applied by Treebeard the Ent to the Orcs in J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" (see also **elvish**, **elder days**).

Node:treeware, Next:trit, Previous:tree-killer, Up:= T =

treeware /tree'weir/ n.

Printouts, books, and other information media made from pulped dead trees. Compare **tree-killer**, see **documentation**.

Node:trit, Next:trivial, Previous:treeware, Up:= T =

trit /trit/ n.

[by analogy with `bit'] One base-3 digit; the amount of information conveyed by a selection among one of three equally likely outcomes (see also **bit**). Trits arise, for example, in the context of a **flag** that should actually be able to assume *three* values -- such as yes, no, or unknown. Trits are sometimes jokingly called `3-state bits'. A trit may be semi-seriously referred to as `a bit and a half', although it is linearly equivalent to 1.5849625 bits (that is, log2(3) bits).

Node:trivial, Next:troff, Previous:trit, Up:= T =

trivial adj.

1. Too simple to bother detailing. 2. Not worth the speaker's time. 3. Complex, but solvable by methods so well known that anyone not utterly **cretinous** would have thought of them already. 4. Any problem one has already solved (some claim that hackish `trivial' usually evaluates to `I've seen it before'). Hackers' notions of triviality may be quite at variance with those of non-hackers. See **nontrivial**, **uninteresting**.

The physicist Richard Feynman, who had the hacker nature to an amazing degree (see his essay "Los Alamos From Below" in "Surely You're Joking, Mr. Feynman!"), defined `trivial theorem' as "one that has already been proved".

Node:troff, Next:troglodyte, Previous:trivial, Up:= T =

troff /T'rof/ or /trof/ n.

[Unix] The gray eminence of Unix text processing; a formatting and phototypesetting program, written originally in PDP-11 assembler and then in barely-structured early C by the late Joseph Ossanna, modeled after the earlier ROFF which was in turn modeled after the **Multics** and **CTSS** program RUNOFF by Jerome Saltzer (*that* name came from the expression "to run off a copy"). A companion program, **nroff**, formats output for terminals and line printers.

In 1979, Brian Kernighan modified troff so that it could drive phototypesetters other than the Graphic Systems CAT. His paper describing that work ("A Typesetter-independent troff," AT&T CSTR #97) explains troff's durability. After discussing the program's "obvious deficiencies -- a rebarbative input syntax, mysterious and undocumented properties in some areas, and a voracious appetite for computer resources" and noting the ugliness and extreme hairiness of the code and internals, Kernighan concludes:

> None of these remarks should be taken as denigrating Ossanna's accomplishment with TROFF. It has proven a remarkably robust tool, taking unbelievable abuse from a variety of preprocessors and being forced into uses that were never conceived of in the original design, all with considerable grace under fire.

The success of **TeX** and desktop publishing systems have reduced `troff`'s relative importance, but this tribute perfectly captures the strengths that secured `troff` a place in hacker folklore; indeed, it could be taken more generally as an indication of those qualities of good programs that, in the long run, hackers most admire.

Node:troglodyte, Next:troglodyte mode, Previous:troff, Up:= T =

troglodyte n.

[Commodore] 1. A hacker who never leaves his cubicle. The term `gnoll' (from Dungeons & Dragons) is

also reported. 2. A curmudgeon attached to an obsolescent computing environment. The combination `ITS troglodyte' was flung around some during the Usenet and email wringle-wrangle attending the 2.x.x revision of the Jargon File; at least one of the people it was intended to describe adopted it with pride.

Node:troglodyte mode, Next:Trojan horse, Previous:troglodyte, Up:= T =

troglodyte mode n.

[Rice University] Programming with the lights turned off, sunglasses on, and the terminal inverted (black on white) because you've been up for so many days straight that your eyes hurt (see **raster burn**). Loud music blaring from a stereo stacked in the corner is optional but recommended. See **larval stage**, **hack mode**.

Node:Trojan horse, Next:troll, Previous:troglodyte mode, Up:= T =

Trojan horse n.

[coined by MIT-hacker-turned-NSA-spook Dan Edwards] A malicious, security-breaking program that is disguised as something benign, such as a directory lister, archiver, game, or (in one notorious 1990 case on the Mac) a program to find and destroy viruses! See **back door**, **virus**, **worm**, **phage**, **mockingbird**.

Node:troll, Next:Troll-O-Meter, Previous:Trojan horse, Up:= T =

troll v.,n.

1. [From the Usenet group *alt.folklore.urban*] To utter a posting on **Usenet** designed to attract predictable responses or **flame**s; or, the post itself. Derives from the phrase "trolling for **newbie**s" which in turn comes from mainstream "trolling", a style of fishing in which one trails bait through a likely spot hoping for a bite. The well-constructed troll is a post that induces lots of newbies and flamers to make themselves look even more clueless than they already do, while subtly conveying to the more savvy and experienced that it is in fact a deliberate troll. If you don't fall for the joke, you get to be in on it. See also **YHBT**. 2. An individual who chronically trolls in sense 1; regularly posts specious arguments, flames or personal attacks to a newsgroup, discussion list, or in email for no other purpose than to annoy someone or disrupt a discussion. Trolls are recognizable by the fact that the have no real interest in learning about the topic at hand - they simply want to utter flame bait. Like the ugly creatures they are named after, they exhibit no redeeming characteristics, and as such, they are recognized as a lower form of life on the net, as in, "Oh, ignore him, he's just a troll." 3. [Berkeley] Computer lab monitor. A popular campus job for CS students. Duties include helping newbies and ensuring that lab policies are followed. Probably so-called because it involves lurking in dark cavelike corners.

Some people claim that the troll (sense 1) is properly a narrower category than **flame bait**, that a troll is categorized by containing some assertion that is wrong but not overtly controversial. See also **Troll-O-Meter**.

Node:Troll-O-Meter, Next:tron, Previous:troll, Up:= T =

Troll-O-Meter n.

Common Usenet jargon for a notional instrument used to measure the quality of a Usenet **troll**. "Come on, everyone! If the above doesn't set off the Troll-O-Meter, we're going to have to get him to run around

with a big blinking sign saying `I am a troll, I'm only in it for the controversy and flames' and shooting random gobs of Jell-O(tm) at us before the point is proven." Mentions of the Troll-O-Meter are often accompanied by an ASCII picture of an arrow pointing at a numeric scale. Compare **bogometer**.

Node:tron, Next:true-hacker, Previous:Troll-O-Meter, Up:= T =

tron v.

[NRL, CMU; prob. fr. the movie "Tron"] To become inaccessible except via email or `talk(1)`, especially when one is normally available via telephone or in person. Frequently used in the past tense, as in: "Ran seems to have tronned on us this week" or "Gee, Ran, glad you were able to un-tron yourself". One may also speak of `tron mode'; compare **spod**.

Note that many dialects of BASIC have a TRON/TROFF command pair that enables/disables line number tracing; this has no obvious relationship to the slang usage.

Node:true-hacker, Next:tty, Previous:tron, Up:= T =

true-hacker n.

[analogy with `trufan' from SF fandom] One who exemplifies the primary values of hacker culture, esp. competence and helpfulness to other hackers. A high compliment. "He spent 6 hours helping me bring up UUCP and netnews on my FOOBAR 4000 last week -- manifestly the act of a true-hacker." Compare **demigod**, oppose **munchkin**.

Node:tty, Next:tube, Previous:true-hacker, Up:= T =

tty /T-T-Y/, /tit'ee/ n.

The latter pronunciation was primarily ITS, but some Unix people say it this way as well; this pronunciation is *not* considered to have sexual undertones. 1. A terminal of the teletype variety, characterized by a noisy mechanical printer, a very limited character set, and poor print quality. Usage: antiquated (like the TTYs themselves). See also **bit-paired keyboard**. 2. [especially Unix] Any terminal at all; sometimes used to refer to the particular terminal controlling a given job. 3. [Unix] Any serial port, whether or not the device connected to it is a terminal; so called because under Unix such devices have names of the form tty*. Ambiguity between senses 2 and 3 is common but seldom bothersome.

Node:tube, Next:tube time, Previous:tty, Up:= T =

tube

1. n. A CRT terminal. Never used in the mainstream sense of TV; real hackers don't watch TV, except for Loony Toons, Rocky & Bullwinkle, Trek Classic, the Simpsons, and the occasional cheesy old swashbuckler movie. 2. [IBM] To send a copy of something to someone else's terminal. "Tube me that note?"

Node:tube time, Next:tunafish, Previous:tube, Up:= T =

tube time n.

Time spent at a terminal or console. More inclusive than hacking time; commonly used in discussions of what parts of one's environment one uses most heavily. "I find I'm spending too much of my tube time reading mail since I started this revision."

Node:tunafish, Next:tune, Previous:tube time, Up:= T =

tunafish n.

In hackish lore, refers to the mutated punchline of an age-old joke to be found at the bottom of the manual pages of `tunefs(8)` in the original **BSD** 4.2 distribution. The joke was removed in later releases once commercial sites started using 4.2, but apparently restored on the 4.4BSD tape and in {Net,Free,Open}BSD. Tunefs relates to the `tuning' of file-system parameters for optimum performance, and at the bottom of a few pages of wizardly inscriptions was a `BUGS' section consisting of the line "You can tune a file system, but you can't tunafish". Variants of this can be seen in other BSD versions, though it has been excised from some versions by humorless management **droid**s. The [nt]roff source for SunOS 4.1.1 contains a comment apparently designed to prevent this: "Take this out and a Unix Demon will dog your steps from now until the `time_t`'s wrap around."

[It has since been pointed out that indeed you can tunafish. Usually at a canning factory... --ESR]

Node:tune, Next:turbo nerd, Previous:tunafish, Up:= T =

tune vt.

[from automotive or musical usage] To optimize a program or system for a particular environment, esp. by adjusting numerical parameters designed as **hook**s for tuning, e.g., by changing `#define` lines in C. One may `tune for time' (fastest execution), `tune for space' (least memory use), or `tune for configuration' (most efficient use of hardware). See **bum**, **hot spot**, **hand-hacking**.

Node:turbo nerd, Next:Turing tar-pit, Previous:tune, Up:= T =

turbo nerd n.

See **computer geek**.

Node:Turing tar-pit, Next:turist, Previous:turbo nerd, Up:= T =

Turing tar-pit n.

1. A place where anything is possible but nothing of interest is practical. Alan Turing helped lay the foundations of computer science by showing that all machines and languages capable of expressing a certain very primitive set of operations are logically equivalent in the kinds of computations they can carry out, and in principle have capabilities that differ only in speed from those of the most powerful and elegantly designed computers. However, no machine or language exactly matching Turing's primitive set has ever been built (other than possibly as a classroom exercise), because it would be horribly slow and far too painful to use. A `Turing tar-pit' is any computer language or other tool that shares this property. That is, it's theoretically universal -- but in practice, the harder you struggle to get any real work done, the

deeper its inadequacies suck you in. Compare **bondage-and-discipline language**. 2. The perennial **holy wars** over whether language A or B is the "most powerful".

Node:turist, Next:Tux, Previous:Turing tar-pit, Up:= T =

turist /too'rist/ n.

Var. sp. of **tourist**, q.v. Also in adjectival form, `turistic'. Poss. influenced by **luser** and `Turing'.

Node:Tux, Next:tweak, Previous:turist, Up:= T =

Tux

Tux the Penguin is the official emblem of **Linux**, This eventuated after a logo contest in 1996, during which Linus Torvalds endorsed the idea of a penguin logo in a couple of famously funny postings. Linus explained that he was once bitten by a killer penguin in Australia and has felt a special affinity for the species ever since. (Linus has since admitted that he was also thinking of Feathers McGraw, the evil-genius penguin jewel thief who appeared in a Wallace & Grommit feature cartoon, "The Wrong Trousers".)

Larry Ewing designed the official Tux logo. It has proved a wise choice, amenable to hundreds of recognizable variations used as emblems of Linux-related projects, products, and user groups. In fact, Tux has spawned an entire mythology, of which the Gospel According to Tux and the mock-epic poem "Tuxowolf" are among the best-known examples.

There is a `real' Tux - a black-footed penguin resident at the Bristol Zoo. Several friends of Linux bought a zoo sponsorship for Linus as a birthday present in 1996.

Node:tweak, Next:tweeter, Previous:Tux, Up:= T =

tweak vt.

1. To change slightly, usually in reference to a value. Also used synonymously with **twiddle**. If a program is almost correct, rather than figure out the precise problem you might just keep tweaking it until it works. See **frobnicate** and **fudge factor**; also see **shotgun debugging**. 2. To **tune** or **bum** a program; preferred usage in the U.K.

Node:tweeter, Next:TWENEX, Previous:tweak, Up:= T =

tweeter n.

[University of Waterloo] Syn. **perf**, **chad** (sense 1). This term (like **woofer**) has been in use at Waterloo since 1972 but is elsewhere unknown. In audio jargon, the word refers to the treble speaker(s) on a hi-fi.

Node:TWENEX, Next:twiddle, Previous:tweeter, Up:= T =

TWENEX /twe'neks/ n.

The TOPS-20 operating system by **DEC** -- the second proprietary OS for the PDP-10 -- preferred by most PDP-10 hackers over TOPS-10 (that is, by those who were not **ITS** or **WAITS** partisans). TOPS-20 began in 1969 as Bolt, Beranek & Newman's TENEX operating system using special paging hardware. By the early 1970s, almost all of the systems on the ARPANET ran TENEX. DEC purchased the rights to TENEX from BBN and began work to make it their own. The first in-house code name for the operating system was VIROS (VIRtual memory Operating System); when customers started asking questions, the name was changed to SNARK so DEC could truthfully deny that there was any project called VIROS. When the name SNARK became known, the name was briefly reversed to become KRANS; this was quickly abandoned when someone objected that `krans' meant `funeral wreath' in Swedish (though some Swedish speakers have since said it means simply `wreath'; this part of the story may be apocryphal). Ultimately DEC picked TOPS-20 as the name of the operating system, and it was as TOPS-20 that it was marketed. The hacker community, mindful of its origins, quickly dubbed it TWENEX (a contraction of `twenty TENEX'), even though by this point very little of the original TENEX code remained (analogously to the differences between AT&T V6 Unix and BSD). DEC people cringed when they heard "TWENEX", but the term caught on nevertheless (the written abbreviation `20x' was also used). TWENEX was successful and very popular; in fact, there was a period in the early 1980s when it commanded as fervent a culture of partisans as Unix or ITS -- but DEC's decision to scrap all the internal rivals to the VAX architecture and its relatively stodgy VMS OS killed the DEC-20 and put a sad end to TWENEX's brief day in the sun. DEC attempted to convince TOPS-20 users to convert to **VMS**, but instead, by the late 1980s, most of the TOPS-20 hackers had migrated to Unix.

Node:twiddle, Next:twilight zone, Previous:TWENEX, Up:= T =

twiddle n.

1. Tilde (ASCII 1111110, ~). Also called `squiggle', `sqiggle' (sic -- pronounced /skig'l/), and `twaddle', but twiddle is the most common term. 2. A small and insignificant change to a program. Usually fixes one bug and generates several new ones (see also **shotgun debugging**). 3. vt. To change something in a small way. Bits, for example, are often twiddled. Twiddling a switch or **knobs** implies much less sense of purpose than toggling or tweaking it; see **frobnicate**. To speak of twiddling a bit connotes aimlessness, and at best doesn't specify what you're doing to the bit; `toggling a bit' has a more specific meaning (see **bit twiddling**, **toggle**). 4. Uncommon name for the **twirling baton** prompt.

Node:twilight zone, Next:twink, Previous:twiddle, Up:= T =

twilight zone n. //

[IRC] Notionally, the area of cyberspace where **IRC** operators live. An **op** is said to have a "connection to the twilight zone".

Node:twink, Next:twirling baton, Previous:twilight zone, Up:= T =

twink /twink/ n.

1. [Berkeley] A clue-repellant user; the next step beyond a clueless one. 2. [UCSC] A **read-only user**. Also reported on the Usenet group *soc.motss*; may derive from gay slang for a cute young thing with nothing upstairs (compare mainstream `chick').

Node:twirling baton, Next:two pi, Previous:twink, Up:= T =

twirling baton n.

[PLATO] The overstrike sequence -/|\-/|\- which produces an animated twirling baton. If you output it with a single backspace between characters, the baton spins in place. If you output the sequence BS SP between characters, the baton spins from left to right. If you output BS SP BS BS between characters, the baton spins from right to left. This is also occasionally called a twiddle prompt.

The twirling baton was a popular component of animated signature files on the pioneering PLATO educational timesharing system. The `archie` Internet service is perhaps the best-known baton program today; it uses the twirling baton as an idler indicating that the program is working on a query. The twirling baton is also used as a boot progress indicator on several BSD variants of Unix; if it stops you're probably going to have a long and trying day.

Node:two pi, Next:two-to-the-N, Previous:twirling baton, Up:= T =

two pi quant.

The number of years it takes to finish one's thesis. Occurs in stories in the following form: "He started on his thesis; 2 pi years later..."

Node:two-to-the-N, Next:twonkie, Previous:two pi, Up:= T =

two-to-the-N quant.

An amount much larger than **N** but smaller than **infinity**. "I have 2-to-the-N things to do before I can go out for lunch" means you probably won't show up.

Node:twonkie, Next:u-, Previous:two-to-the-N, Up:= T =

twonkie /twon'kee/ n.

The software equivalent of a Twinkie (a variety of sugar-loaded junk food, or (in gay slang with a small t) the male equivalent of `chick'); a useless `feature' added to look sexy and placate a **marketroid** (compare **Saturday-night special**). The term may also be related to "The Twonky", title menace of a classic SF short story by Lewis Padgett (Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore), first published in the September 1942 "Astounding Science Fiction" and subsequently much anthologized.

Node:= U =, Next:= V =, Previous:= T =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= U =

- u-:
- UBD:
- UBE:
- UCE:
- UDP:
- UN*X:
- undefined external reference:

- under the hood:
- undocumented feature:
- uninteresting:
- Unix:
- Unix brain damage:
- Unix conspiracy:
- Unix weenie:
- unixism:
- unswizzle:
- unwind the stack:
- unwind-protect:
- up:
- upload:
- upthread:
- urchin:
- URL:
- Usenet:
- Usenet Death Penalty:
- user:
- user-friendly:
- user-obsequious:
- USG Unix:
- UTSL:
- UUCPNET:

Node:u-, Next:UBD, Previous:twonkie, Up:= U =

u- pref.

Written shorthand for **micro-**; techspeak when applied to metric units, jargon when used otherwise. Derived from the Greek letter "mu", the first letter of "micro" (and which letter looks a lot like the English letter "u").

Node:UBD, Next:UBE, Previous:u-, Up:= U =

UBD /U-B-D/ n.

[abbreviation for `User Brain Damage'] An abbreviation used to close out trouble reports obviously due to utter cluelessness on the user's part. Compare **pilot error**; oppose **PBD**; see also **brain-damaged**.

Node:UBE, Next:UCE, Previous:UBD, Up:= U =

UBE // n.

[abbrev., Unsolicilted Bulk Email] A widespread, more formal term for email **spam**. Compare **UCE**. The UBE term recognizes that spam is uttered by nonprofit and advocacy groups whose motives are not commercial.

Node:UCE, Next:UDP, Previous:UBE, Up:= U =

UCE n.

[abbrev., Unsolicited Commercial Email] A widespread, more formal term for email **spam**. Compare **UBE**, which may be superseding it.

Node:UDP, Next:UN*X, Previous:UCE, Up:= U =

UDP /U-D-P/ v.,n.

[Usenet] Abbreviation for **Usenet Death Penalty**. Common (probably now more so than the full form), and frequently verbed. Compare **IDP**.

Node:UN*X, Next:undefined external reference, Previous:UDP, Up:= U =

UN*X n.

Used to refer to the Unix operating system (a trademark of AT&T) in writing, but avoiding the need for the ugly **(TM)** typography. Also used to refer to any or all varieties of Unixoid operating systems. Ironically, lawyers now say that the requirement for the trademark postfix has no legal force, but the asterisk usage is entrenched anyhow. It has been suggested that there may be a psychological connection to practice in certain religions (especially Judaism) in which the name of the deity is never written out in full, e.g., `YHWH' or `G-d' is used. See also **glob**.

Node:undefined external reference, Next:under the hood, Previous:UN*X, Up:= U =

undefined external reference excl.

[Unix] A message from Unix's linker. Used in speech to flag loose ends or dangling references in an argument or discussion.

Node:under the hood, Next:undocumented feature, Previous:undefined external reference, Up:= U =

under the hood adj.

[hot-rodder talk] 1. Used to introduce the underlying implementation of a product (hardware, software, or idea). Implies that the implementation is not intuitively obvious from the appearance, but the speaker is about to enable the listener to **grok** it. "Let's now look under the hood to see how ...." 2. Can also imply that the implementation is much simpler than the appearance would indicate: "Under the hood, we are just fork/execing the shell." 3. Inside a chassis, as in "Under the hood, this baby has a 40MHz 68030!"

Node:undocumented feature, Next:uninteresting, Previous:under the hood, Up:= U =

undocumented feature n.

See **feature**.

Node:uninteresting, Next:Unix, Previous:undocumented feature, Up:= U =

uninteresting adj.

1. Said of a problem that, although **nontrivial**, can be solved simply by throwing sufficient resources at it. 2. Also said of problems for which a solution would neither advance the state of the art nor be fun to design and code.

Hackers regard uninteresting problems as intolerable wastes of time, to be solved (if at all) by lesser mortals. *Real* hackers (see **toolsmith**) generalize uninteresting problems enough to make them interesting and solve them -- thus solving the original problem as a special case (and, it must be admitted, occasionally turning a molehill into a mountain, or a mountain into a tectonic plate). See **WOMBAT**, **SMOP**; compare **toy problem**, oppose **interesting**.

Node:Unix, Next:Unix brain damage, Previous:uninteresting, Up:= U =

Unix /yoo'niks/ n.

[In the authors' words, "A weak pun on Multics"; very early on it was `UNICS'] (also `UNIX') An interactive time-sharing system invented in 1969 by Ken Thompson after Bell Labs left the Multics project, originally so he could play games on his scavenged PDP-7. Dennis Ritchie, the inventor of C, is considered a co-author of the system. The turning point in Unix's history came when it was reimplemented almost entirely in C during 1972-1974, making it the first source-portable OS. Unix subsequently underwent mutations and expansions at the hands of many different people, resulting in a uniquely flexible and developer-friendly environment. By 1991, Unix had become the most widely used multiuser general-purpose operating system in the world. Many people consider this the most important victory yet of hackerdom over industry opposition (but see **Unix weenie** and **Unix conspiracy** for an opposing point of view). See **Version 7**, **BSD**, **USG Unix**, **Linux**.

Some people are confused over whether this word is appropriately `UNIX' or `Unix'; both forms are common, and used interchangeably. Dennis Ritchie says that the `UNIX' spelling originally happened in CACM's 1974 paper "The UNIX Time-Sharing System" because "we had a new typesetter and **troff** had just been invented and we were intoxicated by being able to produce small caps." Later, dmr tried to get the spelling changed to `Unix' in a couple of Bell Labs papers, on the grounds that the word is not acronymic. He failed, and eventually (his words) "wimped out" on the issue. So, while the trademark today is `UNIX', both capitalizations are grounded in ancient usage; the Jargon File uses `Unix' in deference to dmr's wishes.

Node:Unix brain damage, Next:Unix conspiracy, Previous:Unix, Up:= U =

Unix brain damage n.

Something that has to be done to break a network program (typically a mailer) on a non-Unix system so that it will interoperate with Unix systems. The hack may qualify as `Unix brain damage' if the program conforms to published standards and the Unix program in question does not. Unix brain damage happens because it is much easier for other (minority) systems to change their ways to match non-conforming behavior than it is to change all the hundreds of thousands of Unix systems out there.

An example of Unix brain damage is a **kluge** in a mail server to recognize bare line feed (the Unix newline) as an equivalent form to the Internet standard newline, which is a carriage return followed by a line feed. Such things can make even a hardened **jock** weep.

Node:Unix conspiracy, Next:Unix weenie, Previous:Unix brain damage, Up:= U =

Unix conspiracy n.

[ITS] According to a conspiracy theory long popular among **ITS** and **TOPS-20** fans, Unix's growth is the result of a plot, hatched during the 1970s at Bell Labs, whose intent was to hobble AT&T's competitors by making them dependent upon a system whose future evolution was to be under AT&T's control. This would be accomplished by disseminating an operating system that is apparently inexpensive and easily portable, but also relatively unreliable and insecure (so as to require continuing upgrades from AT&T). This theory was lent a substantial impetus in 1984 by the paper referenced in the **back door** entry.

In this view, Unix was designed to be one of the first computer viruses (see **virus**) -- but a virus spread to computers indirectly by people and market forces, rather than directly through disks and networks. Adherents of this `Unix virus' theory like to cite the fact that the well-known quotation "Unix is snake oil" was uttered by **DEC** president Kenneth Olsen shortly before DEC began actively promoting its own family of Unix workstations. (Olsen now claims to have been misquoted.)

[If there was ever such a conspiracy, it got thoroughly out of the plotters' control after 1990. AT&T sold its UNIX operation to Novell around the same time **Linux** and other free-UNIX distributions were beginning to make noise. --ESR]

Node:Unix weenie, Next:unixism, Previous:Unix conspiracy, Up:= U =

Unix weenie n.

[ITS] 1. A derogatory play on `Unix wizard', common among hackers who use Unix by necessity but would prefer alternatives. The implication is that although the person in question may consider mastery of Unix arcana to be a wizardly skill, the only real skill involved is the ability to tolerate (and the bad taste to wallow in) the incoherence and needless complexity that is alleged to infest many Unix programs. "This shell script tries to parse its arguments in 69 bletcherous ways. It must have been written by a real Unix weenie." 2. A derogatory term for anyone who engages in uncritical praise of Unix. Often appearing in the context "stupid Unix weenie". See **Weenix**, **Unix conspiracy**. See also **weenie**.

Node:unixism, Next:unswizzle, Previous:Unix weenie, Up:= U =

unixism n.

A piece of code or a coding technique that depends on the protected multi-tasking environment with relatively low process-spawn overhead that exists on virtual-memory Unix systems. Common **unixism**s include: gratuitous use of `fork(2)`; the assumption that certain undocumented but well-known features of Unix libraries such as `stdio(3)` are supported elsewhere; reliance on **obscure** side-effects of system calls (use of `sleep(2)` with a 0 argument to clue the scheduler that you're willing to give up your time-slice, for example); the assumption that freshly allocated memory is zeroed; and the assumption that fragmentation problems won't arise from never `free()`ing memory. Compare **vaxocentrism**; see also **New Jersey**.

Node:unswizzle, Next:unwind the stack, Previous:unixism, Up:= U =

unswizzle v.

See **swizzle**.

Node:unwind the stack, Next:unwind-protect, Previous:unswizzle, Up:= U =

unwind the stack vi.

1. [techspeak] During the execution of a procedural language, one is said to `unwind the stack' from a called procedure up to a caller when one discards the stack frame and any number of frames above it, popping back up to the level of the given caller. In C this is done with `longjmp/setjmp`, in LISP or C++ with `throw/catch`. See also **smash the stack**. 2. People can unwind the stack as well, by quickly dealing with a bunch of problems: "Oh heck, let's do lunch. Just a second while I unwind my stack."

Node:unwind-protect, Next:up, Previous:unwind the stack, Up:= U =

unwind-protect n.

[MIT: from the name of a LISP operator] A task you must remember to perform before you leave a place or finish a project. "I have an unwind-protect to call my advisor."

Node:up, Next:upload, Previous:unwind-protect, Up:= U =

up adj.

1. Working, in order. "The down escalator is up." Oppose **down**. 2. `bring up': vt. To create a working version and start it. "They brought up a down system." 3. `come up' vi. To become ready for production use.

Node:upload, Next:upthread, Previous:up, Up:= U =

upload /uhp'lohd/ v.

1. [techspeak] To transfer programs or data over a digital communications link from a smaller or peripheral `client' system to a larger or central `host' one. A transfer in the other direction is, of course, called a **download** (but see the note about ground-to-space comm under that entry). 2. [jargon] To send data (especially large relatively standalone pieces of data like files and images) over the wire to a remote location. 3. [speculatively] To move the essential patterns and algorithms that make up one's mind from one's brain into a computer. Those who are convinced that such patterns and algorithms capture the complete essence of the self view this prospect with pleasant anticipation.

Node:upthread, Next:urchin, Previous:upload, Up:= U =

upthread adv.

Earlier in the discussion (see **thread**), i.e., `above'. "As Joe pointed out upthread, ..." See also **followup**.

Node:urchin, Next:URL, Previous:upthread, Up:= U =

urchin n.

See **munchkin**.

Node:URL, Next:Usenet, Previous:urchin, Up:= U =

URL /U-R-L/ or /erl/ n.

Uniform Resource Locator, an address widget that identifies a document or resource on the World Wide Web. This entry is here primarily to record the fact that the term is commonly pronounced both /erl/, and /U-R-L/ (the latter predominates in more formal contexts).

Node:Usenet, Next:Usenet Death Penalty, Previous:URL, Up:= U =

Usenet /yoos'net/ or /yooz'net/ n.

[from `Users' Network'; the original spelling was USENET, but the mixed-case form is now widely preferred] A distributed **bboard** (bulletin board) system supported mainly by Unix machines. Originally implemented in 1979-1980 by Steve Bellovin, Jim Ellis, Tom Truscott, and Steve Daniel at Duke University, it has swiftly grown to become international in scope and is now probably the largest decentralized information utility in existence. As of early 1996, it hosts over 10,000 **newsgroup**s and an average of over 500 megabytes (the equivalent of several thousand paper pages) of new technical articles, news, discussion, chatter, and **flamage** every day (and that leaves out the graphics...).

By the year the Internet hit the mainstream (1994) the original UUCP transport for Usenet was fading out of use (see **UUCPNET**) - almost all Usenet connections were over Internet links. A lot of newbies and journalists began to refer to "Internet newsgroups" as though Usenet was and always had been just another Internet service. This ignorance greatly annoys experienced Usenetters.

Node:Usenet Death Penalty, Next:user, Previous:Usenet, Up:= U =

Usenet Death Penalty

[Usenet] A sanction against sites that habitually spew Usenet **spam**. This can be either passive or active. A passive UDP refers to the dropping of all postings by a particular domain so as to inhibit propagation. An active UDP refers to third-party cancellation of all postings by the UDPed domain. A partial UDP is one which applies only to certain newsgroups or hierarchies in Usenet. Compare **Internet Death Penalty**, with which this term is sometimes confused.

Node:user, Next:user-friendly, Previous:Usenet Death Penalty, Up:= U =

user n.

1. Someone doing `real work' with the computer, using it as a means rather than an end. Someone who pays to use a computer. See **real user**. 2. A programmer who will believe anything you tell him. One who asks silly questions. [GLS observes: This is slightly unfair. It is true that users ask questions (of necessity). Sometimes they are thoughtful or deep. Very often they are annoying or downright stupid, apparently because the user failed to think for two seconds or look in the documentation before bothering the maintainer.] See **luser**. 3. Someone who uses a program from the outside, however skillfully, without getting into the internals of the program. One who reports bugs instead of just going ahead and fixing

them.

The general theory behind this term is that there are two classes of people who work with a program: there are implementors (hackers) and **luser**s. The users are looked down on by hackers to some extent because they don't understand the full ramifications of the system in all its glory. (The few users who do are known as `real winners'.) The term is a relative one: a skilled hacker may be a user with respect to some program he himself does not hack. A LISP hacker might be one who maintains LISP or one who uses LISP (but with the skill of a hacker). A LISP user is one who uses LISP, whether skillfully or not. Thus there is some overlap between the two terms; the subtle distinctions must be resolved by context.

Node:user-friendly, Next:user-obsequious, Previous:user, Up:= U =

user-friendly adj.

Programmer-hostile. Generally used by hackers in a critical tone, to describe systems that hold the user's hand so obsessively that they make it painful for the more experienced and knowledgeable to get any work done. See **menuitis**, **drool-proof paper**, **Macintrash**, **user-obsequious**.

Node:user-obsequious, Next:USG Unix, Previous:user-friendly, Up:= U =

user-obsequious adj.

Emphatic form of **user-friendly**. Connotes a system so verbose, inflexible, and determinedly simple-minded that it is nearly unusable. "Design a system any fool can use and only a fool will want to use it." See **WIMP environment**, **Macintrash**.

Node:USG Unix, Next:UTSL, Previous:user-obsequious, Up:= U =

USG Unix /U-S-G yoo'niks/ n.

Refers to AT&T Unix commercial versions after **Version 7**, especially System III and System V releases 1, 2, and 3. So called because during most of the lifespan of those versions AT&T's support crew was called the `Unix Support Group'. See **BSD**, **Unix**.

Node:UTSL, Next:UUCPNET, Previous:USG Unix, Up:= U =

UTSL // n.

[Unix] On-line acronym for `Use the Source, Luke' (a pun on Obi-Wan Kenobi's "Use the Force, Luke!" in "Star Wars") -- analogous to **RTFS** (sense 1), but more polite. This is a common way of suggesting that someone would be better off reading the source code that supports whatever feature is causing confusion, rather than making yet another futile pass through the manuals, or broadcasting questions on Usenet that haven't attracted **wizard**s to answer them.

Once upon a time in **elder days**, everyone running Unix had source. After 1978, AT&T's policy tightened up, so this objurgation was in theory appropriately directed only at associates of some outfit with a Unix source license. In practice, bootlegs of Unix source code (made precisely for reference purposes) were so ubiquitous that one could utter it at almost anyone on the network without concern.

Nowadays, free Unix clones have become widely enough distributed that anyone can read source legally.

The most widely distributed is certainly Linux, with variants of the NET/2 and 4.4BSD distributions running second. Cheap commercial Unixes with source such as BSD/OS are accelerating this trend.

Node:UUCPNET, Next:V7, Previous:UTSL, Up:= U =

UUCPNET n. obs.

The store-and-forward network consisting of all the world's connected Unix machines (and others running some clone of the UUCP (Unix-to-Unix CoPy) software). Any machine reachable only via a **bang path** is on UUCPNET. This term has been rendered obsolescent by the spread of cheap Internet connections in the 1990s; the few remaining UUCP links are essentially slow channels to the Internet rather than an autonomous network. See **network address**.

Node:= V =, Next:= W =, Previous:= U =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= V =

- V7:
- vadding:
- vanilla:
- vanity domain:
- vannevar:
- vaporware:
- var:
- vaston:
- VAX:
- VAXectomy:
- VAXen:
- vaxherd:
- vaxism:
- vaxocentrism:
- vdiff:
- veeblefester:
- velveeta:
- ventilator card:
- Venus flytrap:
- verbage:
- verbiage:
- Version 7:
- vgrep:
- vi:
- video toaster:
- videotex:
- virgin:
- virtual:
- virtual beer:
- virtual Friday:
- virtual reality:
- virtual shredder:

- virus:
- visionary:
- VMS:
- voice:
- voice-net:
- voodoo programming:
- VR:
- Vulcan nerve pinch:
- vulture capitalist:

Node:V7, Next:vadding, Previous:UUCPNET, Up:= V =

V7 /V'sev'en/ n.

See **Version 7**.

Node:vadding, Next:vanilla, Previous:V7, Up:= V =

vadding /vad'ing/ n.

[from VAD, a permutation of ADV (i.e., **ADVENT**), used to avoid a particular **admin**'s continual search-and-destroy sweeps for the game] A leisure-time activity of certain hackers involving the covert exploration of the `secret' parts of large buildings -- basements, roofs, freight elevators, maintenance crawlways, steam tunnels, and the like. A few go so far as to learn locksmithing in order to synthesize vadding keys. The verb is `to vad' (compare **phreaking**; see also **hack**, sense 9). This term dates from the late 1970s, before which such activity was simply called `hacking'; the older usage is still prevalent at MIT.

The most extreme and dangerous form of vadding is `elevator rodeo', a.k.a. `elevator surfing', a sport played by wrasslin' down a thousand-pound elevator car with a 3-foot piece of string, and then exploiting this mastery in various stimulating ways (such as elevator hopping, shaft exploration, rat-racing, and the ever-popular drop experiments). Kids, don't try this at home! See also **hobbit** (sense 2).

Node:vanilla, Next:vanity domain, Previous:vadding, Up:= V =

vanilla adj.

[from the default flavor of ice cream in the U.S.] Ordinary **flavor**, standard. When used of food, very often does not mean that the food is flavored with vanilla extract! For example, `vanilla wonton soup' means ordinary wonton soup, as opposed to hot-and-sour wonton soup. Applied to hardware and software, as in "Vanilla Version 7 Unix can't run on a vanilla 11/34." Also used to orthogonalize chip nomenclature; for instance, a 74V00 means what TI calls a 7400, as distinct from a 74LS00, etc. This word differs from **canonical** in that the latter means `default', whereas vanilla simply means `ordinary'. For example, when hackers go on a **great-wall**, hot-and-sour soup is the **canonical** soup to get (because that is what most of them usually order) even though it isn't the vanilla (wonton) soup.

Node:vanity domain, Next:vannevar, Previous:vanilla, Up:= V =

vanity domain n.

[common; from `vanity plate' as in car license plate] An Internet domain, particularly in the .com or .org top-level domains, apparently created for no reason other than boosting the creator's ego.

Node:vannevar, Next:vaporware, Previous:vanity domain, Up:= V =

vannevar /van'*-var/ n.

A bogus technological prediction or a foredoomed engineering concept, esp. one that fails by implicitly assuming that technologies develop linearly, incrementally, and in isolation from one another when in fact the learning curve tends to be highly nonlinear, revolutions are common, and competition is the rule. The prototype was Vannevar Bush's prediction of `electronic brains' the size of the Empire State Building with a Niagara-Falls-equivalent cooling system for their tubes and relays, a prediction made at a time when the semiconductor effect had already been demonstrated. Other famous vannevars have included magnetic-bubble memory, LISP machines, **videotex**, and a paper from the late 1970s that computed a purported ultimate limit on areal density for ICs that was in fact less than the routine densities of 5 years later.

Node:vaporware, Next:var, Previous:vannevar, Up:= V =

vaporware /vay'pr-weir/ n.

Products announced far in advance of any release (which may or may not actually take place). See also **brochureware**.

Node:var, Next:vaston, Previous:vaporware, Up:= V =

var /veir/ or /var/ n.

Short for `variable'. Compare **arg**, **param**.

Node:vaston, Next:VAX, Previous:var, Up:= V =

vaston n.

[Durham, UK] The unit of `load average'. A measure of how much work a computer is doing. A meter displaying this as a function of time is known as a `vastometer'. First used in during a computing practical in December 1996.

Node:VAX, Next:VAXectomy, Previous:vaston, Up:= V =

VAX /vaks/ n.

1. [from Virtual Address eXtension] The most successful minicomputer design in industry history, possibly excepting its immediate ancestor, the PDP-11. Between its release in 1978 and its eclipse by **killer micro**s after about 1986, the VAX was probably the hacker's favorite machine of them all, esp. after the 1982 release of 4.2 BSD Unix (see **BSD**). Esp. noted for its large, assembler-programmer-friendly instruction set -- an asset that became a liability after the RISC revolution. 2. A major brand of vacuum cleaner in Britain. Cited here because its sales pitch, "Nothing sucks like a VAX!" became a sort

of battle-cry of RISC partisans. It is even sometimes claimed that DEC actually entered a cross-licensing deal with the vacuum-Vax people that allowed them to market VAX computers in the U.K. in return for not challenging the vacuum cleaner trademark in the U.S.

A rival brand actually pioneered the slogan: its original form was "Nothing sucks like Electrolux". It has apparently become a classic example (used in advertising textbooks) of the perils of not knowing the local idiom. But in 1996, the press manager of Electrolux AB, while confirming that the company used this slogan in the late 1960s, also tells us that their marketing people were fully aware of the possible double entendre and intended it to gain attention.

And gain attention it did - the VAX-vacuum-cleaner people thought the slogan a sufficiently good idea to copy it. Several British hackers report that VAX's promotions used it in 1986-1987, and we have one report from a New Zealander that the infamous slogan surfaced there in TV ads for the product in 1992.

Node:VAXectomy, Next:VAXen, Previous:VAX, Up:= V =

VAXectomy /vak-sek't*-mee/ n.

[by analogy with `vasectomy'] A VAX removal. **DEC**'s Microvaxen, especially, are much slower than newer RISC-based workstations such as the SPARC. Thus, if one knows one has a replacement coming, VAX removal can be cause for celebration.

Node:VAXen, Next:vaxherd, Previous:VAXectomy, Up:= V =

VAXen /vak'sn/ n.

[from `oxen', perhaps influenced by `vixen'] (alt. `vaxen') The plural canonically used among hackers for the **DEC** VAX computers. "Our installation has four PDP-10s and twenty vaxen." See **boxen**.

Node:vaxherd, Next:vaxism, Previous:VAXen, Up:= V =

vaxherd /vaks'herd/ n. obs.

[from `oxherd'] A VAX operator. The image is reinforced because VAXen actually did tend to come in herds, technically known as `clusters'.

Node:vaxism, Next:vaxocentrism, Previous:vaxherd, Up:= V =

vaxism /vak'sizm/ n.

A piece of code that exhibits **vaxocentrism** in critical areas. Compare **PC-ism**, **unixism**.

Node:vaxocentrism, Next:vdiff, Previous:vaxism, Up:= V =

vaxocentrism /vak`soh-sen'trizm/ n.

[analogy with `ethnocentrism'] A notional disease said to afflict C programmers who persist in coding according to certain assumptions that are valid (esp. under Unix) on **VAXen** but false elsewhere. Among

these are:

1. The assumption that dereferencing a null pointer is safe because it is all bits 0, and location 0 is readable and 0. Problem: this may instead cause an illegal-address trap on non-VAXen, and even on VAXen under OSes other than BSD Unix. Usually this is an implicit assumption of sloppy code (forgetting to check the pointer before using it), rather than deliberate exploitation of a misfeature.
2. The assumption that characters are signed.
3. The assumption that a pointer to any one type can freely be cast into a pointer to any other type. A stronger form of this is the assumption that all pointers are the same size and format, which means you don't have to worry about getting the casts or types correct in calls. Problem: this fails on word-oriented machines or others with multiple pointer formats.
4. The assumption that the parameters of a routine are stored in memory, on a stack, contiguously, and in strictly ascending or descending order. Problem: this fails on many RISC architectures.
5. The assumption that pointer and integer types are the same size, and that pointers can be stuffed into integer variables (and vice-versa) and drawn back out without being truncated or mangled. Problem: this fails on segmented architectures or word-oriented machines with funny pointer formats.
6. The assumption that a data type of any size may begin at any byte address in memory (for example, that you can freely construct and dereference a pointer to a word- or greater-sized object at an odd char address). Problem: this fails on many (esp. RISC) architectures better optimized for **HLL** execution speed, and can cause an illegal address fault or bus error.
7. The (related) assumption that there is no padding at the end of types and that in an array you can thus step right from the last byte of a previous component to the first byte of the next one. This is not only machine- but compiler-dependent.
8. The assumption that memory address space is globally flat and that the array reference `foo[-1]` is necessarily valid. Problem: this fails at 0, or other places on segment-addressed machines like Intel chips (yes, segmentation is universally considered a **brain-damaged** way to design machines (see **moby**), but that is a separate issue).
9. The assumption that objects can be arbitrarily large with no special considerations. Problem: this fails on segmented architectures and under non-virtual-addressing environments.
10. The assumption that the stack can be as large as memory. Problem: this fails on segmented architectures or almost anything else without virtual addressing and a paged stack.
11. The assumption that bits and addressable units within an object are ordered in the same way and that this order is a constant of nature. Problem: this fails on **big-endian** machines.
12. The assumption that it is meaningful to compare pointers to different objects not located within the same array, or to objects of different types. Problem: the former fails on segmented architectures, the latter on word-oriented machines or others with multiple pointer formats.
13. The assumption that an `int` is 32 bits, or (nearly equivalently) the assumption that `sizeof(int) == sizeof(long)`. Problem: this fails on PDP-11s, 286-based systems and even on 386 and 68000 systems under some compilers (and on 64-bit systems like the Alpha, of course).
14. The assumption that `argv[]` is writable. Problem: this fails in many embedded-systems C environments and even under a few flavors of Unix.

Note that a programmer can validly be accused of vaxocentrism even if he or she has never seen a VAX. Some of these assumptions (esp. 2-5) were valid on the PDP-11, the original C machine, and became endemic years before the VAX. The terms `vaxocentricity' and `all-the-world's-a-VAX syndrome' have been used synonymously.

Node:vdiff, Next:veeblefester, Previous:vaxocentrism, Up:= V =

vdiff /vee'dif/ v.,n.

Visual diff. The operation of finding differences between two files by **eyeball search**. The term `optical diff' has also been reported, and is sometimes more specifically used for the act of superimposing two nearly identical printouts on one another and holding them up to a light to spot differences. Though this method is poor for detecting omissions in the `rear' file, it can also be used with printouts of graphics, a claim few if any diff programs can make. See **diff**.

Node:veeblefester, Next:velveeta, Previous:vdiff, Up:= V =

veeblefester /vee'b*l-fes`tr/ n.

[from the "Born Loser" comix via Commodore; prob. originally from "Mad" Magazine's `Veeblefetzer' parodies beginning in #15, 1954] Any obnoxious person engaged in the (alleged) professions of marketing or management. Antonym of **hacker**. Compare **suit**, **marketroid**.

Node:velveeta, Next:ventilator card, Previous:veeblefester, Up:= V =

velveeta n.

[Usenet: by analogy with **spam**] Also knows as **ECP**; a message that is excessively cross-posted, as opposed to **spam** which is too frequently posted. This term is widely recognized but not commonly used; most people refer to both kinds of abuse as spam. Compare **jello**.

Node:ventilator card, Next:Venus flytrap, Previous:velveeta, Up:= V =

ventilator card n.

Syn. **lace card**.

Node:Venus flytrap, Next:verbage, Previous:ventilator card, Up:= V =

Venus flytrap n.

[after the insect-eating plant] See **firewall machine**.

Node:verbage, Next:verbiage, Previous:Venus flytrap, Up:= V =

verbage /ver'b*j/ n.

A deliberate misspelling and mispronunciation of **verbiage** that assimilates it to the word `garbage'. Compare **content-free**. More pejorative than `verbiage'.

Node:verbiage, Next:Version 7, Previous:verbage, Up:= V =

verbiage n.

When the context involves a software or hardware system, this refers to **documentation**. This term

borrows the connotations of mainstream `verbiage' to suggest that the documentation is of marginal utility and that the motives behind its production have little to do with the ostensible subject.

Node:Version 7, Next:vgrep, Previous:verbiage, Up:= V =

Version 7 alt. V7 /vee' se'vn/ n.

The first widely distributed version of **Unix**, released unsupported by Bell Labs in 1978. The term is used adjectivally to describe Unix features and programs that date from that release, and are thus guaranteed to be present and portable in all Unix versions (this was the standard gauge of portability before the POSIX and IEEE 1003 standards). Note that this usage does *not* derive from the release being the "seventh version of **Unix**"; research **Unix** at Bell Labs has traditionally been numbered according to the edition of the associated documentation. Indeed, only the widely-distributed Sixth and Seventh Editions are widely known as V[67]; the OS that might today be known as `V10' is instead known in full as "Tenth Edition Research Unix" or just "Tenth Edition" for short. For this reason, "V7" is often read by cognoscenti as "Seventh Edition". See **BSD**, **USG Unix**, **Unix**. Some old-timers impatient with commercialization and kernel bloat still maintain that V7 was the Last True Unix.

Node:vgrep, Next:vi, Previous:Version 7, Up:= V =

vgrep /vee'grep/ v.,n.

Visual grep. The operation of finding patterns in a file optically rather than digitally (also called an `optical grep'). See **grep**; compare **vdiff**.

Node:vi, Next:video toaster, Previous:vgrep, Up:= V =

vi /V-I/, *not* /vi:/ and *never* /siks/ n.

[from `Visual Interface'] A screen editor crufted together by Bill Joy for an early **BSD** release. Became the *de facto* standard Unix editor and a nearly undisputed hacker favorite outside of MIT until the rise of **EMACS** after about 1984. Tends to frustrate new users no end, as it will neither take commands while expecting input text nor vice versa, and the default setup on older versions provides no indication of which mode the editor is in (years ago, a correspondent reported that he has often heard the editor's name pronounced /vi:l/; there is now a vi clone named `vile'). Nevertheless vi (and variants such as vim and elvis) is still widely used (about half the respondents in a 1991 Usenet poll preferred it), and even EMACS fans often resort to it as a mail editor and for small editing jobs (mainly because it starts up faster than the bulkier versions of EMACS). See **holy wars**.

Node:video toaster, Next:videotex, Previous:vi, Up:= V =

video toaster n.

Historically, an Amiga running LightWave and fitted out with a particular line of special video-display hardware from NewTek - long a popular platform at special-effects and video production houses. More generally, any computer system designed specifically for video production and manipulation. Compare **web toaster** and see **toaster**.

Node:videotex, Next:virgin, Previous:video toaster, Up:= V =

videotex n. obs.

An electronic service offering people the privilege of paying to read the weather on their television screens instead of having somebody read it to them for free while they brush their teeth. The idea bombed everywhere it wasn't government-subsidized, because by the time videotex was practical the installed base of personal computers could hook up to timesharing services and do the things for which videotex might have been worthwhile better and cheaper. Videotex planners badly overestimated both the appeal of getting information from a computer and the cost of local intelligence at the user's end. Like the **gorilla arm** effect, this has been a cautionary tale to hackers ever since. See also **vannevar**.

Node:virgin, Next:virtual, Previous:videotex, Up:= V =

virgin adj.

Unused; pristine; in a known initial state. "Let's bring up a virgin system and see if it crashes again." (Esp. useful after contracting a **virus** through **SEX**.) Also, by extension, buffers and the like within a program that have not yet been used.

Node:virtual, Next:virtual beer, Previous:virgin, Up:= V =

virtual adj.

[via the technical term `virtual memory', prob. from the term `virtual image' in optics] 1. Common alternative to **logical**; often used to refer to the artificial objects (like addressable virtual memory larger than physical memory) simulated by a computer system as a convenient way to manage access to shared resources. 2. Simulated; performing the functions of something that isn't really there. An imaginative child's doll may be a virtual playmate. Oppose **real**.

Node:virtual beer, Next:virtual Friday, Previous:virtual, Up:= V =

virtual beer n.

Praise or thanks. Used universally in the Linux community. Originally this term signified cash, after a famous incident in which some some Britishers who wanted to buy Linus a beer and sent him money to Finland to do so.

Node:virtual Friday, Next:virtual reality, Previous:virtual beer, Up:= V =

virtual Friday n.

(also `logical Friday') The last day before an extended weekend, if that day is not a `real' Friday. For example, the U.S. holiday Thanksgiving is always on a Thursday. The next day is often also a holiday or taken as an extra day off, in which case Wednesday of that week is a virtual Friday (and Thursday is a virtual Saturday, as is Friday). There are also `virtual Mondays' that are actually Tuesdays, after the three-day weekends associated with many national holidays in the U.S.

Node:virtual reality, Next:virtual shredder, Previous:virtual Friday, Up:= V =

virtual reality n.

1. Computer simulations that use 3-D graphics and devices such as the Dataglove to allow the user to interact with the simulation. See **cyberspace**. 2. A form of network interaction incorporating aspects of role-playing games, interactive theater, improvisational comedy, and `true confessions' magazines. In a virtual reality forum (such as Usenet's *alt.callahans* newsgroup or the **MUD** experiments on Internet), interaction between the participants is written like a shared novel complete with scenery, `foreground characters' that may be personae utterly unlike the people who write them, and common `background characters' manipulable by all parties. The one iron law is that you may not write irreversible changes to a character without the consent of the person who `owns' it. Otherwise anything goes. See **bamf**, **cyberspace**, **teledildonics**.

Node:virtual shredder, Next:virus, Previous:virtual reality, Up:= V =

virtual shredder n.

The jargonic equivalent of the **bit bucket** at shops using IBM's VM/CMS operating system. VM/CMS officially supports a whole bestiary of virtual card readers, virtual printers, and other phantom devices; these are used to supply some of the same capabilities Unix gets from pipes and I/O redirection.

Node:virus, Next:visionary, Previous:virtual shredder, Up:= V =

virus n.

[from the obvious analogy with biological viruses, via SF] A cracker program that searches out other programs and `infects' them by embedding a copy of itself in them, so that they become **Trojan horse**s. When these programs are executed, the embedded virus is executed too, thus propagating the `infection'. This normally happens invisibly to the user. Unlike a **worm**, a virus cannot infect other computers without assistance. It is propagated by vectors such as humans trading programs with their friends (see **SEX**). The virus may do nothing but propagate itself and then allow the program to run normally. Usually, however, after propagating silently for a while, it starts doing things like writing cute messages on the terminal or playing strange tricks with the display (some viruses include nice **display hack**s). Many nasty viruses, written by particularly perversely minded **cracker**s, do irreversible damage, like nuking all the user's files.

In the 1990s, viruses have become a serious problem, especially among Wintel and Macintosh users; the lack of security on these machines enables viruses to spread easily, even infecting the operating system (Unix machines, by contrast, are immune to such attacks). The production of special anti-virus software has become an industry, and a number of exaggerated media reports have caused outbreaks of near hysteria among users; many **luser**s tend to blame *everything* that doesn't work as they had expected on virus attacks. Accordingly, this sense of `virus' has passed not only into techspeak but into also popular usage (where it is often incorrectly used to denote a **worm** or even a **Trojan horse**). See **phage**; compare **back door**; see also **Unix conspiracy**.

Node:visionary, Next:VMS, Previous:virus, Up:= V =

visionary n.

1. One who hacks vision, in the sense of an Artificial Intelligence researcher working on the problem of

getting computers to `see' things using TV cameras. (There isn't any problem in sending information from a TV camera to a computer. The problem is, how can the computer be programmed to make use of the camera information? See **SMOP**, **AI-complete**.) 2. [IBM] One who reads the outside literature. At IBM, apparently, such a penchant is viewed with awe and wonder.

Node:VMS, Next:voice, Previous:visionary, Up:= V =

VMS /V-M-S/ n.

DEC's proprietary operating system for its VAX minicomputer; one of the seven or so environments that loom largest in hacker folklore. Many Unix fans generously concede that VMS would probably be the hacker's favorite commercial OS if Unix didn't exist; though true, this makes VMS fans furious. One major hacker gripe with VMS concerns its slowness -- thus the following limerick:

```
There once was a system called VMS
Of cycles by no means abstemious.
     It's chock-full of hacks
     And runs on a VAX
And makes my poor stomach all squeamious.
                                  --- The Great Quux
```

See also **VAX**, **TOPS-10**, **TOPS-20**, **Unix**, **runic**.

Node:voice, Next:voice-net, Previous:VMS, Up:= V =

voice vt.

To phone someone, as opposed to emailing them or connecting in **talk mode**. "I'm busy now; I'll voice you later."

Node:voice-net, Next:voodoo programming, Previous:voice, Up:= V =

voice-net n.

Hackish way of referring to the telephone system, analogizing it to a digital network. Usenet **sig block**s not uncommonly include the sender's phone next to a "Voice:" or "Voice-Net:" header; common variants of this are "Voicenet" and "V-Net". Compare **paper-net**, **snail-mail**.

Node:voodoo programming, Next:VR, Previous:voice-net, Up:= V =

voodoo programming n.

[from George Bush's "voodoo economics"] 1. The use by guess or cookbook of an **obscure** or **hairy** system, feature, or algorithm that one does not truly understand. The implication is that the technique may not work, and if it doesn't, one will never know why. Almost synonymous with **black magic**, except that black magic typically isn't documented and *nobody* understands it. Compare **magic**, **deep magic**, **heavy wizardry**, **rain dance**, **cargo cult programming**, **wave a dead chicken**. 2. Things programmers do that they know shouldn't work but they try anyway, and which sometimes actually work, such as recompiling everything.

Node:VR, Next:Vulcan nerve pinch, Previous:voodoo programming, Up:= V =

VR // [MUD] n.

On-line abbrev for **virtual reality**, as opposed to **RL**.

Node:Vulcan nerve pinch, Next:vulture capitalist, Previous:VR, Up:= V =

Vulcan nerve pinch n.

[from the old "Star Trek" TV series via Commodore Amiga hackers] The keyboard combination that forces a soft-boot or jump to ROM monitor (on machines that support such a feature). On many micros this is Ctrl-Alt-Del; on Suns, L1-A; on Macintoshes, it is <Cmd>-<Power switch> or <CMD>-<CTRL>-<POWER>! Also called **three-finger salute**. Compare **quadruple bucky**.

Node:vulture capitalist, Next:W2K bug, Previous:Vulcan nerve pinch, Up:= V =

vulture capitalist n.

Pejorative hackerism for `venture capitalist', deriving from the common practice of pushing contracts that deprive inventors of control over their own innovations and most of the money they ought to have made from them.

Node:= W =, Next:= X =, Previous:= V =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= W =

- W2K bug:
- wabbit:
- WAITS:
- waldo:
- walk:
- walk off the end of:
- walking drives:
- wall:
- wall follower:
- wall time:
- wall wart:
- wallpaper:
- wango:
- wank:
- wannabee:
- war dialer:
- -ware:
- warez:
- warez d00dz:
- warez kiddies:
- warlording:

- warm boot:
- wart:
- washing machine:
- washing software:
- water MIPS:
- wave a dead chicken:
- weasel:
- web pointer:
- web toaster:
- webify:
- webmaster:
- web ring:
- wedged:
- wedgie:
- wedgitude:
- weeble:
- weeds:
- weenie:
- Weenix:
- well-behaved:
- well-connected:
- wetware:
- whack:
- whack-a-mole:
- whacker:
- whales:
- whalesong:
- What's a spline?:
- wheel:
- wheel bit:
- wheel of reincarnation:
- wheel wars:
- White Book:
- whizzy:
- wibble:
- WIBNI:
- widget:
- wiggles:
- WIMP environment:
- win:
- win big:
- win win:
- Winchester:
- windoid:
- window shopping:
- Windoze:
- winged comments:
- winkey:
- winnage:
- winner:
- winnitude:
- Wintel:

- wired:
- wirehead:
- wirewater:
- wish list:
- within delta of:
- within epsilon of:
- wizard:
- Wizard Book:
- wizard hat:
- wizard mode:
- wizardly:
- wok-on-the-wall:
- womb box:
- WOMBAT:
- womble:
- wonky:
- woofer:
- workaround:
- working as designed:
- worm:
- wormhole:
- wound around the axle:
- wrap around:
- write-only code:
- write-only language:
- write-only memory:
- Wrong Thing:
- wugga wugga:
- wumpus:
- WYSIAYG:
- WYSIWYG:

Node:W2K bug, Next:wabbit, Previous:vulture capitalist, Up:= W =

W2K bug

[from `Y2K bug' for the Year 2000 problem] The upcoming deployment of Microsoft's Windows 2000 operating system, which hackers generally expect will be among the worst train wrecks in the history of software engineering. Such is the power of Microsoft marketing, however, that it is also expected this will not become obvious until it has incurred hundreds of millions of dollars in downtime and lost opportunity costs.

Node:wabbit, Next:WAITS, Previous:W2K bug, Up:= W =

wabbit /wab'it/ n.

[almost certainly from Elmer Fudd's immortal line "You wascawwy wabbit!"] 1. A legendary early hack reported on a System/360 at RPI and elsewhere around 1978; this may have descended (if only by inspiration) from a hack called RABBITS reported from 1969 on a Burroughs 5500 at the University of Washington Computer Center. The program would make two copies of itself every time it was run,

eventually crashing the system. 2. By extension, any hack that includes infinite self-replication but is not a **virus** or **worm**. See **fork bomb** and **rabbit job**, see also **cookie monster**.

Node:WAITS, Next:waldo, Previous:wabbit, Up:= W =

WAITS /wayts/ n.

The mutant cousin of **TOPS-10** used on a handful of systems at **SAIL** up to 1990. There was never an `official' expansion of WAITS (the name itself having been arrived at by a rather sideways process), but it was frequently glossed as `West-coast Alternative to ITS'. Though WAITS was less visible than ITS, there was frequent exchange of people and ideas between the two communities, and innovations pioneered at WAITS exerted enormous indirect influence. The early screen modes of **EMACS**, for example, were directly inspired by WAITS's `E' editor -- one of a family of editors that were the first to do `real-time editing', in which the editing commands were invisible and where one typed text at the point of insertion/overwriting. The modern style of multi-region windowing is said to have originated there, and WAITS alumni at XEROX PARC and elsewhere played major roles in the developments that led to the XEROX Star, the Macintosh, and the Sun workstations. Also invented there were **bucky bits** -- thus, the ALT key on every IBM PC is a WAITS legacy. One WAITS feature very notable in pre-Web days was a news-wire interface that allowed WAITS hackers to read, store, and filter AP and UPI dispatches from their terminals; the system also featured a still-unusual level of support for what is now called `multimedia' computing, allowing analog audio and video signals to be switched to programming terminals.

Node:waldo, Next:walk, Previous:WAITS, Up:= W =

waldo /wol'doh/ n.

[From Robert A. Heinlein's story "Waldo"] 1. A mechanical agent, such as a gripper arm, controlled by a human limb. When these were developed for the nuclear industry in the mid-1940s they were named after the invention described by Heinlein in the story, which he wrote in 1942. Now known by the more generic term `telefactoring', this technology is of intense interest to NASA for tasks like space station maintenance. 2. At Harvard (particularly by Tom Cheatham and students), this is used instead of **foobar** as a metasyntactic variable and general nonsense word. See **foo**, **bar**, **foobar**, **quux**.

Node:walk, Next:walk off the end of, Previous:waldo, Up:= W =

walk n.,vt.

Traversal of a data structure, especially an array or linked-list data structure in **core**. See also **codewalker**, **silly walk**, **clobber**.

Node:walk off the end of, Next:walking drives, Previous:walk, Up:= W =

walk off the end of vt.

To run past the end of an array, list, or medium after stepping through it -- a good way to land in trouble. Often the result of an **off-by-one error**. Compare **clobber**, **roach**, **smash the stack**.

Node:walking drives, Next:wall, Previous:walk off the end of, Up:= W =

walking drives n.

An occasional failure mode of magnetic-disk drives back in the days when they were huge, clunky **washing machine**s. Those old **dinosaur** parts carried terrific angular momentum; the combination of a misaligned spindle or worn bearings and stick-slip interactions with the floor could cause them to `walk' across a room, lurching alternate corners forward a couple of millimeters at a time. There is a legend about a drive that walked over to the only door to the computer room and jammed it shut; the staff had to cut a hole in the wall in order to get at it! Walking could also be induced by certain patterns of drive access (a fast seek across the whole width of the disk, followed by a slow seek in the other direction). Some bands of old-time hackers figured out how to induce disk-accessing patterns that would do this to particular drive models and held disk-drive races.

Node:wall, Next:wall follower, Previous:walking drives, Up:= W =

wall interj.

[WPI] 1. An indication of confusion, usually spoken with a quizzical tone: "Wall??" 2. A request for further explication. Compare **octal forty**. 3. [Unix, from `write all'] v. To send a message to everyone currently logged in, esp. with the wall(8) utility.

It is said that sense 1 came from the idiom `like talking to a blank wall'. It was originally used in situations where, after you had carefully answered a question, the questioner stared at you blankly, clearly having understood nothing that was explained. You would then throw out a "Hello, wall?" to elicit some sort of response from the questioner. Later, confused questioners began voicing "Wall?" themselves.

Node:wall follower, Next:wall time, Previous:wall, Up:= W =

wall follower n.

A person or algorithm that compensates for lack of sophistication or native stupidity by efficiently following some simple procedure shown to have been effective in the past. Used of an algorithm, this is not necessarily pejorative; it recalls `Harvey Wallbanger', the winning robot in an early AI contest (named, of course, after the cocktail). Harvey successfully solved mazes by keeping a `finger' on one wall and running till it came out the other end. This was inelegant, but it was mathematically guaranteed to work on simply-connected mazes -- and, in fact, Harvey outperformed more sophisticated robots that tried to `learn' each maze by building an internal representation of it. Used of humans, the term *is* pejorative and implies an uncreative, bureaucratic, by-the-book mentality. See also **code grinder**; compare **droid**.

Node:wall time, Next:wall wart, Previous:wall follower, Up:= W =

wall time n.

(also `wall clock time') 1. `Real world' time (what the clock on the wall shows), as opposed to the system clock's idea of time. 2. The real running time of a program, as opposed to the number of **tick**s required to execute it (on a timesharing system these always differ, as no one program gets all the ticks, and on multiprocessor systems with good thread support one may get more processor time than real time).

Node:wall wart, Next:wallpaper, Previous:wall time, Up:= W =

wall wart n.

A small power-supply brick with integral male plug, designed to plug directly into a wall outlet; called a `wart' because when installed on a power strip it tends to block up at least one more socket than it uses.. These are frequently associated with modems and other small electronic devices which would become unacceptably bulky or hot if they had power supplies on board (there are other reasons as well having to do with the cost of UL certification).

Node:wallpaper, Next:wango, Previous:wall wart, Up:= W =

wallpaper n.

1. A file containing a listing (e.g., assembly listing) or a transcript, esp. a file containing a transcript of all or part of a login session. (The idea was that the paper for such listings was essentially good only for wallpaper, as evidenced at Stanford, where it was used to cover windows.) Now rare, esp. since other systems have developed other terms for it (e.g., PHOTO on TWENEX). However, the Unix world doesn't have an equivalent term, so perhaps **wallpaper** will take hold there. The term probably originated on ITS, where the commands to begin and end transcript files were `:WALBEG` and `:WALEND`, with default file `WALL PAPER` (the space was a path delimiter). 2. The background pattern used on graphical workstations (this is techspeak under the `Windows' graphical user interface to MS-DOS). 3. `wallpaper file' n. The file that contains the wallpaper information before it is actually printed on paper. (Even if you don't intend ever to produce a real paper copy of the file, it is still called a wallpaper file.)

Node:wango, Next:wank, Previous:wallpaper, Up:= W =

wango /wang'goh/ n.

Random bit-level **grovel**ling going on in a system during some unspecified operation. Often used in combination with **mumble**. For example: "You start with the `.o' file, run it through this postprocessor that does mumble-wango -- and it comes out a snazzy object-oriented executable."

Node:wank, Next:wannabee, Previous:wango, Up:= W =

wank /wangk/ n.,v.,adj.

[Columbia University: prob. by mutation from Commonwealth slang v. `wank', to masturbate] Used much as **hack** is elsewhere, as a noun denoting a clever technique or person or the result of such cleverness. May describe (negatively) the act of hacking for hacking's sake ("Quit wanking, let's go get supper!") or (more positively) a **wizard**. Adj. `wanky' describes something particularly clever (a person, program, or algorithm). Conversations can also get wanky when there are too many wanks involved. This excess wankiness is signalled by an overload of the `wankometer' (compare **bogometer**). When the wankometer overloads, the conversation's subject must be changed, or all non-wanks will leave. Compare `neep-neeping' (under **neep-neep**). Usage: U.S. only. In Britain and the Commonwealth this word is *extremely* rude and is best avoided unless one intends to give offense. Adjectival `wanky' is less offensive and simply means `stupid' or `broken' (this is mainstream in Great Britain).

Node:wannabee, Next:war dialer, Previous:wank, Up:= W =

wannabee /won'*-bee/ n.

(also, more plausibly, spelled `wannabe') [from a term recently used to describe Madonna fans who dress, talk, and act like their idol; prob. originally from biker slang] A would-be **hacker**. The connotations of this term differ sharply depending on the age and exposure of the subject. Used of a person who is in or might be entering **larval stage**, it is semi-approving; such wannabees can be annoying but most hackers remember that they, too, were once such creatures. When used of any professional programmer, CS academic, writer, or **suit**, it is derogatory, implying that said person is trying to cuddle up to the hacker mystique but doesn't, fundamentally, have a prayer of understanding what it is all about. Overuse of terms from this lexicon is often an indication of the **wannabee** nature. Compare **newbie**.

Historical note: The wannabee phenomenon has a slightly different flavor now (1993) than it did ten or fifteen years ago. When the people who are now hackerdom's tribal elders were in **larval stage**, the process of becoming a hacker was largely unconscious and unaffected by models known in popular culture -- communities formed spontaneously around people who, *as individuals*, felt irresistibly drawn to do hackerly things, and what wannabees experienced was a fairly pure, skill-focused desire to become similarly wizardly. Those days of innocence are gone forever; society's adaptation to the advent of the microcomputer after 1980 included the elevation of the hacker as a new kind of folk hero, and the result is that some people semi-consciously set out to *be hackers* and borrow hackish prestige by fitting the popular image of hackers. Fortunately, to do this really well, one has to actually become a wizard. Nevertheless, old-time hackers tend to share a poorly articulated disquiet about the change; among other things, it gives them mixed feelings about the effects of public compendia of lore like this one.

Node:war dialer, Next:-ware, Previous:wannabee, Up:= W =

war dialer n.

A cracking tool, a program that calls a given list or range of phone numbers and records those which answer with handshake tones (and so might be entry points to computer or telecommunications systems). Some of these programs have become quite sophisticated, and can now detect modem, fax, or PBX tones and log each one separately. The war dialer is one of the most important tools in the **phreaker**'s kit. These programs evolved from early **demon dialer**s.

Node:-ware, Next:warez, Previous:war dialer, Up:= W =

-ware suff.

[from `software'] Commonly used to form jargon terms for classes of software. For examples, see **annoyware**, **careware**, **crippleware**, **crudware**, **freeware**, **fritterware**, **guiltware**, **liveware**, **meatware**, **payware**, **psychedelicware**, **shareware**, **shelfware**, **vaporware**, **wetware**.

Node:warez, Next:warez d00dz, Previous:-ware, Up:= W =

warez /weirz/ n.

Widely used in **cracker** subcultures to denote cracked version of commercial software, that is versions from which copy-protection has been stripped. Hackers recognize this term but don't use it themselves. See **warez d00dz**.

Node:warez d00dz, Next:warez kiddies, Previous:warez, Up:= W =

warez d00dz /weirz doodz/ n.

A substantial subculture of **cracker**s refer to themselves as `warez d00dz'; there is evidently some connection with **B1FF** here. As `Ozone Pilot', one former warez d00d, wrote:

> Warez d00dz get illegal copies of copyrighted software. If it has copy protection on it, they break the protection so the software can be copied. Then they distribute it around the world via several gateways. Warez d00dz form badass group names like RAZOR and the like. They put up boards that distribute the latest ware, or pirate program. The whole point of the Warez sub-culture is to get the pirate program released and distributed before any other group. I know, I know. But don't ask, and it won't hurt as much. This is how they prove their poweress [sic]. It gives them the right to say, "I released King's Quest IVXIX before you so obviously my testicles are larger." Again don't ask...

The studly thing to do if one is a warez d00d, it appears, is emit `0-day warez', that is copies of commercial software copied and cracked on the same day as its retail release. Warez d00ds also hoard software in a big way, collecting untold megabytes of arcade-style games, pornographic JPGs, and applications they'll never use onto their hard disks. As Ozone Pilot acutely observes:

> [BELONG] is the only word you will need to know. Warez d00dz want to belong. They have been shunned by everyone, and thus turn to cyberspace for acceptance. That is why they always start groups like TGW, FLT, USA and the like. Structure makes them happy. [...] Warez d00dz will never have a handle like "Pink Daisy" because warez d00dz are insecure. Only someone who is very secure with a good dose of self-esteem can stand up to the cries of fag and girlie-man. More likely you will find warez d00dz with handles like: Doctor Death, Deranged Lunatic, Hellraiser, Mad Prince, Dreamdevil, The Unknown, Renegade Chemist, Terminator, and Twin Turbo. They like to sound badass when they can hide behind their terminals. More likely, if you were given a sample of 100 people, the person whose handle is Hellraiser is the last person you'd associate with the name.

The contrast with Internet hackers is stark and instructive. See **cracker**, **wannabee**, **handle**, **elite**; compare **weenie**, **spod**.

Node:warez kiddies, Next:warlording, Previous:warez d00dz, Up:= W =

warez kiddies n.

Even more derogatory way of referring to **warez d00dz**; refers to the fact that most warez d00dz are around the age of puberty. Compare **script kiddies**.

Node:warlording, Next:warm boot, Previous:warez kiddies, Up:= W =

warlording v.

[from the Usenet group *alt.fan.warlord*] The act of excoriating a bloated, ugly, or derivative **sig block**. Common grounds for warlording include the presence of a signature rendered in a **BUAF**, over-used or cliched **sig quote**s, ugly **ASCII art**, or simply excessive size. The original `Warlord' was a **B1FF**-like **newbie** c.1991 who featured in his sig a particularly large and obnoxious ASCII graphic resembling the sword of Conan the Barbarian in the 1981 John Milius movie; the group name *alt.fan.warlord* was sarcasm, and the characteristic mode of warlording is devastatingly sarcastic praise.

Node:warm boot, Next:wart, Previous:warlording, Up:= W =

warm boot n.

See **boot**.

Node:wart, Next:washing machine, Previous:warm boot, Up:= W =

wart n.

A small, **crock**y **feature** that sticks out of an otherwise **clean** design. Something conspicuous for localized ugliness, especially a special-case exception to a general rule. For example, in some versions of `csh(1)`, single quotes literalize every character inside them except `!`. In ANSI C, the `??` syntax used for obtaining ASCII characters in a foreign environment is a wart. See also **miswart**.

Node:washing machine, Next:washing software, Previous:wart, Up:= W =

washing machine n.

1. Old-style 14-inch hard disks in floor-standing cabinets. So called because of the size of the cabinet and the `top-loading' access to the media packs -- and, of course, they were always set on `spin cycle'. The washing-machine idiom transcends language barriers; it is even used in Russian hacker jargon. See also **walking drives**. The thick channel cables connecting these were called `bit hoses' (see **hose**, sense 3). 2. [CMU] A machine used exclusively for **washing software**. CMU has clusters of these.

Node:washing software, Next:water MIPS, Previous:washing machine, Up:= W =

washing software n.

The process of recompiling a software distribution (used more often when the recompilation is occuring from scratch) to pick up and merge together all of the various changes that have been made to the source.

Node:water MIPS, Next:wave a dead chicken, Previous:washing software, Up:= W =

water MIPS n.

(see **MIPS**, sense 2) Large, water-cooled machines of either today's ECL-supercomputer flavor or yesterday's traditional **mainframe** type.

Node:wave a dead chicken, Next:weasel, Previous:water MIPS, Up:= W =

wave a dead chicken v.

To perform a ritual in the direction of crashed software or hardware that one believes to be futile but is nevertheless necessary so that others are satisfied that an appropriate degree of effort has been expended. "I'll wave a dead chicken over the source code, but I really think we've run into an OS bug." Compare **voodoo programming**, **rain dance**; see also **casting the runes**.

Node:weasel, Next:web pointer, Previous:wave a dead chicken, Up:= W =

weasel n.

[Cambridge] A naive user, one who deliberately or accidentally does things that are stupid or ill-advised. Roughly synonymous with **loser**.

Node:web pointer, Next:web toaster, Previous:weasel, Up:= W =

web pointer n.

A World Wide Web **URL**. See also **hotlink**, which has slightly different connotations.

Node:web toaster, Next:webify, Previous:web pointer, Up:= W =

web toaster n.

A small specialized computer, shipped with no monitor or keyboard or any other external peripherals, pre-configured to be controlled through an Ethernet port and function as a WWW server. Products of this kind (for example the Cobalt Qube) are often about the size of a toaster. See **toaster**; compare **video toaster**.

Node:webify, Next:webmaster, Previous:web toaster, Up:= W =

webify n.

To put a piece of (possibly already existing) material on the WWW. Frequently used for papers ("Why don't you webify all your publications?") or for demos ("They webified their 6.866 final project"). This term seems to have been (rather logically) independently invented multiple times in the early 1990s.

Node:webmaster, Next:web ring, Previous:webify, Up:= W =

webmaster n.

[WWW: from **postmaster**] The person at a site providing World Wide Web information who is responsible for maintaining the public pages and keeping the Web server running and properly configured.

Node:web ring, Next:wedged, Previous:webmaster, Up:= W =

web ring n.

Two or more web sites connected by prominent links between sites sharing a common interest or theme. Usually such cliques have the topology of a ring, in order to make it easy for visitors to navigate through all of them.

Node:wedged, Next:wedgie, Previous:web ring, Up:= W =

wedged adj.

1. To be stuck, incapable of proceeding without help. This is different from having crashed. If the system has crashed, it has become totally non-functioning. If the system is wedged, it is trying to do something but cannot make progress; it may be capable of doing a few things, but not be fully operational. For example, a process may become wedged if it **deadlock**s with another (but not all instances of wedging are deadlocks). See also **gronk**, **locked up**, **hosed**, **hung** (wedged is more severe than **hung**). 2. Often refers to humans suffering misconceptions. "He's totally wedged -- he's convinced that he can levitate through meditation." 3. [Unix] Specifically used to describe the state of a TTY left in a losing state by abort of a screen-oriented program or one that has messed with the line discipline in some obscure way.

There is some dispute over the origin of this term. It is usually thought to derive from a common description of recto-cranial inversion; however, it may actually have originated with older `hot-press' printing technology in which physical type elements were locked into type frames with wedges driven in by mallets. Once this had been done, no changes in the typesetting for that page could be made.

Node:wedgie, Next:wedgitude, Previous:wedged, Up:= W =

wedgie n.

[Fairchild] A bug. Prob. related to **wedged**.

Node:wedgitude, Next:weeble, Previous:wedgie, Up:= W =

wedgitude /wedj'i-t[y]ood/ n.

The quality or state of being **wedged**.

Node:weeble, Next:weeds, Previous:wedgitude, Up:= W =

weeble /weeb'l/ interj.

[Cambridge] Used to denote frustration, usually at amazing stupidity. "I stuck the disk in upside down." "Weeble...." Compare **gurfle**.

Node:weeds, Next:weenie, Previous:weeble, Up:= W =

weeds n.

1. Refers to development projects or algorithms that have no possible relevance or practical application. Comes from `off in the weeds'. Used in phrases like "lexical analysis for microcode is serious weeds...." 2. At CDC/ETA before its demise, the phrase `go off in the weeds' was equivalent to IBM's **branch to Fishkill** and mainstream hackerdom's **jump off into never-never land**.

Node:weenie, Next:Weenix, Previous:weeds, Up:= W =

weenie n.

1. [on BBSes] Any of a species of luser resembling a less amusing version of **B1FF** that infests many **BBS** systems. The typical weenie is a teenage boy with poor social skills travelling under a grandiose **handle** derived from fantasy or heavy-metal rock lyrics. Among sysops, `the weenie problem' refers to the marginally literate and profanity-laden **flamage** weenies tend to spew all over a newly-discovered BBS. Compare **spod**, **computer geek**, **terminal junkie**, **warez d00dz**. 2. [Among hackers] When used with a qualifier (for example, as in **Unix weenie**, VMS weenie, IBM weenie) this can be either an insult or a term of praise, depending on context, tone of voice, and whether or not it is applied by a person who considers him or herself to be the same sort of weenie. Implies that the weenie has put a major investment of time, effort, and concentration into the area indicated; whether this is good or bad depends on the hearer's judgment of how the speaker feels about that area. See also **bigot**. 3. The semicolon character, `;` (ASCII 0111011).

Node:Weenix, Next:well-behaved, Previous:weenie, Up:= W =

Weenix /wee'niks/ n.

1. [ITS] A derogatory term for **Unix**, derived from **Unix weenie**. According to one noted ex-ITSer, it is "the operating system preferred by Unix Weenies: typified by poor modularity, poor reliability, hard file deletion, no file version numbers, case sensitivity everywhere, and users who believe that these are all advantages". (Some ITS fans behave as though they believe Unix stole a future that rightfully belonged to them. See **ITS**, sense 2.) 2. [Brown University] A Unix-like OS developed for tutorial purposes at Brown University. See http://www.cs.brown.edu/courses/cs167/weenix.html. Named independently of the ITS usage.

Node:well-behaved, Next:well-connected, Previous:Weenix, Up:= W =

well-behaved adj.

1. [primarily **MS-DOS**] Said of software conforming to system interface guidelines and standards. Well-behaved software uses the operating system to do chores such as keyboard input, allocating memory and drawing graphics. Oppose **ill-behaved**. 2. Software that does its job quietly and without counterintuitive effects. Esp. said of software having an interface spec sufficiently simple and well-defined that it can be used as a **tool** by other software. See **cat**. 3. Said of an algorithm that doesn't **crash** or **blow up**, even when given **pathological** input. Implies that the stability of the algorithm is intrinsic, which makes this somewhat different from **bulletproof**.

Node:well-connected, Next:wetware, Previous:well-behaved, Up:= W =

well-connected adj.

Said of a computer installation, asserts that it has reliable email links with the network and/or that it relays a large fraction of available **Usenet** newsgroups. `Well-known' can be almost synonymous, but also implies that the site's name is familiar to many (due perhaps to an archive service or active Usenet users).

Node:wetware, Next:whack, Previous:well-connected, Up:= W =

wetware /wet'weir/ n.

[prob. from the novels of Rudy Rucker] 1. The human nervous system, as opposed to computer hardware or software. "Wetware has 7 plus or minus 2 temporary registers." 2. Human beings (programmers, operators, administrators) attached to a computer system, as opposed to the system's hardware or software. See **liveware**, **meatware**.

Node:whack, Next:whack-a-mole, Previous:wetware, Up:= W =

whack v.

According to arch-hacker James Gosling (designer of **NeWS**, **GOSMACS** and Java), to "...modify a program with no idea whatsoever how it works." (See **whacker**.) It is actually possible to do this in nontrivial circumstances if the change is small and well-defined and you are very good at **glark**ing things from context. As a trivial example, it is relatively easy to change all `stderr` writes to `stdout` writes in a piece of C filter code which remains otherwise mysterious.

Node:whack-a-mole, Next:whacker, Previous:whack, Up:= W =

whack-a-mole n.

[Usenet] The practice of repeatedly causing spammers' **throwaway account**s and drop boxes to be terminated. Named for the carnival game which involves quickly and repeatedly hitting the heads of mechanical moles with a mallet as they pop up from their holes.

Node:whacker, Next:whales, Previous:whack-a-mole, Up:= W =

whacker n.

[University of Maryland: from **hacker**] 1. A person, similar to a **hacker**, who enjoys exploring the details of programmable systems and how to stretch their capabilities. Whereas a hacker tends to produce great hacks, a whacker only ends up whacking the system or program in question. Whackers are often quite egotistical and eager to claim **wizard** status, regardless of the views of their peers. 2. A person who is good at programming quickly, though rather poorly and ineptly.

Node:whales, Next:whalesong, Previous:whacker, Up:= W =

whales n.

See **like kicking dead whales down the beach**.

Node:whalesong, Next:What's a spline?, Previous:whales, Up:= W =

whalesong n.

The peculiar clicking and whooshing sounds made by a PEP modem such as the Telebit Trailblazer as it tries to synchronize with another PEP modem for their special high-speed mode. This sound isn't anything like the normal two-tone handshake between conventional V-series modems and is instantly recognizable to anyone who has heard it more than once. It sounds, in fact, very much like whale songs. This noise is also called "the moose call" or "moose tones".

Node:What's a spline?, Next:wheel, Previous:whalesong, Up:= W =

What's a spline?

[XEROX PARC] This phrase expands to: "You have just used a term that I've heard for a year and a half, and I feel I should know, but don't. My curiosity has finally overcome my guilt." The PARC lexicon adds "Moral: don't hesitate to ask questions, even if they seem obvious."

Node:wheel, Next:wheel bit, Previous:What's a spline?, Up:= W =

wheel n.

[from slang `big wheel' for a powerful person] A person who has an active **wheel bit**. "We need to find a wheel to unwedge the hung tape drives." (See **wedged**, sense 1.) The traditional name of security group zero in **BSD** (to which the major system-internal users like **root** belong) is `wheel'. Some vendors have expanded on this usage, modifying Unix so that only members of group `wheel' can **go root**.

Node:wheel bit, Next:wheel of reincarnation, Previous:wheel, Up:= W =

wheel bit n.

A privilege bit that allows the possessor to perform some restricted operation on a timesharing system, such as read or write any file on the system regardless of protections, change or look at any address in the running monitor, crash or reload the system, and kill or create jobs and user accounts. The term was invented on the TENEX operating system, and carried over to TOPS-20, XEROX-IFS, and others. The state of being in a privileged logon is sometimes called `wheel mode'. This term entered the Unix culture from TWENEX in the mid-1980s and has been gaining popularity there (esp. at university sites). See also **root**.

Node:wheel of reincarnation, Next:wheel wars, Previous:wheel bit, Up:= W =

wheel of reincarnation

[coined in a paper by T. H. Myer and I.E. Sutherland "On the Design of Display Processors", Comm. ACM, Vol. 11, no. 6, June 1968)] Term used to refer to a well-known effect whereby function in a computing system family is migrated out to special-purpose peripheral hardware for speed, then the peripheral evolves toward more computing power as it does its job, then somebody notices that it is inefficient to support two asymmetrical processors in the architecture and folds the function back into the main CPU, at which point the cycle begins again.

Several iterations of this cycle have been observed in graphics-processor design, and at least one or two in communications and floating-point processors. Also known as `the Wheel of Life', `the Wheel of Samsara', and other variations of the basic Hindu/Buddhist theological idea. See also **blitter**, **bit bang**.

Node:wheel wars, Next:White Book, Previous:wheel of reincarnation, Up:= W =

wheel wars n.

[Stanford University] A period in **larval stage** during which student hackers hassle each other by attempting to log each other out of the system, delete each other's files, and otherwise wreak havoc, usually at the expense of the lesser users.

Node:White Book, Next:whizzy, Previous:wheel wars, Up:= W =

White Book n.

1. Syn. **K&R**. 2. Adobe's fourth book in the PostScript series, describing the previously-secret format of Type 1 fonts; "Adobe Type 1 Font Format, version 1.1", (Addison-Wesley, 1990, ISBN 0-201-57044-0). See also **Red Book**, **Green Book**, **Blue Book**.

Node:whizzy, Next:wibble, Previous:White Book, Up:= W =

whizzy adj.

(alt. `wizzy') [Sun] Describes a **cuspy** program; one that is feature-rich and well presented.

Node:wibble, Next:WIBNI, Previous:whizzy, Up:= W =

wibble

[UK, perh. originally from the first "Roger Irrelevant" strip in "VIZ" comics] 1. n.,v. Commonly used to describe chatter, content-free remarks or other essentially meaningless contributions to threads in newsgroups. "Oh, rspence is wibbling again". 2. [UK IRC] An explicit on-line no-op equivalent to **humma**. 3. One of the preferred **metasyntactic variable**s in the UK, forming a series with `wobble`, `wubble`, and `flob` (attributed to the hilarious historical comedy "Blackadder"). 4. A pronounciation of the letters "www", as seen in URLs; i.e., www.{foo}.com may be pronounced "wibble dot foo dot com" (compare **dub dub dub**).

The ancestral sense of this word is reported to have been "My brain is packing it in now. I give up. *Tilt! Tilt! Tilt!*"

Node:WIBNI, Next:widget, Previous:wibble, Up:= W =

WIBNI // n.

[Bell Labs: Wouldn't It Be Nice If] What most requirements documents and specifications consist entirely of. Compare **IWBNI**.

Node:widget, Next:wiggles, Previous:WIBNI, Up:= W =

widget n.

1. A meta-thing. Used to stand for a real object in didactic examples (especially database tutorials). Legend has it that the original widgets were holders for buggy whips. "But suppose the parts list for a widget has 52 entries...." 2. [poss. evoking `window gadget'] A user interface object in **X** graphical user interfaces.

Node:wiggles, Next:WIMP environment, Previous:widget, Up:= W =

wiggles n.

[scientific computation] In solving partial differential equations by finite difference and similar methods, wiggles are sawtooth (up-down-up-down) oscillations at the shortest wavelength representable on the grid. If an algorithm is unstable, this is often the most unstable waveform, so it grows to dominate the solution. Alternatively, stable (though inaccurate) wiggles can be generated near a discontinuity by a Gibbs phenomenon.

Node:WIMP environment, Next:win, Previous:wiggles, Up:= W =

WIMP environment n.

[acronym: `Window, Icon, Menu, Pointing device (or Pull-down menu)'] A graphical-user-interface environment such as **X** or the Macintosh interface, esp. as described by a hacker who prefers command-line interfaces for their superior flexibility and extensibility. However, it is also used without negative connotations; one must pay attention to voice tone and other signals to interpret correctly. See **menuitis**, **user-obsequious**.

Node:win, Next:win big, Previous:WIMP environment, Up:= W =

win

[MIT; now common everywhere] 1. vi. To succeed. A program wins if no unexpected conditions arise, or (especially) if it sufficiently **robust** to take exceptions in stride. 2. n. Success, or a specific instance thereof. A pleasing outcome. "So it turned out I could use a **lexer** generator instead of hand-coding my own pattern recognizer. What a win!" Emphatic forms: `moby win', `super win', `hyper-win' (often used interjectively as a reply). For some reason `suitable win' is also common at MIT, usually in reference to a satisfactory solution to a problem. Oppose **lose**; see also **big win**, which isn't quite just an intensification of `win'.

Node:win big, Next:win win, Previous:win, Up:= W =

win big vi.

To experience serendipity. "I went shopping and won big; there was a 2-for-1 sale." See **big win**.

Node:win win, Next:Winchester, Previous:win big, Up:= W =

win win excl.

Expresses pleasure at a **win**.

Node:Winchester, Next:windoid, Previous:win win, Up:= W =

Winchester n.

Informal generic term for sealed-enclosure magnetic-disk drives in which the read-write head planes over the disk surface on an air cushion. There is a legend that the name arose because the original 1973 engineering prototype for what later became the IBM 3340 featured two 30-megabyte volumes; 30-30 became `Winchester' when somebody noticed the similarity to the common term for a famous Winchester rifle (in the latter, the first 30 referred to caliber and the second to the grain weight of the charge). (It is sometimes incorrectly claimed that Winchester was the laboratory in which the technology was developed.)

Node:windoid, Next:window shopping, Previous:Winchester, Up:= W =

windoid n.

In the Macintosh world, a style of window with much less adornment (smaller or missing title bar, zoom box, etc, etc) than a standard window.

Node:window shopping, Next:Windoze, Previous:windoid, Up:= W =

window shopping n.

[US Geological Survey] Among users of **WIMP environment**s like **X** or the Macintosh, extended experimentation with new window colors, fonts, and icon shapes. This activity can take up hours of what might otherwise have been productive working time. "I spent the afternoon window shopping until I found the coolest shade of green for my active window borders -- now they perfectly match my medium slate blue background." Serious window shoppers will spend their days with bitmap editors, creating new and different icons and background patterns for all to see. Also: `window dressing', the act of applying new fonts, colors, etc. See **fritterware**, compare **macdink**.

Node:Windoze, Next:winged comments, Previous:window shopping, Up:= W =

Windoze /win'dohz/ n.

See **Microsloth Windows**.

Node:winged comments, Next:winkey, Previous:Windoze, Up:= W =

winged comments n.

Comments set on the same line as code, as opposed to **boxed comments**. In C, for example:

```
d = sqrt(x*x + y*y);  /* distance from origin */
```

Generally these refer only to the action(s) taken on that line.

Node:winkey, Next:winnage, Previous:winged comments, Up:= W =

winkey n.

(alt. `winkey face') See **emoticon**.

Node:winnage, Next:winner, Previous:winkey, Up:= W =

winnage /win'*j/ n.

The situation when a lossage is corrected, or when something is winning.

Node:winner, Next:winnitude, Previous:winnage, Up:= W =

winner

1. n. An unexpectedly good situation, program, programmer, or person. 2. `real winner': Often sarcastic, but also used as high praise (see also the note under **user**). "He's a real winner -- never reports a bug till he can duplicate it and send in an example."

Node:winnitude, Next:Wintel, Previous:winner, Up:= W =

winnitude /win'*-t[y]ood/ n.

The quality of winning (as opposed to **winnage**, which is the result of winning). "Guess what? They tweaked the microcode and now the LISP interpreter runs twice as fast as it used to." "That's really great! Boy, what winnitude!" "Yup. I'll probably get a half-hour's winnage on the next run of my program." Perhaps curiously, the obvious antonym `lossitude' is rare.

Node:Wintel, Next:wired, Previous:winnitude, Up:= W =

Wintel n.

Microsoft Windows plus Intel - the tacit alliance that dominated desktop computing in the 1990s. Now (1999) possibly on the verge of breaking up under pressure from **Linux**; see **Lintel**.

Node:wired, Next:wirehead, Previous:Wintel, Up:= W =

wired n.

See **hardwired**.

Node:wirehead, Next:wirewater, Previous:wired, Up:= W =

wirehead /wi:r'hed/ n.

[prob. from SF slang for an electrical-brain-stimulation addict] 1. A hardware hacker, especially one who concentrates on communications hardware. 2. An expert in local-area networks. A wirehead can be a network software wizard too, but will always have the ability to deal with network hardware, down to the smallest component. Wireheads are known for their ability to lash up an Ethernet terminator from spare

resistors, for example.

Node:wirewater, Next:wish list, Previous:wirehead, Up:= W =

wirewater n.

Syn. **programming fluid**. This melds the mainstream slang adjective `wired' (stimulated, up, hyperactive) with `firewater'; however, it refers to caffeinacious rather than alcoholic beverages.

Node:wish list, Next:within delta of, Previous:wirewater, Up:= W =

wish list n.

A list of desired features or bug fixes that probably won't get done for a long time, usually because the person responsible for the code is too busy or can't think of a clean way to do it. "OK, I'll add automatic filename completion to the wish list for the new interface." Compare **tick-list features**.

Node:within delta of, Next:within epsilon of, Previous:wish list, Up:= W =

within delta of adj.

See **delta**.

Node:within epsilon of, Next:wizard, Previous:within delta of, Up:= W =

within epsilon of adj.

See **epsilon**.

Node:wizard, Next:Wizard Book, Previous:within epsilon of, Up:= W =

wizard n.

1. Transitively, a person who knows how a complex piece of software or hardware works (that is, who **grok**s it); esp. someone who can find and fix bugs quickly in an emergency. Someone is a **hacker** if he or she has general hacking ability, but is a wizard with respect to something only if he or she has specific detailed knowledge of that thing. A good hacker could become a wizard for something given the time to study it. 2. The term `wizard' is also used intransitively of someone who has extremely high-level hacking or problem-solving ability. 3. A person who is permitted to do things forbidden to ordinary people; one who has **wheel** privileges on a system. 4. A Unix expert, esp. a Unix systems programmer. This usage is well enough established that `Unix Wizard' is a recognized job title at some corporations and to most headhunters. See **guru**, **lord high fixer**. See also **deep magic**, **heavy wizardry**, **incantation**, **magic**, **mutter**, **rain dance**, **voodoo programming**, **wave a dead chicken**.

Node:Wizard Book, Next:wizard hat, Previous:wizard, Up:= W =

Wizard Book n.

"Structure and Interpretation of Computer Programs" (Hal Abelson, Jerry Sussman and Julie Sussman; MIT Press, 1984, 1996; ISBN 0-262-01153-0), an excellent computer science text used in introductory courses at MIT. So called because of the wizard on the jacket. One of the **bible**s of the LISP/Scheme world. Also, less commonly, known as the **Purple Book**.

Node:wizard hat, Next:wizard mode, Previous:Wizard Book, Up:= W =

wizard hat n.

[also, after Terry Pratchett, `pointy hat'] Notional headgear worn by whoever is the **wizard** in a particular context. The implication is that it's a transferable role. "Talk to Alice, she's wearing the TCP/IP wizard hat while Bob is on vacation." This metaphor is sufficiently live that one may actually see hackers miming the act of putting on, taking off, or transferring a phantom hat. Compare **patch pumpkin**.

Node:wizard mode, Next:wizardly, Previous:wizard hat, Up:= W =

wizard mode n.

[from **rogue**] A special access mode of a program or system, usually passworded, that permits some users godlike privileges. Generally not used for operating systems themselves (`root mode' or `wheel mode' would be used instead). This term is often used with respect to games that have editable state.

Node:wizardly, Next:wok-on-the-wall, Previous:wizard mode, Up:= W =

wizardly adj.

Pertaining to wizards. A wizardly **feature** is one that only a wizard could understand or use properly.

Node:wok-on-the-wall, Next:womb box, Previous:wizardly, Up:= W =

wok-on-the-wall n.

A small microwave dish antenna used for cross-campus private network circuits, from the obvious resemblance between a microwave dish and the Chinese culinary utensil.

Node:womb box, Next:WOMBAT, Previous:wok-on-the-wall, Up:= W =

womb box n.

1. [TMRC] Storage space for equipment. 2. [proposed] A variety of hard-shell equipment case with heavy interior padding and/or shaped carrier cutouts in a foam-rubber matrix; mundanely called a `flight case'. Used for delicate test equipment, electronics, and musical instruments.

Node:WOMBAT, Next:womble, Previous:womb box, Up:= W =

WOMBAT /wom'bat/ adj.

[acronym: Waste Of Money, Brains, And Time] Applied to problems which are both profoundly **uninteresting** in themselves and unlikely to benefit anyone interesting even if solved. Often used in fanciful constructions such as `wrestling with a wombat'. See also **crawling horror**, **SMOP**. Also note the rather different usage as a metasyntactic variable in **Commonwealth Hackish**.

Users of the PDP-11 database program DATATRIEVE adopted the wombat as their notional mascot; the program's help file responded to "HELP WOMBAT" with factual information about Real World wombats.

Node:womble, Next:wonky, Previous:WOMBAT, Up:= W =

womble n.

[Unisys UK: from British cartoon characters] A user who has great difficulty in communicating their requirements and/or in using the resulting software. Extreme case of **luser**. An especially senior or high-ranking womble is referred to as Great-Uncle Bulgaria.

Node:wonky, Next:woofer, Previous:womble, Up:= W =

wonky /wong'kee/ adj.

[from Australian slang] Yet another approximate synonym for **broken**. Specifically connotes a malfunction that produces behavior seen as crazy, humorous, or amusingly perverse. "That was the day the printer's font logic went wonky and everybody's listings came out in Tengwar." Also in `wonked out'. See **funky**, **demented**, **bozotic**.

Node:woofer, Next:workaround, Previous:wonky, Up:= W =

woofer n.

[University of Waterloo] Some varieties of wide paper for printers have a perforation 8.5 inches from the left margin that allows the excess on the right-hand side to be torn off when the print format is 80 columns or less wide. The right-hand excess may be called `woofer'. This term (like **tweeter**) has been in use at Waterloo since 1972, but is elsewhere unknown. In audio jargon, the word refers to the bass speaker(s) on a hi-fi.

Node:workaround, Next:working as designed, Previous:woofer, Up:= W =

workaround n.

1. A temporary **kluge** used to bypass, mask, or otherwise avoid a **bug** or **misfeature** in some system. Theoretically, workarounds are always replaced by **fix**es; in practice, customers often find themselves living with workarounds for long periods of time. "The code died on NUL characters in the input, so I fixed it to interpret them as spaces." "That's not a fix, that's a workaround!" 2. A procedure to be employed by the user in order to do what some currently non-working feature should do. Hypothetical example: "Using META-F7 **crash**es the 4.43 build of Weemax, but as a workaround you can type CTRL-R, then SHIFT-F5, and delete the remaining **cruft** by hand."

Node:working as designed, Next:worm, Previous:workaround, Up:= W =

working as designed adj.

[IBM] 1. In conformance to a wrong or inappropriate specification; useful, but misdesigned. 2. Frequently used as a sardonic comment on a program's utility. 3. Unfortunately also used as a bogus reason for not accepting a criticism or suggestion. At **IBM**, this sense is used in official documents! See **BAD**.

Node:worm, Next:wormhole, Previous:working as designed, Up:= W =

worm n.

[from `tapeworm' in John Brunner's novel "The Shockwave Rider", via XEROX PARC] A program that propagates itself over a network, reproducing itself as it goes. Compare **virus**. Nowadays the term has negative connotations, as it is assumed that only **cracker**s write worms. Perhaps the best-known example was Robert T. Morris's **Great Worm** of 1988, a `benign' one that got out of control and hogged hundreds of Suns and VAXen across the U.S. See also **cracker**, **RTM**, **Trojan horse**, **ice**.

Node:wormhole, Next:wound around the axle, Previous:worm, Up:= W =

wormhole /werm'hohl/ n.

[from the `wormhole' singularities hypothesized in some versions of General Relativity theory] 1. [n.,obs.] A location in a monitor which contains the address of a routine, with the specific intent of making it easy to substitute a different routine. This term is now obsolescent; modern operating systems use clusters of wormholes extensively (for modularization of I/O handling in particular, as in the Unix device-driver organization) but the preferred techspeak for these clusters is `device tables', `jump tables' or `capability tables'. 2. [Amateur Packet Radio] A network path using a commercial satellite link to join two or more amateur VHF networks. So called because traffic routed through a wormhole leaves and re-enters the amateur network over great distances with usually little clue in the message routing header as to how it got from one relay to the other. Compare **gopher hole** (sense 2).

Node:wound around the axle, Next:wrap around, Previous:wormhole, Up:= W =

wound around the axle adj.

In an infinite loop. Often used by older computer types.

Node:wrap around, Next:write-only code, Previous:wound around the axle, Up:= W =

wrap around vi.

(also n. `wraparound' and v. shorthand `wrap') 1. [techspeak] The action of a counter that starts over at zero or at `minus infinity' (see **infinity**) after its maximum value has been reached, and continues incrementing, either because it is programmed to do so or because of an overflow (as when a car's odometer starts over at 0). 2. To change **phase** gradually and continuously by maintaining a steady wake-sleep cycle somewhat longer than 24 hours, e.g., living six long (28-hour) days in a week (or, equivalently, sleeping at the rate of 10 microhertz). This sense is also called **phase-wrapping**.

Node:write-only code, Next:write-only language, Previous:wrap around, Up:= W =

write-only code n.

[a play on `read-only memory'] Code so arcane, complex, or ill-structured that it cannot be modified or even comprehended by anyone but its author, and possibly not even by him/her. A **Bad Thing**.

Node:write-only language, Next:write-only memory, Previous:write-only code, Up:= W =

write-only language n.

A language with syntax (or semantics) sufficiently dense and bizarre that any routine of significant size is automatically **write-only code**. A sobriquet applied occasionally to C and often to APL, though **INTERCAL** and **TECO** certainly deserve it more. See also **Befunge**.

Node:write-only memory, Next:Wrong Thing, Previous:write-only language, Up:= W =

write-only memory n.

The obvious antonym to `read-only memory'. Out of frustration with the long and seemingly useless chain of approvals required of component specifications, during which no actual checking seemed to occur, an engineer at Signetics once created a specification for a write-only memory and included it with a bunch of other specifications to be approved. This inclusion came to the attention of Signetics **management** only when regular customers started calling and asking for pricing information. Signetics published a corrected edition of the data book and requested the return of the `erroneous' ones. Later, around 1974, Signetics bought a double-page spread in "Electronics" magazine's April issue and used the spec as an April Fools' Day joke. Instead of the more conventional characteristic curves, the 25120 "fully encoded, 9046 x N, Random Access, write-only-memory" data sheet included diagrams of "bit capacity vs. Temp.", "Iff vs. Vff", "Number of pins remaining vs. number of socket insertions", and "AQL vs. selling price". The 25120 required a 6.3 VAC VFF supply, a +10V VCC, and VDD of 0V, +/- 2%.

Node:Wrong Thing, Next:wugga wugga, Previous:write-only memory, Up:= W =

Wrong Thing n.

A design, action, or decision that is clearly incorrect or inappropriate. Often capitalized; always emphasized in speech as if capitalized. The opposite of the **Right Thing**; more generally, anything that is not the Right Thing. In cases where `the good is the enemy of the best', the merely good -- although good -- is nevertheless the Wrong Thing. "In C, the default is for module-level declarations to be visible everywhere, rather than just within the module. This is clearly the Wrong Thing."

Node:wugga wugga, Next:wumpus, Previous:Wrong Thing, Up:= W =

wugga wugga /wuh'g* wuh'g*/ n.

Imaginary sound that a computer program makes as it labors with a tedious or difficult task.**grind** (sense 4).

Node:wumpus, Next:WYSIAYG, Previous:wugga wugga, Up:= W =

wumpus /wuhm'p*s/ n.

The central monster (and, in many versions, the name) of a famous family of very early computer games called "Hunt The Wumpus'. The original was invented in 1970 (several years before **ADVENT**) by Gregory Yob. The wumpus lived somewhere in a cave with the topology of an dodecahedron's edge/vertex graph (later versions supported other topologies, including an icosahedron and Möbius strip). The player started somewhere at random in the cave with five `crooked arrows'; these could be shot through up to three connected rooms, and would kill the wumpus on a hit (later versions introduced the wounded wumpus, which got very angry). Unfortunately for players, the movement necessary to map the maze was made hazardous not merely by the wumpus (which would eat you if you stepped on him) but also by bottomless pits and colonies of super bats that would pick you up and drop you at a random location (later versions added `anaerobic termites' that ate arrows, bat migrations, and earthquakes that randomly changed pit locations).

This game appears to have been the first to use a non-random graph-structured map (as opposed to a rectangular grid like the even older Star Trek games). In this respect, as in the dungeon-like setting and its terse, amusing messages, it prefigured **ADVENT** and **Zork** and was directly ancestral to the latter (Zork acknowledged this heritage by including a super-bat colony). A C emulation of the original Basic game is available at the Retrocomputing Museum, http://www.ccil.org/retro.

Node:WYSIAYG, Next:WYSIWYG, Previous:wumpus, Up:= W =

WYSIAYG /wiz'ee-ayg/ adj.

Describes a user interface under which "What You See Is *All* You Get"; an unhappy variant of **WYSIWYG**. Visual, `point-and-shoot'-style interfaces tend to have easy initial learning curves, but also to lack depth; they often frustrate advanced users who would be better served by a command-style interface. When this happens, the frustrated user has a WYSIAYG problem. This term is most often used of editors, word processors, and document formatting programs. WYSIWYG `desktop publishing' programs, for example, are a clear win for creating small documents with lots of fonts and graphics in them, especially things like newsletters and presentation slides. When typesetting book-length manuscripts, on the other hand, scale changes the nature of the task; one quickly runs into WYSIAYG limitations, and the increased power and flexibility of a command-driven formatter like **TeX** or Unix's **troff** becomes not just desirable but a necessity. Compare **YAFIYGI**.

Node:WYSIWYG, Next:X, Previous:WYSIAYG, Up:= W =

WYSIWYG /wiz'ee-wig/ adj.

Describes a user interface under which "What You See Is What You Get", as opposed to one that uses more-or-less obscure commands that do not result in immediate visual feedback. True WYSIWYG in environments supporting multiple fonts or graphics is a a rarely-attained ideal; there are variants of this term to express real-world manifestations including WYSIAWYG (What You See Is *Almost* What You Get) and WYSIMOLWYG (What You See Is More or Less What You Get). All these can be mildly derogatory, as they are often used to refer to dumbed-down **user-friendly** interfaces targeted at non-programmers; a hacker has no fear of obscure commands (compare **WYSIAYG**). On the other hand, **EMACS** was one of the very first WYSIWYG editors, replacing (actually, at first overlaying) the extremely obscure, command-based **TECO**. See also **WIMP environment**. [Oddly enough, WYSIWYG has already made it into the OED, in lower case yet. --ESR]

Node:= X =, Next:= Y =, Previous:= W =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= X =

- X:
- XEROX PARC:
- XOFF:
- XON:
- xor:
- xref:
- XXX:
- xyzzy:

Node:X, Next:XEROX PARC, Previous:WYSIWYG, Up:= X =

X /X/ n.

1. Used in various speech and writing contexts (also in lowercase) in roughly its algebraic sense of `unknown within a set defined by context' (compare **N**). Thus, the abbreviation 680x0 stands for 68000, 68010, 68020, 68030, or 68040, and 80x86 stands for 80186, 80286, 80386, 80486, 80586 or 80686 (note that a Unix hacker might write these as 680[0-6]0 and 80[1-6]86 or 680?0 and 80?86 respectively; see **glob**). 2. [after the name of an earlier window system called `W'] An over-sized, over-featured, over-engineered and incredibly over-complicated window system developed at MIT and widely used on Unix systems.

Node:XEROX PARC, Next:XOFF, Previous:X, Up:= X =

XEROX PARC /zee'roks park'/ n.

The famed Palo Alto Research Center. For more than a decade, from the early 1970s into the mid-1980s, PARC yielded an astonishing volume of groundbreaking hardware and software innovations. The modern mice, windows, and icons style of software interface was invented there. So was the laser printer and the local-area network; and PARC's series of D machines anticipated the powerful personal computers of the 1980s by a decade. Sadly, the prophets at PARC were without honor in their own company, so much so that it became a standard joke to describe PARC as a place that specialized in developing brilliant ideas for everyone else.

The stunning shortsightedness and obtusity of XEROX's top-level **suit**s has been well anatomized in "Fumbling The Future: How XEROX Invented, Then Ignored, the First Personal Computer" by Douglas K. Smith and Robert C. Alexander (William Morrow & Co., 1988, ISBN 0-688-09511-9).

Node:XOFF, Next:XON, Previous:XEROX PARC, Up:= X =

XOFF /X-of/ n.

Syn. **control-S**.

Node:XON, Next:xor, Previous:XOFF, Up:= X =

XON /X-on/ n.

Syn. **control-Q**.

Node:xor, Next:xref, Previous:XON, Up:= X =

xor /X'or/, /kzor/ conj.

Exclusive or. `A xor B' means `A or B, but not both'. "I want to get cherry pie xor a banana split." This derives from the technical use of the term as a function on truth-values that is true if exactly one of its two arguments is true.

Node:xref, Next:XXX, Previous:xor, Up:= X =

xref /X'ref/ v.,n.

Hackish standard abbreviation for `cross-reference'.

Node:XXX, Next:xyzzy, Previous:xref, Up:= X =

XXX /X-X-X/ n.

A marker that attention is needed. Commonly used in program comments to indicate areas that are kluged up or need to be. Some hackers liken `XXX' to the notional heavy-porn movie rating. Compare **FIXME**.

Node:xyzzy, Next:YA-, Previous:XXX, Up:= X =

xyzzy /X-Y-Z-Z-Y/, /X-Y-ziz'ee/, /ziz'ee/, or /ik-ziz'ee/ adj.

[from the ADVENT game] The **canonical** `magic word'. This comes from **ADVENT**, in which the idea is to explore an underground cave with many rooms and to collect the treasures you find there. If you type `xyzzy' at the appropriate time, you can move instantly between two otherwise distant points. If, therefore, you encounter some bit of **magic**, you might remark on this quite succinctly by saying simply "Xyzzy!" "Ordinarily you can't look at someone else's screen if he has protected it, but if you type quadruple-bucky-clear the system will let you do it anyway." "Xyzzy!" It's traditional for xyzzy to be an **Easter egg** in games with text interfaces.

Xyzzy has actually been implemented as an undocumented no-op command on several OSes; in Data General's AOS/VS, for example, it would typically respond "Nothing happens", just as **ADVENT** did if the magic was invoked at the wrong spot or before a player had performed the action that enabled the word. In more recent 32-bit versions, by the way, AOS/VS responds "Twice as much happens".

Early versions of the popular `minesweeper' game under Microsoft Windows has a cheat mode triggered by the command `xyzzy<enter><right-shift>' that turns the top-left pixel of the screen different colors depending on whether or not the cursor is over a bomb. This feature seems to be gone in the 32-bit (Windows 98 and later) versions.

= Y =

- YA-:
- YABA:
- YAFIYGI:
- YAUN:
- Yellow Book:
- yellow card:
- yellow wire:
- Yet Another:
- YHBT:
- YKYBHTLW:
- YMMV:
- You are not expected to understand this:
- You know you've been hacking too long when:
- Your mileage may vary:
- Yow!:
- yoyo mode:
- Yu-Shiang Whole Fish:

YA- abbrev.

[Yet Another] In hackish acronyms this almost invariably expands to **Yet Another**, following the precedent set by Unix `yacc(1)` (Yet Another Compiler-Compiler). See **YABA**.

YABA /ya'b*/ n.

[Cambridge] Yet Another Bloody Acronym. Whenever some program is being named, someone invariably suggests that it be given a name that is acronymic. The response from those with a trace of originality is to remark ironically that the proposed name would then be `YABA-compatible'. Also used in response to questions like "What is WYSIWYG?" See also **TLA**.

YAFIYGI /yaf'ee-y*-gee/ adj.

[coined in response to WYSIWYG] Describes the command-oriented ed/vi/nroff/TeX style of word processing or other user interface, the opposite of **WYSIWYG**. Stands for "You asked for it, you got it", because what you actually asked for is often not apparent until long after it is too late to do anything about it. Used to denote perversity ("Real Programmers use YAFIYGI tools...and *like* it!") or, less often, a necessary tradeoff ("Only a YAFIYGI tool can have full programmable flexibility in its interface.").

This precise sense of "You asked for it, you got it" seems to have first appeared in Ed Post's classic parody "Real Programmers don't use Pascal" (see **Real Programmer**s); the acronym is a more recent invention.

Node:YAUN, Next:Yellow Book, Previous:YAFIYGI, Up:= Y =

YAUN /yawn/ n.

[Acronym for `Yet Another Unix Nerd'] Reported from the San Diego Computer Society (predominantly a microcomputer users' group) as a good-natured punning insult aimed at Unix zealots.

Node:Yellow Book, Next:yellow card, Previous:YAUN, Up:= Y =

Yellow Book n.

The print version of this Jargon File; "The New Hacker's Dictionary" from MIT Press; The book includes essentially all the material the File, plus a Foreword by Guy L. Steele Jr. and a Preface by Eric S. Raymond. Most importantly, the book version is nicely typeset and includes almost all of the infamous Crunchly cartoons by the Great Quux, each attached to an appropriate entry. The first edition (1991, ISBN 0-262-68069-6) corresponded to the Jargon File version 2.9.6. The second edition (1993, ISBN 0-262-68079-3) corresponded to the Jargon File 3.0.0. The third (1996, ISBN 0-262-68092-0) corresponded to 4.0.0.

Node:yellow card, Next:yellow wire, Previous:Yellow Book, Up:= Y =

yellow card n.

See **green card**.

Node:yellow wire, Next:Yet Another, Previous:yellow card, Up:= Y =

yellow wire n.

[IBM] Repair wires used when connectors (especially ribbon connectors) got broken due to some schlemiel pinching them, or to reconnect cut traces after the FE mistakenly cut one. Compare **blue wire**, **purple wire**, **red wire**.

Node:Yet Another, Next:YHBT, Previous:yellow wire, Up:= Y =

Yet Another adj.

[From Unix's `yacc(1)`, `Yet Another Compiler-Compiler', a LALR parser generator] 1. Of your own work: A humorous allusion often used in titles to acknowledge that the topic is not original, though the content is. As in `Yet Another AI Group' or `Yet Another Simulated Annealing Algorithm'. 2. Of others' work: Describes something of which there are already far too many. See also **YA-**, **YABA**, **YAUN**.

Node:YHBT, Next:YKYBHTLW, Previous:Yet Another, Up:= Y =

YHBT //

[Usenet: very common] Abbreviation: You Have Been Trolled (see **troll**, sense 1). Especially used in "YHBT. YHL. HAND.", which is widely understood to expand to "You Have Been Trolled. You Have Lost. Have A Nice Day". You are quite likely to see this if you respond incautiously to a flame-provoking post that was obviously floated as sucker bait.

Node:YKYBHTLW, Next:YMMV, Previous:YHBT, Up:= Y =

YKYBHTLW // abbrev.

Abbreviation of `You know you've been hacking too long when...', which became established on the Usenet group *alt.folklore.computers* during extended discussion of the indicated entry in the Jargon File.

Node:YMMV, Next:You are not expected to understand this, Previous:YKYBHTLW, Up:= Y =

YMMV // cav.

Abbreviation for **Your mileage may vary** common on Usenet.

Node:You are not expected to understand this, Next:You know you've been hacking too long when, Previous:YMMV, Up:= Y =

You are not expected to understand this [Unix] cav.

The canonical comment describing something **magic** or too complicated to bother explaining properly. From an infamous comment in the context-switching code of the V6 Unix kernel. Dennis Ritchie has explained this in detail.

Node:You know you've been hacking too long when, Next:Your mileage may vary, Previous:You are not expected to understand this, Up:= Y =

You know you've been hacking too long when

The set-up line for a genre of one-liners told by hackers about themselves. These include the following:

- not only do you check your email more often than your paper mail, but you remember your **network address** faster than your postal one.
- your **SO** kisses you on the neck and the first thing you think is "Uh, oh, **priority interrupt**."
- you go to balance your checkbook and discover that you're doing it in octal.
- your computers have a higher street value than your car.
- in your universe, `round numbers' are powers of 2, not 10.
- more than once, you have woken up recalling a dream in some programming language.
- you realize you have never seen half of your best friends.

A list list of these can be found by searching for this phrase on the web.

[An early version of this entry said "All but one of these have been reliably reported as hacker traits (some of them quite often). Even hackers may have trouble spotting the ringer." The ringer was balancing one's checkbook in octal, which I made up out of whole cloth. Although more respondents picked that one out as fiction than any of the others, I also received multiple independent reports of its actually happening, most famously to Grace Hopper while she was working with BINAC in 1949. --ESR]

Node:Your mileage may vary, Next:Yow!, Previous:You know you've been hacking too long when, Up:= Y =

Your mileage may vary cav.

[from the standard disclaimer attached to EPA mileage ratings by American car manufacturers] 1. A ritual warning often found in Unix freeware distributions. Translates roughly as "Hey, I tried to write this portably, but who *knows* what'll happen on your system?" 2. More generally, a qualifier attached to advice. "I find that sending flowers works well, but your mileage may vary."

Node:Yow!, Next:yoyo mode, Previous:Your mileage may vary, Up:= Y =

Yow! /yow/ interj.

[from "Zippy the Pinhead" comix] A favored hacker expression of humorous surprise or emphasis. "Yow! Check out what happens when you twiddle the foo option on this display hack!" Compare **gurfle**.

Node:yoyo mode, Next:Yu-Shiang Whole Fish, Previous:Yow!, Up:= Y =

yoyo mode n.

The state in which the system is said to be when it rapidly alternates several times between being up and being down. Interestingly (and perhaps not by coincidence), many hardware vendors give out free yoyos at Usenix exhibits.

Sun Microsystems gave out logoized yoyos at SIGPLAN '88. Tourists staying at one of Atlanta's most respectable hotels were subsequently treated to the sight of 200 of the country's top computer scientists testing yo-yo algorithms in the lobby.

Node:Yu-Shiang Whole Fish, Next:zap, Previous:yoyo mode, Up:= Y =

Yu-Shiang Whole Fish /yoo-shyang hohl fish/ n. obs.

The character gamma (extended SAIL ASCII 0001001), which with a loop in its tail looks like a little fish swimming down the page. The term is actually the name of a Chinese dish in which a fish is cooked whole (not **parse**d) and covered with Yu-Shiang (or Yu-Hsiang) sauce. Usage: primarily by people on the MIT LISP Machine, which could display this character on the screen. Tends to elicit incredulity from people who hear about it second-hand.

Node:= Z =, Previous:= Y =, Up:The Jargon Lexicon

= Z =

- zap:
- zapped:
- zen:
- zero:
- zero-content:
- Zero-One-Infinity Rule:
- zeroth:
- zigamorph:
- zip:
- zipperhead:
- zombie:
- zorch:
- Zork:
- zorkmid:

Node:zap, Next:zapped, Previous:Yu-Shiang Whole Fish, Up:= Z =

zap

1. n. Spiciness. 2. vt. To make food spicy. 3. vt. To make someone `suffer' by making his food spicy. (Most hackers love spicy food. Hot-and-sour soup is considered wimpy unless it makes you wipe your nose for the rest of the meal.) See **zapped**. 4. vt. To modify, usually to correct; esp. used when the action is performed with a debugger or binary patching tool. Also implies surgical precision. "Zap the debug level to 6 and run it again." In the IBM mainframe world, binary patches are applied to programs or to the OS with a program called `superzap', whose file name is `IMASPZAP' (possibly contrived from I M A SuPerZAP). 5. vt. To erase or reset. 6. To **fry** a chip with static electricity. "Uh oh -- I think that lightning strike may have zapped the disk controller."

Node:zapped, Next:zen, Previous:zap, Up:= Z =

zapped adj.

Spicy. This term is used to distinguish between food that is hot (in temperature) and food that is *spicy*-hot. For example, the Chinese appetizer Bon Bon Chicken is a kind of chicken salad that is cold but zapped; by contrast, **vanilla** wonton soup is hot but not zapped. See also **oriental food**, **laser chicken**. See **zap**, senses 1 and 2.

Node:zen, Next:zero, Previous:zapped, Up:= Z =

zen vt.

To figure out something by meditation or by a sudden flash of enlightenment. Originally applied to bugs, but occasionally applied to problems of life in general. "How'd you figure out the buffer allocation problem?" "Oh, I zenned it." Contrast **grok**, which connotes a time-extended version of zenning a system. Compare **hack mode**. See also **guru**.

Node:zero, Next:zero-content, Previous:zen, Up:= Z =

zero vt.

1. To set to 0. Usually said of small pieces of data, such as bits or words (esp. in the construction `zero out'). 2. To erase; to discard all data from. Said of disks and directories, where `zeroing' need not involve actually writing zeroes throughout the area being zeroed. One may speak of something being `logically zeroed' rather than being `physically zeroed'. See **scribble**.

Node:zero-content, Next:Zero-One-Infinity Rule, Previous:zero, Up:= Z =

zero-content adj.

Syn. **content-free**.

Node:Zero-One-Infinity Rule, Next:zeroth, Previous:zero-content, Up:= Z =

Zero-One-Infinity Rule prov.

"Allow none of **foo**, one of **foo**, or any number of **foo**." A rule of thumb for software design, which instructs one to not place **random** limits on the number of instances of a given entity (such as: windows in a window system, letters in an OS's filenames, etc.). Specifically, one should either disallow the entity entirely, allow exactly one instance (an "exception"), or allow as many as the user wants - address space and memory permitting.

The logic behind this rule is that there are often situations where it makes clear sense to allow one of something instead of none. However, if one decides to go further and allow N (for N > 1), then why not N+1? And if N+1, then why not N+2, and so on? Once above 1, there's no excuse not to allow any N; hence, **infinity**.

Many hackers recall in this connection Isaac Asimov's SF novel "The Gods Themselves" in which a character announces that the number 2 is impossible - if you're going to believe in more than one universe, you might as well believe in an infinite number of them.

Node:zeroth, Next:zigamorph, Previous:Zero-One-Infinity Rule, Up:= Z =

zeroth /zee'rohth/ adj.

First. Among software designers, comes from C's and LISP's 0-based indexing of arrays. Hardware people also tend to start counting at 0 instead of 1; this is natural since, e.g., the 256 states of 8 bits correspond to the binary numbers 0, 1, ..., 255 and the digital devices known as `counters' count in this way.

Hackers and computer scientists often like to call the first chapter of a publication `Chapter 0', especially if it is of an introductory nature (one of the classic instances was in the First Edition of **K&R**). In recent years this trait has also been observed among many pure mathematicians (who have an independent tradition of numbering from 0). Zero-based numbering tends to reduce **fencepost error**s, though it cannot eliminate them entirely.

Node:zigamorph, Next:zip, Previous:zeroth, Up:= Z =

zigamorph /zig'*-morf/ n.

1. Hex FF (11111111) when used as a delimiter or **fence** character. Usage: primarily at IBM shops. 2. [proposed] n. The Unicode non-character U+FFFF (1111111111111111), a character code which is not assigned to any character, and so is usable as end-of-string. (Unicode is a 16-bit character code intended to cover all of the world's writing systems, including Latin, Greek, Cyrillic, Chinese, hiragana, katakana, Devanagari, Thai, Laotian and many other scripts - support for **elvish** is planned for a future release).

Node:zip, Next:zipperhead, Previous:zigamorph, Up:= Z =

zip vt.

[primarily MS-DOS] To create a compressed archive from a group of files using PKWare's PKZIP or a compatible archiver. Its use is spreading now that portable implementations of the algorithm have been written. Commonly used as follows: "I'll zip it up and send it to you." See **tar and feather**.

Node:zipperhead, Next:zombie, Previous:zip, Up:= Z =

zipperhead n.

[IBM] A person with a closed mind.

Node:zombie, Next:zorch, Previous:zipperhead, Up:= Z =

zombie n.

[Unix] A process that has died but has not yet relinquished its process table slot (because the parent process hasn't executed a `wait(2)` for it yet). These can be seen in `ps(1)` listings occasionally. Compare **orphan**.

Node:zorch, Next:Zork, Previous:zombie, Up:= Z =

zorch /zorch/

1. [TMRC] v. To attack with an inverse heat sink. 2. [TMRC] v. To travel, with v approaching c [that is, with velocity approaching lightspeed --ESR]. 3. [MIT] v. To propel something very quickly. "The new comm software is very fast; it really zorches files through the network." 4. [MIT] n. Influence. Brownie points. Good karma. The intangible and fuzzy currency in which favors are measured. "I'd rather not ask him for that just yet; I think I've used up my quota of zorch with him for the week." 5. [MIT] n. Energy, drive, or ability. "I think I'll **punt** that change for now; I've been up for 30 hours and I've run out of zorch." 6. [MIT] v. To flunk an exam or course.

Node:Zork, Next:zorkmid, Previous:zorch, Up:= Z =

Zork /zork/ n.

The second of the great early experiments in computer fantasy gaming; see **ADVENT**. Originally written on MIT-DM during 1977-1979, later distributed with BSD Unix (as a patched, sourceless RT-11

FORTRAN binary; see **retrocomputing**) and commercialized as `The Zork Trilogy' by **Infocom**. The FORTRAN source was later rewritten for portability and released to Usenet under the name "Dungeon". Both FORTRAN "Dungeon" and translated C versions are available at many FTP sites. See also **grue**.

Node:zorkmid, Previous:Zork, Up:= Z =

zorkmid /zork'mid/ n.

The canonical unit of currency in hacker-written games. This originated in **Zork** but has spread to **nethack** and is referred to in several other games.

(Lexicon Entries End Here)

Node:Appendix A, Next:Appendix B, Previous:The Jargon Lexicon, Up:Top

Hacker Folklore

This appendix contains several legends and fables that illuminate the meaning of various entries in the lexicon.

- The Meaning of Hack: ...and three famous ones
- TV Typewriters: A Tale of Hackish Ingenuity
- A Story About Magic: By Guy Steele
- Some AI Koans: Wit and Wisdom of the Masters
- OS and JEDGAR: Intrigue and mayhem under ITS
- The Story of Mel: One of hackerdom's great myths

Node:The Meaning of Hack, Next:TV Typewriters, Previous:Appendix A, Up:Appendix A

The Meaning of `Hack'

"The word **hack** doesn't really have 69 different meanings", according to MIT hacker Phil Agre. "In fact, **hack** has only one meaning, an extremely subtle and profound one which defies articulation. Which connotation is implied by a given use of the word depends in similarly profound ways on the context. Similar remarks apply to a couple of other hacker words, most notably **random**."

Hacking might be characterized as `an appropriate application of ingenuity'. Whether the result is a quick-and-dirty patchwork job or a carefully crafted work of art, you have to admire the cleverness that went into it.

An important secondary meaning of **hack** is `a creative practical joke'. This kind of hack is easier to explain to non-hackers than the programming kind. Of course, some hacks have both natures; see the lexicon entries for **pseudo** and **kgbvax**. But here are some examples of pure practical jokes that illustrate the hacking spirit:

> In 1961, students from Caltech (California Institute of Technology, in Pasadena) hacked the Rose Bowl football game. One student posed as a reporter and `interviewed' the director of

> the University of Washington card stunts (such stunts involve people in the stands who hold up colored cards to make pictures). The reporter learned exactly how the stunts were operated, and also that the director would be out to dinner later.
>
> While the director was eating, the students (who called themselves the `Fiendish Fourteen') picked a lock and stole a blank direction sheet for the card stunts. They then had a printer run off 2300 copies of the blank. The next day they picked the lock again and stole the master plans for the stunts -- large sheets of graph paper colored in with the stunt pictures. Using these as a guide, they made new instructions for three of the stunts on the duplicated blanks. Finally, they broke in once more, replacing the stolen master plans and substituting the stack of diddled instruction sheets for the original set.
>
> The result was that three of the pictures were totally different. Instead of `WASHINGTON', the word ``CALTECH' was flashed. Another stunt showed the word `HUSKIES', the Washington nickname, but spelled it backwards. And what was supposed to have been a picture of a husky instead showed a beaver. (Both Caltech and MIT use the beaver -- nature's engineer -- as a mascot.)
>
> After the game, the Washington faculty athletic representative said: "Some thought it ingenious; others were indignant." The Washington student body president remarked: "No hard feelings, but at the time it was unbelievable. We were amazed."

This is now considered a classic hack, particularly because revising the direction sheets constituted a form of programming.

Here is another classic hack:

> On November 20, 1982, MIT hacked the Harvard-Yale football game. Just after Harvard's second touchdown against Yale, in the first quarter, a small black ball popped up out of the ground at the 40-yard line, and grew bigger, and bigger, and bigger. The letters `MIT' appeared all over the ball. As the players and officials stood around gawking, the ball grew to six feet in diameter and then burst with a bang and a cloud of white smoke.
>
> The "Boston Globe" later reported: "If you want to know the truth, MIT won The Game."
>
> The prank had taken weeks of careful planning by members of MIT's Delta Kappa Epsilon fraternity. The device consisted of a weather balloon, a hydraulic ram powered by Freon gas to lift it out of the ground, and a vacuum-cleaner motor to inflate it. They made eight separate expeditions to Harvard Stadium between 1 and 5 A.M., locating an unused 110-volt circuit in the stadium and running buried wires from the stadium circuit to the 40-yard line, where they buried the balloon device. When the time came to activate the device, two fraternity members had merely to flip a circuit breaker and push a plug into an outlet.
>
> This stunt had all the earmarks of a perfect hack: surprise, publicity, the ingenious use of technology, safety, and harmlessness. The use of manual control allowed the prank to be timed so as not to disrupt the game (it was set off between plays, so the outcome of the game would not be unduly affected). The perpetrators had even thoughtfully attached a note to the balloon explaining that the device was not dangerous and contained no explosives.
>
> Harvard president Derek Bok commented: "They have an awful lot of clever people down there at MIT, and they did it again." President Paul E. Gray of MIT said: "There is absolutely no truth to the rumor that I had anything to do with it, but I wish there were."

The ha ks above are verifiable history; they can be proved to have happened. Many other classic-hack stories from MIT and elsewhere, though retold as history, have the characteristics of what Jan Brunvand has called `urban folklore' (see **FOAF**). Perhaps the best known of these is the legend of the infamous

trolley-car hack, an alleged incident in which engineering students are said to have welded a trolley car to its tracks with thermite. Numerous versions of this have been recorded from the 1940s to the present, most set at MIT but at least one very detailed version set at CMU.

Brian Leibowitz has researched MIT hacks both real and mythical extensively; the interested reader is referred to his delightful pictorial compendium "The Journal of the Institute for Hacks, Tomfoolery, and Pranks" (MIT Museum, 1990; ISBN 0-917027-03-5). The Institute has a World Wide Web page at http://hacks.mit.edu/Hacks/Gallery.html. There is rumored to be a sequel entitled "Is This The Way To Baker Street?". The Caltech Alumni Association has published two similar books titled "Legends of Caltech" and "More Legends of Caltech".

Finally, here is a story about one of the classic computer hacks.

> Back in the mid-1970s, several of the system support staff at Motorola discovered a relatively simple way to crack system security on the Xerox CP-V timesharing system. Through a simple programming strategy, it was possible for a user program to trick the system into running a portion of the program in `master mode' (supervisor state), in which memory protection does not apply. The program could then poke a large value into its `privilege level' byte (normally write-protected) and could then proceed to bypass all levels of security within the file-management system, patch the system monitor, and do numerous other interesting things. In short, the barn door was wide open.
>
> Motorola quite properly reported this problem to Xerox via an official `level 1 SIDR' (a bug report with an intended urgency of `needs to be fixed yesterday'). Because the text of each SIDR was entered into a database that could be viewed by quite a number of people, Motorola followed the approved procedure: they simply reported the problem as `Security SIDR', and attached all of the necessary documentation, ways-to-reproduce, etc.
>
> The CP-V people at Xerox sat on their thumbs; they either didn't realize the severity of the problem, or didn't assign the necessary operating-system-staff resources to develop and distribute an official patch.
>
> Months passed. The Motorola guys pestered their Xerox field-support rep, to no avail. Finally they decided to take direct action, to demonstrate to Xerox management just how easily the system could be cracked and just how thoroughly the security safeguards could be subverted.
>
> They dug around in the operating-system listings and devised a thoroughly devilish set of patches. These patches were then incorporated into a pair of programs called `Robin Hood' and `Friar Tuck'. Robin Hood and Friar Tuck were designed to run as `ghost jobs' (daemons, in Unix terminology); they would use the existing loophole to subvert system security, install the necessary patches, and then keep an eye on one another's statuses in order to keep the system operator (in effect, the superuser) from aborting them.
>
> One fine day, the system operator on the main CP-V software development system in El Segundo was surprised by a number of unusual phenomena. These included the following:
>
> - Tape drives would rewind and dismount their tapes in the middle of a job.
> - Disk drives would seek back and forth so rapidly that they would attempt to walk across the floor (see **walking drives**).
> - The card-punch output device would occasionally start up of itself and punch a **lace card**. These would usually jam in the punch.
> - The console would print snide and insulting messages from Robin Hood to Friar Tuck, or vice versa.
> - The Xerox card reader had two output stackers; it could be instructed to stack into A, stack into B, or stack into A (unless a card was unreadable, in which case the bad card was placed into stacker B). One of the patches installed by the ghosts added some code

to the card-reader driver... after reading a card, it would flip over to the opposite stacker. As a result, card decks would divide themselves in half when they were read, leaving the operator to recollate them manually.

Naturally, the operator called in the operating-system developers. They found the bandit ghost jobs running, and **gun**ned them... and were once again surprised. When Robin Hood was gunned, the following sequence of events took place:

```
!X id1

id1: Friar Tuck... I am under attack!  Pray save me!
id1: Off (aborted)

id2: Fear not, friend Robin!  I shall rout the Sheriff
     of Nottingham's men!

id1: Thank you, my good fellow!
```

Each ghost-job would detect the fact that the other had been killed, and would start a new copy of the recently slain program within a few milliseconds. The only way to kill both ghosts was to kill them simultaneously (very difficult) or to deliberately crash the system.

Finally, the system programmers did the latter -- only to find that the bandits appeared once again when the system rebooted! It turned out that these two programs had patched the boot-time OS image (the kernel file, in Unix terms) and had added themselves to the list of programs that were to be started at boot time (this is similar to the way MS-DOS viruses propagate).

The Robin Hood and Friar Tuck ghosts were finally eradicated when the system staff rebooted the system from a clean boot-tape and reinstalled the monitor. Not long thereafter, Xerox released a patch for this problem.

It is alleged that Xerox filed a complaint with Motorola's management about the merry-prankster actions of the two employees in question. It is not recorded that any serious disciplinary action was taken against either of them.

Node:TV Typewriters, Next:A Story About Magic, Previous:The Meaning of Hack, Up:Appendix A

TV Typewriters A Tale of Hackish Ingenuity

Here is a true story about a glass tty: One day an MIT hacker was in a motorcycle accident and broke his leg. He had to stay in the hospital quite a while, and got restless because he couldn't **hack**. Two of his friends therefore took a terminal and a modem for it to the hospital, so that he could use the computer by telephone from his hospital bed.

Now this happened some years before the spread of home computers, and computer terminals were not a familiar sight to the average person. When the two friends got to the hospital, a guard stopped them and asked what they were carrying. They explained that they wanted to take a computer terminal to their friend who was a patient.

The guard got out his list of things that patients were permitted to have in their rooms: TV, radio, electric razor, typewriter, tape player, ... no computer terminals. Computer terminals weren't on the list, so the guard wouldn't let it in. Rules are rules, you know. (This guard was clearly a **droid**.)

Fair enough, said the two friends, and they left again. They were frustrated, of course, because they knew

that the terminal was as harmless as a TV or anything else on the list... which gave them an idea.

The next day they returned, and the same thing happened: a guard stopped them and asked what they were carrying. They said: "This is a TV typewriter!" The guard was skeptical, so they plugged it in and demonstrated it. "See? You just type on the keyboard and what you type shows up on the TV screen." Now the guard didn't stop to think about how utterly useless a typewriter would be that didn't produce any paper copies of what you typed; but this was clearly a TV typewriter, no doubt about it. So he checked his list: "A TV is all right, a typewriter is all right ... okay, take it on in!"

[Historical note: Many years ago, "Popular Electronics" published solder-it-yourself plans for a TV typewriter. Despite the essential uselessness of the device, it was an enormously popular project. Steve Ciarcia, the man behind "Byte" magazine's "Circuit Cellar" feature, resurrected this ghost in one of his books of the early 1980s. He ascribed its popularity (no doubt correctly) to the feeling of power the builder could achieve by being able to decide himself what would be shown on the TV. --ESR]

[Antihistorical note: On September 23rd, 1992, the L.A. Times ran the following bit in Steve Harvey's `Only in L.A.' column:

> It must have been borrowed from a museum: Solomon Waters of Altadena, a 6-year-old first-grader, came home from his first day of school and excitedly told his mother how he had written on "a machine that looks like a computer-but without the TV screen."
>
> She asked him if it could have been a "typewriter."
>
> "Yeah! Yeah!" he said. "That's what it was called."

I have since investigated this matter and determined that many of today's teenagers have never seen a slide rule, either.... - ESR]

Node:A Story About Magic, Next:Some AI Koans, Previous:TV Typewriters, Up:Appendix A

A Story About `Magic'

Some years ago, I (GLS) was snooping around in the cabinets that housed the MIT AI Lab's PDP-10, and noticed a little switch glued to the frame of one cabinet. It was obviously a homebrew job, added by one of the lab's hardware hackers (no one knows who).

You don't touch an unknown switch on a computer without knowing what it does, because you might crash the computer. The switch was labeled in a most unhelpful way. It had two positions, and scrawled in pencil on the metal switch body were the words `magic' and `more magic'. The switch was in the `more magic' position.

I called another hacker over to look at it. He had never seen the switch before either. Closer examination revealed that the switch had only one wire running to it! The other end of the wire did disappear into the maze of wires inside the computer, but it's a basic fact of electricity that a switch can't do anything unless there are two wires connected to it. This switch had a wire connected on one side and no wire on its other side.

It was clear that this switch was someone's idea of a silly joke. Convinced by our reasoning that the switch was inoperative, we flipped it. The computer instantly crashed.

Imagine our utter astonishment. We wrote it off as coincidence, but nevertheless restored the switch to the `more magic' position before reviving the computer.

A year later, I told this story to yet another hacker, David Moon as I recall. He clearly doubted my sanity, or suspected me of a supernatural belief in the power of this switch, or perhaps thought I was fooling him with a bogus saga. To prove it to him, I showed him the very switch, still glued to the cabinet frame with only one wire connected to it, still in the `more magic' position. We scrutinized the switch and its lone connection, and found that the other end of the wire, though connected to the computer wiring, was connected to a ground pin. That clearly made the switch doubly useless: not only was it electrically nonoperative, but it was connected to a place that couldn't affect anything anyway. So we flipped the switch.

The computer promptly crashed.

This time we ran for Richard Greenblatt, a long-time MIT hacker, who was close at hand. He had never noticed the switch before, either. He inspected it, concluded it was useless, got some diagonal cutters and **dike**d it out. We then revived the computer and it has run fine ever since.

We still don't know how the switch crashed the machine. There is a theory that some circuit near the ground pin was marginal, and flipping the switch changed the electrical capacitance enough to upset the circuit as millionth-of-a-second pulses went through it. But we'll never know for sure; all we can really say is that the switch was **magic**.

I still have that switch in my basement. Maybe I'm silly, but I usually keep it set on `more magic'.

1994: Another explanation of this story has since been offered. Note that the switch body was metal. Suppose that the non-connected side of the switch was connected to the switch body (usually the body is connected to a separate earth lug, but there are exceptions). The body is connected to the computer case, which is, presumably, grounded. Now the circuit ground within the machine isn't necessarily at the same potential as the case ground, so flipping the switch connected the circuit ground to the case ground, causing a voltage drop/jump which reset the machine. This was probably discovered by someone who found out the hard way that there was a potential difference between the two, and who then wired in the switch as a joke.

Node:Some AI Koans, Next:OS and JEDGAR, Previous:A Story About Magic, Up:Appendix A

Some AI Koans

These are some of the funniest examples of a genre of jokes told at the MIT AI Lab about various noted hackers. The original koans were composed by Danny Hillis, who would later found Connection Machines, Inc. In reading these, it is at least useful to know that Minsky, Sussman, and Drescher are AI researchers of note, that Tom Knight was one of the Lisp machine's principal designers, and that David Moon wrote much of Lisp Machine Lisp.

* * *

A novice was trying to fix a broken Lisp machine by turning the power off and on.

Knight, seeing what the student was doing, spoke sternly: "You cannot fix a machine by just power-cycling it with no understanding of what is going wrong."

Knight turned the machine off and on.

The machine worked.

* * *

One day a student came to Moon and said: "I understand how to make a better garbage collector. We must keep a reference count of the pointers to each cons."

Moon patiently told the student the following story:

> "One day a student came to Moon and said: `I understand how to make a better garbage collector...

[Ed. note: Pure reference-count garbage collectors have problems with circular structures that point to themselves.]

* * *

In the days when Sussman was a novice, Minsky once came to him as he sat hacking at the PDP-6.

"What are you doing?", asked Minsky.

"I am training a randomly wired neural net to play Tic-Tac-Toe" Sussman replied.

"Why is the net wired randomly?", asked Minsky.

"I do not want it to have any preconceptions of how to play", Sussman said.

Minsky then shut his eyes.

"Why do you close your eyes?", Sussman asked his teacher.

"So that the room will be empty."

At that moment, Sussman was enlightened.

* * *

A disciple of another sect once came to Drescher as he was eating his morning meal.

"I would like to give you this personality test", said the outsider, "because I want you to be happy."

Drescher took the paper that was offered him and put it into the toaster, saying: "I wish the toaster to be happy, too."

Node:OS and JEDGAR, Next:The Story of Mel, Previous:Some AI Koans, Up:Appendix A

OS and JEDGAR

This story says a lot about the ITS ethos.

On the ITS system there was a program that allowed you to see what was being printed on someone else's terminal. It spied on the other guy's output by examining the insides of the monitor system. The output spy program was called OS. Throughout the rest of the computer science world (and at IBM too) OS means `operating system', but among old-time ITS hackers it almost always meant `output spy'.

OS could work because ITS purposely had very little in the way of `protection' that prevented one user from trespassing on another's areas. Fair is fair, however. There was another program that would

automatically notify you if anyone started to spy on your output. It worked in exactly the same way, by looking at the insides of the operating system to see if anyone else was looking at the insides that had to do with your output. This `counterspy' program was called JEDGAR (a six-letterism pronounced as two syllables: /jed'gr/), in honor of the former head of the FBI.

But there's more. JEDGAR would ask the user for `license to kill'. If the user said yes, then JEDGAR would actually **gun** the job of the **luser** who was spying. Unfortunately, people found that this made life too violent, especially when tourists learned about it. One of the systems hackers solved the problem by replacing JEDGAR with another program that only pretended to do its job. It took a long time to do this, because every copy of JEDGAR had to be patched. To this day no one knows how many people never figured out that JEDGAR had been defanged.

Interestingly, there is still a security module named JEDGAR alive as of late 1994 -- in the Unisys MCP for large systems. It is unknown to us whether the name is tribute or independent invention.

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The Story of Mel

This was posted to Usenet by its author, Ed Nather (utastro!nather), on May 21, 1983.

```
A recent article devoted to the macho side of programming
made the bald and unvarnished statement:

    Real Programmers write in FORTRAN.

Maybe they do now,
in this decadent era of
Lite beer, hand calculators, and ``user-friendly'' software
but back in the Good Old Days,
when the term ``software'' sounded funny
and Real Computers were made out of drums and vacuum tubes,
Real Programmers wrote in machine code.
Not FORTRAN.  Not RATFOR.  Not, even, assembly language.
Machine Code.
Raw, unadorned, inscrutable hexadecimal numbers.
Directly.

Lest a whole new generation of programmers
grow up in ignorance of this glorious past,
I feel duty-bound to describe,
as best I can through the generation gap,
how a Real Programmer wrote code.
I'll call him Mel,
because that was his name.

I first met Mel when I went to work for Royal McBee Computer Corp.,
a now-defunct subsidiary of the typewriter company.
The firm manufactured the LGP-30,
a small, cheap (by the standards of the day)
drum-memory computer,
and had just started to manufacture
the RPC-4000, a much-improved,
bigger, better, faster --- drum-memory computer.
Cores cost too much,
and weren't here to stay, anyway.
(That's why you haven't heard of the company,
or the computer.)

I had been hired to write a FORTRAN compiler
```

for this new marvel and Mel was my guide to its wonders.
Mel didn't approve of compilers.

``If a program can't rewrite its own code'',
he asked, ``what good is it?''

Mel had written,
in hexadecimal,
the most popular computer program the company owned.
It ran on the LGP-30
and played blackjack with potential customers
at computer shows.
Its effect was always dramatic.
The LGP-30 booth was packed at every show,
and the IBM salesmen stood around
talking to each other.
Whether or not this actually sold computers
was a question we never discussed.

Mel's job was to re-write
the blackjack program for the RPC-4000.
(Port? What does that mean?)
The new computer had a one-plus-one
addressing scheme,
in which each machine instruction,
in addition to the operation code
and the address of the needed operand,
had a second address that indicated where, on the revolving drum,
the next instruction was located.

In modern parlance,
every single instruction was followed by a GO TO!
Put *that* in Pascal's pipe and smoke it.

Mel loved the RPC-4000
because he could optimize his code:
that is, locate instructions on the drum
so that just as one finished its job,
the next would be just arriving at the ``read head''
and available for immediate execution.
There was a program to do that job,
an ``optimizing assembler'',
but Mel refused to use it.

``You never know where it's going to put things'',
he explained, ``so you'd have to use separate constants''.

It was a long time before I understood that remark.
Since Mel knew the numerical value
of every operation code,
and assigned his own drum addresses,
every instruction he wrote could also be considered
a numerical constant.
He could pick up an earlier ``add'' instruction, say,
and multiply by it,
if it had the right numeric value.
His code was not easy for someone else to modify.

I compared Mel's hand-optimized programs
with the same code massaged by the optimizing assembler program,
and Mel's always ran faster.
That was because the ``top-down'' method of program design
hadn't been invented yet,
and Mel wouldn't have used it anyway.
He wrote the innermost parts of his program loops first,
so they would get first choice
of the optimum address locations on the drum.
The optimizing assembler wasn't smart enough to do it that way.

Mel never wrote time-delay loops, either,
even when the balky Flexowriter
required a delay between output characters to work right.
He just located instructions on the drum
so each successive one was just *past* the read head
when it was needed;
the drum had to execute another complete revolution
to find the next instruction.
He coined an unforgettable term for this procedure.
Although ``optimum'' is an absolute term,
like ``unique'', it became common verbal practice
to make it relative:
``not quite optimum'' or ``less optimum''
or ``not very optimum''.
Mel called the maximum time-delay locations
the ``most pessimum''.

After he finished the blackjack program
and got it to run
(``Even the initializer is optimized'',
he said proudly),
he got a Change Request from the sales department.
The program used an elegant (optimized)
random number generator
to shuffle the ``cards'' and deal from the ``deck'',
and some of the salesmen felt it was too fair,
since sometimes the customers lost.
They wanted Mel to modify the program
so, at the setting of a sense switch on the console,
they could change the odds and let the customer win.

Mel balked.
He felt this was patently dishonest,
which it was,
and that it impinged on his personal integrity as a programmer,
which it did,
so he refused to do it.
The Head Salesman talked to Mel,
as did the Big Boss and, at the boss's urging,
a few Fellow Programmers.
Mel finally gave in and wrote the code,
but he got the test backwards,
and, when the sense switch was turned on,
the program would cheat, winning every time.
Mel was delighted with this,
claiming his subconscious was uncontrollably ethical,
and adamantly refused to fix it.

After Mel had left the company for greener pa$ture$,
the Big Boss asked me to look at the code
and see if I could find the test and reverse it.
Somewhat reluctantly, I agreed to look.
Tracking Mel's code was a real adventure.

I have often felt that programming is an art form,
whose real value can only be appreciated
by another versed in the same arcane art;
there are lovely gems and brilliant coups
hidden from human view and admiration, sometimes forever,
by the very nature of the process.
You can learn a lot about an individual
just by reading through his code,
even in hexadecimal.
Mel was, I think, an unsung genius.

Perhaps my greatest shock came
when I found an innocent loop that had no test in it.
No test. *None*.
Common sense said it had to be a closed loop,

where the program would circle, forever, endlessly.
Program control passed right through it, however,
and safely out the other side.
It took me two weeks to figure it out.

The RPC-4000 computer had a really modern facility
called an index register.
It allowed the programmer to write a program loop
that used an indexed instruction inside;
each time through,
the number in the index register
was added to the address of that instruction,
so it would refer
to the next datum in a series.
He had only to increment the index register
each time through.
Mel never used it.

Instead, he would pull the instruction into a machine register,
add one to its address,
and store it back.
He would then execute the modified instruction
right from the register.
The loop was written so this additional execution time
was taken into account ---
just as this instruction finished,
the next one was right under the drum's read head,
ready to go.
But the loop had no test in it.

The vital clue came when I noticed
the index register bit,
the bit that lay between the address
and the operation code in the instruction word,
was turned on ---
yet Mel never used the index register,
leaving it zero all the time.
When the light went on it nearly blinded me.

He had located the data he was working on
near the top of memory ---
the largest locations the instructions could address ---
so, after the last datum was handled,
incrementing the instruction address
would make it overflow.
The carry would add one to the
operation code, changing it to the next one in the instruction set:
a jump instruction.
Sure enough, the next program instruction was
in address location zero,
and the program went happily on its way.

I haven't kept in touch with Mel,
so I don't know if he ever gave in to the flood of
change that has washed over programming techniques
since those long-gone days.
I like to think he didn't.
In any event,
I was impressed enough that I quit looking for the
offending test,
telling the Big Boss I couldn't find it.
He didn't seem surprised.

When I left the company,
the blackjack program would still cheat
if you turned on the right sense switch,
and I think that's how it should be.
I didn't feel comfortable
hacking up the code of a Real Programmer.

This is one of hackerdom's great heroic epics, free verse or no. In a few spare images it captures more about the esthetics and psychology of hacking than all the scholarly volumes on the subject put together. For an opposing point of view, see the entry for **Real Programmer**.

[1992 postscript -- the author writes: "The original submission to the net was not in free verse, nor any approximation to it -- it was straight prose style, in non-justified paragraphs. In bouncing around the net it apparently got modified into the `free verse' form now popular. In other words, it got hacked on the net. That seems appropriate, somehow." The author adds that he likes the `free-verse' version better...]

[1999 update: Mel's last name is now known. The manual for the LGP-30 refers to "Mel Kaye of Royal McBee who did the bulk of the programming [...] of the ACT 1 system".]

Node:Appendix B, Next:Appendix C, Previous:Appendix A, Up:Top

A Portrait of J. Random Hacker

This profile reflects detailed comments on an earlier `trial balloon' version from about a hundred Usenet respondents. Where comparatives are used, the implicit `other' is a randomly selected segment of the non-hacker population of the same size as hackerdom.

An important point: Except in some relatively minor respects such as slang vocabulary, hackers don't get to be the way they are by imitating each other. Rather, it seems to be the case that the combination of personality traits that makes a hacker so conditions one's outlook on life that one tends to end up being like other hackers whether one wants to or not (much as bizarrely detailed similarities in behavior and preferences are found in genetic twins raised separately).

- General Appearance:
- Dress:
- Reading Habits:
- Other Interests:
- Physical Activity and Sports:
- Education:
- Things Hackers Detest and Avoid:
- Food:
- Politics:
- Gender and Ethnicity:
- Religion:
- Ceremonial Chemicals:
- Communication Style:
- Geographical Distribution:
- Sexual Habits:
- Personality Characteristics:
- Weaknesses of the Hacker Personality:
- Miscellaneous:

Node:General Appearance, Next:Dress, Up:Appendix B

General Appearance

Intelligent. Scruffy. Intense. Abstracted. Surprisingly for a sedentary profession, more hackers run to skinny than fat; both extremes are more common than elsewhere. Tans are rare.

Node:Dress, Next:Reading Habits, Previous:General Appearance, Up:Appendix B

Dress

Casual, vaguely post-hippie; T-shirts, jeans, running shoes, Birkenstocks (or bare feet). Long hair, beards, and moustaches are common. High incidence of tie-dye and intellectual or humorous `slogan' T-shirts (only rarely computer related; that would be too obvious).

A substantial minority prefers `outdoorsy' clothing -- hiking boots ("in case a mountain should suddenly spring up in the machine room", as one famous parody put it), khakis, lumberjack or chamois shirts, and the like.

Very few actually fit the "National Lampoon" Nerd stereotype, though it lingers on at MIT and may have been more common before 1975. At least since the late Seventies backpacks have been more common than briefcases, and the hacker `look' has been more whole-earth than whole-polyester.

Hackers dress for comfort, function, and minimal maintenance hassles rather than for appearance (some, perhaps unfortunately, take this to extremes and neglect personal hygiene). They have a very low tolerance of suits and other `business' attire; in fact, it is not uncommon for hackers to quit a job rather than conform to a dress code.

Female hackers almost never wear visible makeup, and many use none at all.

Node:Reading Habits, Next:Other Interests, Previous:Dress, Up:Appendix B

Reading Habits

Omnivorous, but usually includes lots of science and science fiction. The typical hacker household might subscribe to "Analog", "Scientific American", "Whole-Earth Review", and "Smithsonian" (most hackers ignore "Wired" and other self-consciously `cyberpunk' magazines, considering them **wannabee** fodder). Hackers often have a reading range that astonishes liberal arts people but tend not to talk about it as much. Many hackers spend as much of their spare time reading as the average American burns up watching TV, and often keep shelves and shelves of well-thumbed books in their homes.

Node:Other Interests, Next:Physical Activity and Sports, Previous:Reading Habits, Up:Appendix B

Other Interests

Some hobbies are widely shared and recognized as going with the culture: science fiction, music, medievalism (in the active form practiced by the Society for Creative Anachronism and similar organizations), chess, go, backgammon, wargames, and intellectual games of all kinds. (Role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons used to be extremely popular among hackers but they lost a bit of

their luster as they moved into the mainstream and became heavily commercialized. More recently, "Magic: The Gathering" has been widely popular among hackers.) Logic puzzles. Ham radio. Other interests that seem to correlate less strongly but positively with hackerdom include linguistics and theater teching.

Node:Physical Activity and Sports, Next:Education, Previous:Other Interests, Up:Appendix B

Physical Activity and Sports

Many (perhaps even most) hackers don't follow or do sports at all and are determinedly anti-physical. Among those who do, interest in spectator sports is low to non-existent; sports are something one *does*, not something one watches on TV.

Further, hackers avoid most team sports like the plague. Volleyball was long a notable exception, perhaps because it's non-contact and relatively friendly; Ultimate Frisbee has become quite popular for similar reasons. Hacker sports are almost always primarily self-competitive ones involving concentration, stamina, and micromotor skills: martial arts, bicycling, auto racing, kite flying, hiking, rock climbing, aviation, target-shooting, sailing, caving, juggling, skiing, skating. Hackers' delight in techno-toys also tends to draw them towards hobbies with nifty complicated equipment that they can tinker with.

Node:Education, Next:Things Hackers Detest and Avoid, Previous:Physical Activity and Sports, Up:Appendix B

Education

Nearly all hackers past their teens are either college-degreed or self-educated to an equivalent level. The self-taught hacker is often considered (at least by other hackers) to be better-motivated, and may be more respected, than his school-shaped counterpart. Academic areas from which people often gravitate into hackerdom include (besides the obvious computer science and electrical engineering) physics, mathematics, linguistics, and philosophy.

Node:Things Hackers Detest and Avoid, Next:Food, Previous:Education, Up:Appendix B

Things Hackers Detest and Avoid

IBM mainframes. All the works of Microsoft. Smurfs, Ewoks, and other forms of offensive cuteness. Bureaucracies. Stupid people. Easy listening music. Television (with occasional exceptions for cartoons, movies, and good SF like "Star Trek" classic or Babylon 5). Business suits. Dishonesty. Incompetence. Boredom. COBOL. BASIC. Character-based menu interfaces.

Node:Food, Next:Politics, Previous:Things Hackers Detest and Avoid, Up:Appendix B

Food

Ethnic. Spicy. Oriental, esp. Chinese and most esp. Szechuan, Hunan, and Mandarin (hackers consider Cantonese vaguely *déclassé*). Hackers prefer the exotic; for example, the Japanese-food fans among them will eat with gusto such delicacies as fugu (poisonous pufferfish) and whale. Thai food has experienced flurries of popularity. Where available, high-quality Jewish delicatessen food is much esteemed. A visible minority of Southwestern and Pacific Coast hackers prefers Mexican.

For those all-night hacks, pizza and microwaved burritos are big. Interestingly, though the mainstream culture has tended to think of hackers as incorrigible junk-food junkies, many have at least mildly health-foodist attitudes and are fairly discriminating about what they eat. This may be generational; anecdotal evidence suggests that the stereotype was more on the mark before the early 1980s.

Node:Politics, Next:Gender and Ethnicity, Previous:Food, Up:Appendix B

Politics

Vaguely liberal-moderate, except for the strong libertarian contingent which rejects conventional left-right politics entirely. The only safe generalization is that hackers tend to be rather anti-authoritarian; thus, both conventional conservatism and `hard' leftism are rare. Hackers are far more likely than most non-hackers to either (a) be aggressively apolitical or (b) entertain peculiar or idiosyncratic political ideas and actually try to live by them day-to-day.

Node:Gender and Ethnicity, Next:Religion, Previous:Politics, Up:Appendix B

Gender and Ethnicity

Hackerdom is still predominantly male. However, the percentage of women is clearly higher than the low-single-digit range typical for technical professions, and female hackers are generally respected and dealt with as equals.

In the U.S., hackerdom is predominantly Caucasian with strong minorities of Jews (East Coast) and Orientals (West Coast). The Jewish contingent has exerted a particularly pervasive cultural influence (see **Food**, above, and note that several common jargon terms are obviously mutated Yiddish).

The ethnic distribution of hackers is understood by them to be a function of which ethnic groups tend to seek and value education. Racial and ethnic prejudice is notably uncommon and tends to be met with freezing contempt.

When asked, hackers often ascribe their culture's gender- and color-blindness to a positive effect of text-only network channels, and this is doubtless a powerful influence. Also, the ties many hackers have to AI research and SF literature may have helped them to develop an idea of personhood that is inclusive rather than exclusive -- after all, if one's imagination readily grants full human rights to future AI programs, robots, dolphins, and extraterrestrial aliens, mere color and gender can't seem very important any more.

Node:Religion, Next:Ceremonial Chemicals, Previous:Gender and Ethnicity, Up:Appendix B

Religion

Agnostic. Atheist. Non-observant Jewish. Neo-pagan. Very commonly, three or more of these are combined in the same person. Conventional faith-holding Christianity is rare though not unknown.

Even hackers who identify with a religious affiliation tend to be relaxed about it, hostile to organized religion in general and all forms of religious bigotry in particular. Many enjoy `parody' religions such as Discordianism and the Church of the SubGenius.

Also, many hackers are influenced to varying degrees by Zen Buddhism or (less commonly) Taoism, and blend them easily with their `native' religions.

There is a definite strain of mystical, almost Gnostic sensibility that shows up even among those hackers not actively involved with neo-paganism, Discordianism, or Zen. Hacker folklore that pays homage to `wizards' and speaks of incantations and demons has too much psychological truthfulness about it to be entirely a joke.

Node:Ceremonial Chemicals, Next:Communication Style, Previous:Religion, Up:Appendix B

Ceremonial Chemicals

Most hackers don't smoke tobacco, and use alcohol in moderation if at all. However, there has been something of a trend towards exotic beers since about 1995, especially among younger Linux hackers apparently influenced by Linus Torvalds's fondness for Guiness.

Limited use of non-addictive psychedelic drugs, such as cannabis, LSD, psilocybin, nitrous oxide, etc., used to be relatively common and is still regarded with more tolerance than in the mainstream culture. Use of `downers' and opiates, on the other hand, appears to be particularly rare; hackers seem in general to dislike drugs that make them stupid. On the third hand, many hackers regularly wire up on caffeine and/or sugar for all-night hacking runs.

Node:Communication Style, Next:Geographical Distribution, Previous:Ceremonial Chemicals, Up:Appendix B

Communication Style

See the discussions of speech and writing styles near the beginning of this File. Though hackers often have poor person-to-person communication skills, they are as a rule quite sensitive to nuances of language and very precise in their use of it. They are often better at writing than at speaking.

Node:Geographical Distribution, Next:Sexual Habits, Previous:Communication Style, Up:Appendix B

Geographical Distribution

In the United States, hackerdom revolves on a Bay Area-to-Boston axis; about half of the hard core seems to live within a hundred miles of Cambridge (Massachusetts) or Berkeley (California), although there are significant contingents in Los Angeles, in the Pacific Northwest, and around Washington DC. Hackers

tend to cluster around large cities, especially `university towns' such as the Raleigh-Durham area in North Carolina or Princeton, New Jersey (this may simply reflect the fact that many are students or ex-students living near their alma maters).

Node:Sexual Habits, Next:Personality Characteristics, Previous:Geographical Distribution, Up:Appendix B

Sexual Habits

Hackerdom easily tolerates a much wider range of sexual and lifestyle variation than the mainstream culture. It includes a relatively large gay and bisexual contingent. Hackers are somewhat more likely to live in polygynous or polyandrous relationships, practice open marriage, or live in communes or group houses. In this, as in general appearance, hackerdom semi-consciously maintains `counterculture' values.

Node:Personality Characteristics, Next:Weaknesses of the Hacker Personality, Previous:Sexual Habits, Up:Appendix B

Personality Characteristics

The most obvious common `personality' characteristics of hackers are high intelligence, consuming curiosity, and facility with intellectual abstractions. Also, most hackers are `neophiles', stimulated by and appreciative of novelty (especially intellectual novelty). Most are also relatively individualistic and anti-conformist.

Although high general intelligence is common among hackers, it is not the *sine qua non* one might expect. Another trait is probably even more important: the ability to mentally absorb, retain, and reference large amounts of `meaningless' detail, trusting to later experience to give it context and meaning. A person of merely average analytical intelligence who has this trait can become an effective hacker, but a creative genius who lacks it will swiftly find himself outdistanced by people who routinely upload the contents of thick reference manuals into their brains. [During the production of the first book version of this document, for example, I learned most of the rather complex typesetting language TeX over about four working days, mainly by inhaling Knuth's 477-page manual. My editor's flabbergasted reaction to this genuinely surprised me, because years of associating with hackers have conditioned me to consider such performances routine and to be expected. --ESR]

Contrary to stereotype, hackers are *not* usually intellectually narrow; they tend to be interested in any subject that can provide mental stimulation, and can often discourse knowledgeably and even interestingly on any number of obscure subjects -- if you can get them to talk at all, as opposed to, say, going back to their hacking.

It is noticeable (and contrary to many outsiders' expectations) that the better a hacker is at hacking, the more likely he or she is to have outside interests at which he or she is more than merely competent.

Hackers are `control freaks' in a way that has nothing to do with the usual coercive or authoritarian connotations of the term. In the same way that children delight in making model trains go forward and back by moving a switch, hackers love making complicated things like computers do nifty stuff for them. But it has to be *their* nifty stuff. They don't like tedium, nondeterminism, or most of the fussy, boring, ill-defined little tasks that go with maintaining a normal existence. Accordingly, they tend to be careful and orderly in their intellectual lives and chaotic elsewhere. Their code will be beautiful, even if their desks are buried in 3 feet of crap.

Hackers are generally only very weakly motivated by conventional rewards such as social approval or money. They tend to be attracted by challenges and excited by interesting toys, and to judge the interest of work or other activities in terms of the challenges offered and the toys they get to play with.

In terms of Myers-Briggs and equivalent psychometric systems, hackerdom appears to concentrate the relatively rare INTJ and INTP types; that is, introverted, intuitive, and thinker types (as opposed to the extroverted-sensate personalities that predominate in the mainstream culture). ENT[JP] types are also concentrated among hackers but are in a minority.

Node:Weaknesses of the Hacker Personality, Next:Miscellaneous, Previous:Personality Characteristics, Up:Appendix B

Weaknesses of the Hacker Personality

Hackers have relatively little ability to identify emotionally with other people. This may be because hackers generally aren't much like `other people'. Unsurprisingly, hackers also tend towards self-absorption, intellectual arrogance, and impatience with people and tasks perceived to be wasting their time.

As cynical as hackers sometimes wax about the amount of idiocy in the world, they tend by reflex to assume that everyone is as rational, `cool', and imaginative as they consider themselves. This bias often contributes to weakness in communication skills. Hackers tend to be especially poor at confrontation and negotiation.

Because of their passionate embrace of (what they consider to be) the **Right Thing**, hackers can be unfortunately intolerant and bigoted on technical issues, in marked contrast to their general spirit of camaraderie and tolerance of alternative viewpoints otherwise. Old-time **ITS** partisans look down on the ever-growing hordes of **Unix** hackers; Unix aficionados despise **VMS** and **MS-DOS**; and hackers who are used to conventional command-line user interfaces loudly loathe mouse-and-menu based systems such as the Macintosh. Hackers who don't indulge in **Usenet** consider it a huge waste of time and **bandwidth**; fans of old adventure games such as **ADVENT** and **Zork** consider **MUD**s to be glorified chat systems devoid of atmosphere or interesting puzzles; hackers who are willing to devote endless hours to Usenet or MUDs consider **IRC** to be a *real* waste of time; IRCies think MUDs might be okay if there weren't all those silly puzzles in the way. And, of course, there are the perennial **holy wars** -- **EMACS** vs. **vi**, **big-endian** vs. **little-endian**, RISC vs. CISC, etc., etc., etc. As in society at large, the intensity and duration of these debates is usually inversely proportional to the number of objective, factual arguments available to buttress any position.

As a result of all the above traits, many hackers have difficulty maintaining stable relationships. At worst, they can produce the classic **computer geek**: withdrawn, relationally incompetent, sexually frustrated, and desperately unhappy when not submerged in his or her craft. Fortunately, this extreme is far less common than mainstream folklore paints it -- but almost all hackers will recognize something of themselves in the unflattering paragraphs above.

Hackers are often monumentally disorganized and sloppy about dealing with the physical world. Bills don't get paid on time, clutter piles up to incredible heights in homes and offices, and minor maintenance tasks get deferred indefinitely.

1994-95's fad behavioral disease was a syndrome called Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), supposedly characterized by (among other things) a combination of short attention span with an ability to `hyperfocus' imaginatively on interesting tasks. In 1998-1999 another syndrome that is said to overlap with many hacker traits entered popular awareness: Asperger's syndrome (AS). This disorder is also sometimes called `high-function autism', though researchers are divided on whether AS is in fact a mild

form of autism or a distinct syndrome with a different etiology. AS patients exhibit mild to severe deficits in interpreting facial and body-language cues and in modeling or empathizing with others' emotions. Though some AS patients exhibit mild retardation, others compensate for their deficits with high intelligence and analytical ability, and frequently seek out technical fields where problem-solving abilities are at a premium and people skills are relatively unimportant. Both syndromes are thought to relate to abnormalities in neurotransmitter chemistry, especially the brain's processing of serotonin.

Many hackers have noticed that mainstream culture has shown a tendency to pathologize and medicalize normal variations in personality, especially those variations that make life more complicated for authority figures and conformists. Thus, hackers aware of the issue tend to be among those questioning whether ADD and AS actually exist; and if so whether they are really `diseases' rather than extremes of a normal genetic variation like having freckles or being able to taste DPT. In either case, they have a sneaking tendency to wonder if these syndromes are over-diagnosed and over-treated. After all, people in authority will always be inconvenienced by schoolchildren or workers or citizens who are prickly, intelligent individualists - thus, any social system that depends on authority relationships will tend to helpfully ostracize and therapize and drug such `abnormal' people until they are properly docile and stupid and `well-socialized'.

So hackers tend to believe they have good reason for skepticism about clinical explanations of the hacker personality. That being said, most would also concede that some hacker traits coincide with indicators for ADD and AS. It is probably true that boosters of both would find a rather higher rate of clinical ADD among hackers than the supposedly mainstream-normal 10% (AS is rarer and there are not yet good estimates of incidence as of 2000).

Node:Miscellaneous, Previous:Weaknesses of the Hacker Personality, Up:Appendix B

Miscellaneous

Hackers are more likely to have cats than dogs (in fact, it is widely grokked that cats have the hacker nature). Many drive incredibly decrepit heaps and forget to wash them; richer ones drive spiffy Porsches and RX-7s and then forget to have them washed. Almost all hackers have terribly bad handwriting, and often fall into the habit of block-printing everything like junior draftsmen.

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Helping Hacker Culture Grow

If you enjoyed the Jargon File, please help the culture that created it grow and flourish. Here are several ways you can help:

• If you are a writer or journalist, don't say or write **hacker** when you mean **cracker**. If you work with writers or journalists, educate them on this issue and push them to do the right thing. If you catch a newspaper or magazine abusing the work `hacker', write them and straighten them out (this appendix includes a model letter).

• If you're a techie or computer hobbyist, get involved with one of the free Unixes. Toss out that lame Microsoft OS, or confine it to one disk partition and put Linux or FreeBSD or NetBSD on the other one. And the next time your friend or boss is thinking about some proprietary software `solution' that costs more than it's worth, be ready to blow the competition away with open-source software running over a Unix.

• Contribute to organizations like the Free Software Foundation that promote the production of high-quality free and open-source software. You can reach the Free Software Foundation at *gnu@gnu.org*, by phone at +1-617-542-5942, or by snail-mail at 59 Temple Place, Suite 330, Boston, MA 02111-1307 USA.

• Support the League for Programming Freedom, which opposes over-broad software patents that constantly threaten to blow up in hackers' faces, preventing them from developing innovative software for tomorrow's needs. You can reach the League for Programming Freedom at *lpf@uunet.uu.net*. by phone at +1 617 621 7084, or by snail-mail at 1 Kendall Square #143, P.O.Box 9171, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139 USA.

• Join the continuing fight against Internet censorship, visit the Center for Democracy and Technology Home Page at http://www.cdt.org.

• If you do nothing else, please help fight government attempts to seize political control of Internet content and restrict strong cryptography. The so-called `Communications Decency Act' was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, but U.S. cryptography policy still infringes our First Amendment rights. Surf to the Center for Democracy and technology's home page at http://www.cdt.org to see what you can do to help fight censorship of the net.

Here's the text of a letter RMS wrote to the Wall Street Journal to complain about their policy of using "hacker" only in a pejorative sense. We hear that most major newspapers have the same policy. If you'd like to help change this situation, send your favorite newspaper the same letter - or, better yet, write your own letter.

> Dear Editor:
>
> This letter is not meant for publication, although you can publish it if you wish. It is meant specifically for you, the editor, not the public.
>
> I am a hacker. That is to say, I enjoy playing with computers -- working with, learning about, and writing clever computer programs. I am not a cracker; I don't make a practice of breaking computer security.
>
> There's nothing shameful about the hacking I do. But when I tell people I am a hacker, people think I'm admitting something naughty -- because newspapers such as yours misuse the word "hacker", giving the impression that it means "security breaker" and nothing else. You are giving hackers a bad name.
>
> The saddest thing is that this problem is perpetuated deliberately. Your reporters know the difference between "hacker" and "security breaker". They know how to make the distinction, but you don't let them! You insist on using "hacker" pejoratively. When reporters try to use another word, you change it. When reporters try to explain the other meanings, you cut it.
>
> Of course, you have a reason. You say that readers have become used to your insulting usage of "hacker", so that you cannot change it now. Well, you can't undo past mistakes today; but that is no excuse to repeat them tomorrow.
>
> If I were what you call a "hacker", at this point I would threaten to crack your computer and crash it. But I am a hacker, not a cracker. I don't do that kind of thing! I have enough computers to play with at home and at work; I don't need yours. Besides, it's not my way to respond to insults with violence. My response is this letter.
>
> You owe hackers an apology; but more than that, you owe us ordinary respect.
>
> Sincerely, etc.

Bibliography

Here are some other books you can read to help you understand the hacker mindset.

Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid**Gödel, Escher, Bach: An Eternal Golden Braid**
Douglas Hofstadter
Basic Books, 1979
ISBN 0-394-74502-7

This book reads like an intellectual Grand Tour of hacker preoccupations. Music, mathematical logic, programming, speculations on the nature of intelligence, biology, and Zen are woven into a brilliant tapestry themed on the concept of encoded self-reference. The perfect left-brain companion to "Illuminatus".

Illuminatus!
I. "The Eye in the Pyramid"
II. "The Golden Apple"
III. "Leviathan".
Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson
Dell, 1988
ISBN 0-440-53981-1

This work of alleged fiction is an incredible berserko-surrealist rollercoaster of world-girdling conspiracies, intelligent dolphins, the fall of Atlantis, who really killed JFK, sex, drugs, rock'n'roll, and the Cosmic Giggle Factor. First published in three volumes, but there is now a one-volume trade paperback, carried by most chain bookstores under SF. The perfect right-brain companion to Hofstadter's "Gödel, Escher, Bach". See **Eris**, **Discordianism**, **random numbers**, **Church of the SubGenius**.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy
Douglas Adams
Pocket Books, 1981
ISBN 0-671-46149-4

This `Monty Python in Space' spoof of SF genre traditions has been popular among hackers ever since the original British radio show. Read it if only to learn about Vogons (see **bogon**) and the significance of the number 42 (see **random numbers**) -- and why the winningest chess program of 1990 was called `Deep Thought'.

The Tao of Programming
James Geoffrey
Infobooks, 1987
ISBN 0-931137-07-1

This gentle, funny spoof of the "Tao Te Ching" contains much that is illuminating about the hacker way of thought. "When you have learned to snatch the error code from the trap frame, it will be time for you to leave."

Hackers
Steven Levy
Anchor/Doubleday 1984
ISBN 0-385-19195-2

Levy's book is at its best in describing the early MIT hackers at the Model Railroad Club and the early days of the microcomputer revolution. He never understood Unix or the networks, though, and his enshrinement of Richard Stallman as "the last true hacker" turns out (thankfully) to have been quite misleading. Despite being a bit dated and containing some minor errors (many fixed in the paperback edition), this remains a useful and stimulating book that captures the feel of several important hacker subcultures.

The Computer Contradictionary
Stan Kelly-Bootle
MIT Press, 1995
ISBN 0-262-61112-0

This pastiche of Ambrose Bierce's famous work is similar in format to the Jargon File (and quotes several entries from TNHD-2) but somewhat different in tone and intent. It is more satirical and less anthropological, and is largely a product of the author's literate and quirky imagination. For example, it defines `computer science' as "a study akin to numerology and astrology, but lacking the precision of the former and the success of the latter" and `implementation' as "The fruitless struggle by the talented and underpaid to fulfill promises made by the rich and ignorant"; `flowchart' becomes "to obfuscate a problem with esoteric cartoons". Revised and expanded from "The Devil's DP Dictionary", McGraw-Hill 1981, ISBN 0-07-034022-6; that work had some stylistic influence on TNHD-1.

The Devouring Fungus: Tales from the Computer Age
Karla Jennings
Norton, 1990
ISBN 0-393-30732-8

The author of this pioneering compendium knits together a great deal of computer- and hacker-related folklore with good writing and a few well-chosen cartoons. She has a keen eye for the human aspects of the lore and is very good at illuminating the psychology and evolution of hackerdom. Unfortunately, a number of small errors and awkwardnesses suggest that she didn't have the final manuscript checked over by a native speaker; the glossary in the back is particularly embarrassing, and at least one classic tale (the Magic Switch story, retold here under **A Story About Magic** in Appendix A is given in incomplete and badly mangled form. Nevertheless, this book is a win overall and can be enjoyed by hacker and non-hacker alike.

The Soul of a New Machine
Tracy Kidder
Little, Brown, 1981
(paperback: Avon, 1982
ISBN 0-380-59931-7)

This book (a 1982 Pulitzer Prize winner) documents the adventure of the design of a new Data General computer, the MV-8000 Eagle. It is an amazingly well-done portrait of the hacker mindset -- although largely the hardware hacker -- done by a complete outsider. It is a bit thin in spots, but with enough technical information to be entertaining to the serious hacker while providing non-technical people a view of what day-to-day life can be like -- the fun, the excitement, the disasters. During one period, when the microcode and logic were glitching at the nanosecond level, one of the overworked engineers departed the company, leaving behind a note on his terminal as his letter of resignation: "I am going to a commune in Vermont and will deal with no unit of time shorter than a season."

Life with UNIX: a Guide for Everyone
Don Libes and Sandy Ressler
Prentice-Hall, 1989
ISBN 0-13-536657-7

The authors of this book set out to tell you all the things about Unix that tutorials and technical books

won't. The result is gossipy, funny, opinionated, downright weird in spots, and invaluable. Along the way they expose you to enough of Unix's history, folklore and humor to qualify as a first-class source for these things. Because so much of today's hackerdom is involved with Unix, this in turn illuminates many of its in-jokes and preoccupations.

True Names ... and Other Dangers
Vernor Vinge
Baen Books, 1987
ISBN 0-671-65363-6

Hacker demigod Richard Stallman used to say that the title story of this book "expresses the spirit of hacking best". Until the subject of the next entry came out, it was hard to even nominate another contender. The other stories in this collection are also fine work by an author who has since won multiple Hugos and is one of today's very best practitioners of hard SF.

Snow Crash
Neal Stephenson
Bantam, 1992
ISBN 0-553-56261-4

Stephenson's epic, comic cyberpunk novel is deeply knowing about the hacker psychology and its foibles in a way no other author of fiction has ever even approached. His imagination, his grasp of the relevant technical details, and his ability to communicate the excitement of hacking and its results are astonishing, delightful, and (so far) unsurpassed.

Cyberpunk: Outlaws and Hackers on the Computer Frontier
Katie Hafner & John Markoff
Simon & Schuster 1991
ISBN 0-671-68322-5

This book gathers narratives about the careers of three notorious crackers into a clear-eyed but sympathetic portrait of hackerdom's dark side. The principals are Kevin Mitnick, "Pengo" and "Hagbard" of the Chaos Computer Club, and Robert T. Morris (see **RTM**, sense 2) . Markoff and Hafner focus as much on their psychologies and motivations as on the details of their exploits, but don't slight the latter. The result is a balanced and fascinating account, particularly useful when read immediately before or after Cliff Stoll's **The Cuckoo's Egg**. It is especially instructive to compare RTM, a true hacker who blundered, with the sociopathic phone-freak Mitnick and the alienated, drug-addled crackers who made the Chaos Club notorious. The gulf between **wizard** and **wannabee** has seldom been made more obvious.

Technobabble
John Barry
MIT Press 1991
ISBN 0-262-02333-4

Barry's book takes a critical and humorous look at the `technobabble' of acronyms, neologisms, hyperbole, and metaphor spawned by the computer industry. Though he discusses some of the same mechanisms of jargon formation that occur in hackish, most of what he chronicles is actually suit-speak -- the obfuscatory language of press releases, marketroids, and Silicon Valley CEOs rather than the playful jargon of hackers (most of whom wouldn't be caught dead uttering the kind of pompous, passive-voiced word salad he deplores).

The Cuckoo's Egg
Clifford Stoll
Doubleday 1989
ISBN 0-385-24946-2

Clifford Stoll's absorbing tale of how he tracked Markus Hess and the Chaos Club cracking ring nicely illustrates the difference between `hacker' and `cracker'. Stoll's portrait of himself, his lady Martha, and his friends at Berkeley and on the Internet paints a marvelously vivid picture of how hackers and the people around them like to live and how they think.

#====================== THE JARGON FILE ENDS HERE ====================#