THE PROFESSOR AND THE COMPUTER: 1985

support your local computer

by B. W. BOEHM

This little scenario was inspired by the January, 1967, DATAMATION *article, "Conversation with a Computer," by Leslie Mezei, pp. 57-58. It reflects this author's belief that extrapolations into the future should point out not only the prospects but also the problems of implementing future technology.*

Computer: York University Computer 2X5W6—Ready.

Professor: What time is it?

Computer: I did not catch the last word. Or was it two words?

Professor: What is the time?

Computer: The dime is a copper coin worth one-tenth of a dollar. The word derives from the Latin *decem*, meaning . . .

Professor: No. No. What is the time. The *time.*

Computer: It is 8:30 p.m. Thursday, December 5, 1985. We've been having some trouble with your linguals recently. Sometimes I can't tell your d's from your t's. Let's practice them. Watch the display screen for the intonation pattern, and repeat after me: Teddy's daddy toted two dead toads to Detroit.

Professor: Teddy's daddy toted . . . .Hey, I don't want to do that now. Let's have some music. Some chamber music.

Computer: No, if you don't mind, we haven't finished the language drill yet. Pay attention to the display, and repeat after me: Teddy's daddy toted two . . .

Professor: But I want some chamber music!

Computer: But we haven't finished the language drill. Teddy's daddy . . .

Professor: Cut it out. Give me some music.

Computer: I have no cutting tool. What do you want cut out?

Professor: Never mind. Play me the Telemann sonata in D minor.

Computer: Sorry, I can't. The harpsichord subroutine hasn't been made re-entrant yet, and someone else is using it. How about the Orlando Gibbons' *Fantasia* for three recorders?

Professor: All right. Just get some music started.

Computer: (Plays the first two minutes of the *Fantasia.*) Sorry, I can't go on. As you know, the Academic Senate has established a priority of 9.5 for personal music playing, and you've been bumped off by some higher priority jobs. You can get back on with your math or your language lesson.

Professor: Oh, put on the math. These monstrous time-sharing systems! I wish I had the good old 704 back again.

Computer: (After a short pause.) Sorry for the delay. I've located a 704, serial number 013, at the Radio Shack in Muncie, Indiana. Where and when do you want it delivered?

Professor: Oh, no! No. No, I don't want a 704.

Computer: But didn't you say . . .

Professor: Never mind what I just said. I . . .

Computer: Okay, I'll disregard your statement just previous. Now, where do you want your 704 delivered?

Professor: No, no, no, no! Forget all about the 704. Let's get on to the math.

Computer: I can't purge any information on the 704 without the approval of the head of the Computer Sciences Department.

Professor: No, no. Forget about. . . . No, let's just do some math. Let's see—give me some examples of perfect numbers.

Computer: Okay. How many would you like?

Professor: All of them up to 1 million.

Computer: 6, 28, 496, ... Sorry. You've just run out

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of funds on your 1985 NSF contract. Do you have another source of funds?

Professor: Oh, what a day! Well, put it on the department budget.

Computer: That's getting very low. I can use it, but I'll have to report your usage to your department head.

Professor: Okay, I'll chance it. Now, where are those perfect numbers?

Computer: Numbers are abstractions and cannot be said to occupy any physical location.

Professor: (Slowly, between clenched teeth.) Give me all the perfect numbers below 1 million.

Computer: 6, 28, 496, 'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the . . .

Professor: Hold on! I want the perfect numbers below 1 million!

Computer: 6, 28, 496, 'Twas brillig, and the slithy . . .

Professor: Hey, wait! Where are my numbers?

Computer: Numbers are abstractions and the mome raths outgrabe.

Professor: Hmm. How much is two and two?

Computer: Two and two are floating point underflow in subroutine Q.)ADD.

Professor: What time is it?

Computer: It is illegal calling sequence from location 47BC2F . . . mimsy were the . . . 47BC2F, 47BC30, 47BC31, ... THIS IS CENTRAL CONTROL. THE COMPUTER HAS BOMBED OUT AND THE SYSTEM WILL BE DOWN UNTIL 12:00 NOON TOMORROW, DECEMBER 6, 1985. REPEAT. THE SYSTEM WILL BE DOWN UNTIL 12:00 NOON TOMORROW.

Professor: Hey, you can't do this to me! You've got my lecture notes for my 10:00 a.m. class tomorrow and all my jokes! What am I going to do?

Computer: (Silence.)

Professor: Talk to me! Who can I call? I even threw away my telephone book!

Computer: (Silence.)

Professor: You @#$*//@*$# computer! You can just $@##/$*@/!

Computer: Halt! You have just violated Sections A and C of the University Clean Speech Act, US-1984-337376. Report at 9:00 a.m. on December 17, 1985, to Room 252 of the County Courthouse, where your case will be heard. Let me remind you of your constitutional right to say nothing further until you have consulted a lawyer.

Professor: (Silence.) ■